

# Co-living

An isometric architectural rendering of a city block. The central focus is a multi-story building with a colorful, segmented facade in shades of yellow, orange, pink, and blue. This building features multiple levels of greenery, including trees and plants, and a prominent pink circular structure on its upper levels. A blue, winding path or ramp leads up to the building. The surrounding area is filled with grey, rectangular buildings of varying heights, representing a typical urban environment. Small figures of people are scattered throughout the scene, including on the streets, sidewalks, and on the green spaces of the central building, to provide a sense of scale and activity. The overall style is clean and modern, with a focus on shared spaces and community interaction.

Design study into co-living  
as a typology of shared living

# Co-living

Design study into co-living  
as a typology of shared living



MVRDV

LIID  
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HUB

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Fund Management

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# Foreword

The ways in which we live and want to live are changing. Attitudes to sharing, to community, the desire for flexibility, mobility, working from home; the problems of climate change, affordability and poor management all require new solutions. But much of the housing we produce remains stubbornly unchanged.

Co-living is one of the few forms of housing that has emerged in the UK over the last decade or so that shifts the dial. It suits the lifestyles and needs of young professionals, students, expats and digital nomads, as well as older downsizers.

The housing sector is in desperate need of innovative thinking. So I welcome the fact that MVRDV, leading global thinkers on the changing urban condition, have been invited to focus on the future of design for co-living and how it can be made even more relevant to today's lifestyles.

What are the typologies that suit co-living? How do we re-purpose office buildings and post-covid stranded assets, re-using embedded carbon? How do we make use of urban voids, the left-over spaces and the rooftops? What formats increase levels of social encounter or suit different types of residents?

The ideas in this report will feed into the wider debate on housing design and delivery and provide a welcome and positive contribution to solving our ongoing housing crisis.

**Peter Murray OBE**

*Co-Founder*

*New London Architecture*

# Introduction (Q&A)

**“The whole building is your neighbourhood. You share the streets, squares and facilities.”** - *Winy Maas*

Co-living is a housing solution that is growing in popularity. Why is it attracting attention? What do we mean by ‘co-living’? And what can it contribute to our future cities?

HUB’s Managing Director, Damien Sharkey and Head of Brand, Kate Brown, alongside Celia Harrison, Investment Director Bridges Fund Management, and MVRDV’s founding partner Winy Maas and Senior Associate Sanne van Manen, discuss how co-living can not only provide an array of solutions to the housing crisis, but also develop and invigorate local communities.

## **What was the inspiration for this study?**

**Damien:** Co-living is a growing sector in the UK with the potential to help address two pressing crises – the housing shortage and climate change. It’s an area HUB has been active in for over five years. We wanted to understand co-living more deeply, and consider both best practice and new ideas for the future. We aim to push boundaries to deliver exemplary schemes here in the UK, so this study was all about understanding different aspects of co-living to help unlock new ideas.

**Kate:** We wanted to demonstrate how co-living, and the ideas contained in it, can help us improve our approach to areas such as sustainability and the sharing economy. We want to share this knowledge with local authorities, investors and the wider industry, addressing the misunderstandings and cynicism that sometimes

arise around co-living. Most importantly we wanted to get people excited about something we believe can have a very positive impact on society.

**Celia:** Bridges invests in needs-driven sectors, developing sustainable solutions to pressing challenges. The housing crisis has been a significant area of focus for us over the last decade and, more recently, we've been actively pursuing co-living opportunities. There's a real need to deliver co-living developments that are 'best in class', and this research will support this. We want to deliver homes that all stakeholders – investors, architects, planners, developers and local communities – can be proud of, ensuring that they are future-proofed and designed to appeal to a broad mix of residents.

**Sanne:** Alongside housing and climate issues, we're witnessing a crisis of social isolation and loneliness. There's an urgent need for people to connect better with their communities. Platform 31, a research institute in the Netherlands, found that 5-10% of all people would like to live in a more communal way, so we think it's interesting to design spaces that are more socially inclusive. This way, when you go home, you don't feel so alone. Instead of

anonymous dark corridors with front door after front door, the spaces in collective arrangements such as co-living make interaction between neighbours much easier.

**Winy:** And not just with your neighbours or the people on your corridor, which some people find difficult. The whole building is your neighbourhood. You share streets, squares and facilities, just like people who share a cul-de-sac or a city square.

As a practice we have often worked on buildings with a focus on sharing, such as the 'vertical village' at Silodam and the collective spaces at Parkrand, both in Amsterdam, and Mirador in Madrid. This project is a great opportunity to build on those ideas.

### **How can the wider community benefit from having a co-living building in the neighbourhood?**

**Celia:** Considerate design and space planning can make a scheme's facilities and amenities accessible to the community, so they get the benefit of additional communal spaces and an improved local offering. With

working from home playing a bigger role in people's lives, these collective spaces can become co-working spaces for both residents and the wider community. They're places where people can meet and build relationships, helping to prevent loneliness and social isolation.

**Kate:** The collective space in a co-living building can act as a village hall, used for local meetings, social events and birthday parties. The village hall is the heart of the community, and it can be the same with the shared space in a co-living building.

**Damien:** Co-living buildings contribute to safe, secure neighbourhoods with active frontages, passive surveillance and a 24 / 7 presence. We can also deliver affordable living spaces through tenure-blind discounted rents which are "pepper potted" throughout our co-living developments. The mix of tenures help create mixed communities within the building but also potentially draw in people who are already living in the neighbourhood, who can pay discounted rents and stay connected to their community. In this way, co-living can really act as a catalyst for social good.

**Sanne:** The kind of buildings we presented in this book have 'social spaciousness' designed in, making them vibrant places. Residents don't just live there; they also come together to relax, exercise, do some gardening or work. This social life creates active and attractive buildings that become the beating heart of their neighbourhood.

**“The kind of buildings presented in this book have ‘social spaciousness’ designed in, making them vibrant places.” - Sanne van Manen**

### **How can co-living deal with the pressure on our cities, which are already quite full?**

**Celia:** Co-living encourages better use of space, which is really important as urban areas and their population grow. By designing smaller private spaces and more generous shared spaces we can make better use of how buildings and spaces are used around the clock.

**Damien:** It's the ideal solution for crowded cities. Co-living allows people to live in high-quality environments in central locations that they perhaps wouldn't otherwise be able to afford. It's also a good fit for the reuse of 'stranded assets' that would otherwise remain empty, which helps to address a lot of other issues .

**Winy:** It's a really good way of housing people in an established city. Co-living spaces that are designed as a vertical village don't need additional ground floor facilities or amenities because they're distributed through the building. So, it fits perfectly in a dense city – it's a quasi-city in itself.

**Sanne:** Damien mentioned stranded assets, but there are also stranded rooftops – these are also spaces we can transform. In Rotterdam we have 18.5 km<sup>2</sup> (around 4,500 acres) of flat rooftop. Approximately 10% of central London is covered by flat roofs, which often allow for additional load. Co-living encourages the use of rooftops for a range of purposes from shared amenities to energy generation to homes themselves, in the form of rooftop villages.

**“Co-living allows people to live in high-quality environments in central locations that they perhaps wouldn't otherwise be able to afford.”** - Damien Sharkey

#### How sustainable is co-living as a type?

**Damien:** We see huge opportunities to bring forward sustainable co-living homes, constructed out of wood and other sustainable or reused materials. The buildings can have gardens and green rooftops to help absorb water after heavy rainfall and lower heat stress in the city, which means they're positively contributing to the biodiversity of the city.

**Kate:** Co-living encourages the sharing of resources – internal and external spaces as well as functional spaces such as cooking and laundry facilities. There might even be a shared tool or toy library. The less 'stuff' we own individually, in our homes, the smaller our individual footprint.

**Sanne:** Social sustainability is often forgotten, but it's an important dimension of co-living. In this booklet we aimed for building types where social interaction can emerge naturally. Healthy cities are built by strong communities, so by generating strong co-living communities, these buildings can promote wellbeing, and positively impact the people who live in them.

**Celia:** We're seeing more opportunities where we can repurpose and retrofit existing buildings. Repurposing buildings rather than building from scratch significantly reduces embodied carbon, and refurbishment allows reductions in operational carbon, too. We can also bring back vibrancy and community to areas and buildings that have become redundant as living and working habits have changed.

**“We see opportunities to repurpose and retrofit existing buildings, which significantly reduces embodied carbon.”** - Celia Harrison

#### How can we best collaborate with municipalities, councils, and local authorities to encourage the adoption of co-living?

**Damien:** We often find there's a misconception about co-living among local authorities and local communities. There tends to be a focus on a perceived lack of space, not on the additive value of shared spaces. This booklet will, we hope, help local authorities and investors understand the benefits of co-living, both for residents and the wider community.

**Celia:** We also want to demonstrate that co-living can satisfy the needs of a much broader audience than it does currently.

**Sanne:** Ideally, people in the local community would be involved in deciding what kinds of collective spaces would benefit them. What are their needs? What amenities would they like to have in this new building in their neighbourhood?

*[The Q&A continues at page 132 to discuss the main learnings and next steps.]*

1

# Why shared living?

Towards a next level of co-living



# Why shared living?

Co-living is not a new idea. In fact, it's an ancient one. Humans have been living cooperatively since the earliest settlements, in tribes, in clans and in communities of extended families. In some cultures, the extended family unit remains the foundation of the society and way of life – the glue that keeps communities working.

In the 19th century, the push for productivity encouraged manufacturers and institutions to create formal shared living arrangements for their workers. These large-scale housing schemes provided accommodation that was a step-up from overcrowded, unhealthy living conditions typical of urban working-class neighbourhoods: residents had access to shared bathrooms, laundry rooms and kitchens. The 20th century saw the communal living concept adopted by those with more socialist leanings, whose aim was to create affordable homes for the working class and increase social stability. And in the 1970s the first cooperative housing projects appeared, with intentional communities created by residents taking a stronger role in shared living schemes.

Today, as cooperative living initiatives are receiving more attention, more market-oriented forms of co-living are on the rise, targeting younger residents with hotel-like, highly serviced homes. It's a good point to ask what lessons from the past can we draw on to develop best practice: how do we make co-living more sociable, affordable and accessible to a wide range of residents, and suitable for both short and long-term stays?

# Brief history of shared living

models of shared living



# Urban challenges

Today, cities face a number of important challenges. Heavy rainfall and heat stress caused by climate change mean our cities need to adapt. In addition, cities have social challenges like increasing loneliness, growing numbers of single households and lack of community. Lastly, the cost of housing makes cities less and less accessible while at the same time more people want to live in them.



Rising housing costs



Growth of the city



Climate adaptation



Increasing loneliness



Lack of community

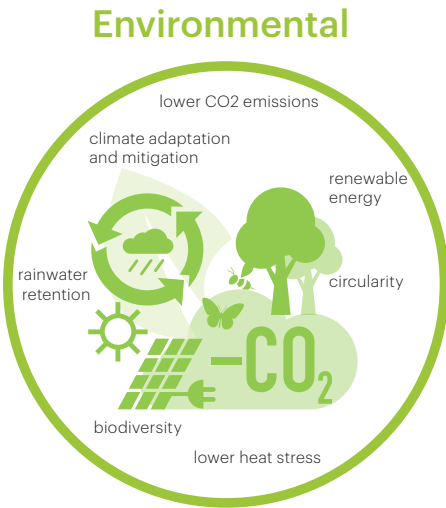


More single households

# Sustainability

Co-living can and should be a sustainable housing typology with a positive impact on the city. Across the three ESG areas (environmental, social and governance), there are many sustainable opportunities inherent in co-living. The 'E' is well-known: the use of sustainable materials, renewable

energy, and improving biodiversity. The 'S' concerns the aim to build strong long term communities. This is a lesser-known factor and therefore a key focus of this study. The 'G' reflects the (participatory) process, involving multiple stakeholders to create co-living that will add value for our (future) cities.



# Why 'co-living' now?

There are economic, sociological, and psychological reasons why co-living is growing in popularity. The surge in the value of real estate is making the cost of living in major cities like London prohibitive, so co-living offers workers and residents an affordable way of staying in the city. As a vertically oriented model of habitation able to accommodate large communities in a small footprint, it is also well-adjusted to today's dense cityscapes.

Society is changing, with people living alone for longer. We are seeing a rise in single-person households among both the young and elderly, as well as a rise in loneliness and social isolation caused by factors such as the pandemic and social media. Co-living responds to the deep need among all people for connection and community.

Finally, as the climate crisis progresses and materials become scarcer, co-living offers an ideal model for the new sharing economy. Residents in co-living schemes share not just space and resources, but also experiences. And they are perfectly placed to build communities that are low-carbon and sustainable.

2

# Vibrant communities

More than a home

# Vibrant communities

At the heart of the co-living model is the idea of communal spaces – shared facilities such as kitchens, workspaces, gyms and laundries that not only provide access to equipment and spaces far beyond what's available in a typical one-bedroom home, but also create natural opportunities for residents to meet, form relationships and build communities.

In any building, these communities range in scale from circles of immediate neighbours to the much wider community of the building and local neighbourhood. The inherent flexibility of the co-living model means it can accommodate shared spaces that serve a wide range of needs, and appeal to a diverse range of residents.

The following pages illustrate the scope for tailoring shared spaces to communities. Getting this balance right is key to designing any co-living building. Some residents might want arts and crafts spaces, others may appreciate a vegetable garden and a communal kitchen. Some spaces are generic, some are more 'niche', such as a music studio or pet bath. Even generic spaces such as a laundry room can be given a distinctive twist by, for example, incorporating elements of a game room.



Shared living creates **communities** instead of buildings.



La Balma collective housing, Spain. Architect: La Boqueria + Local. Photo by Milena Villalba



Silodam, Amsterdam. Architect: MVRDV. Photo by Rob 't Hart

With a **wide variety** of collective spaces.

Communities that operate on **different levels**...



The Fold, London. Developed by HUB and Bridges. Architect: AHMM. Photo by Timothy Soar

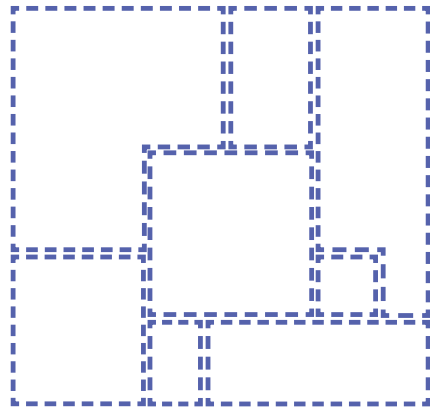


De Warren, Amsterdam. Architect: Natruified Architecture. Photo by Jeroen Musch

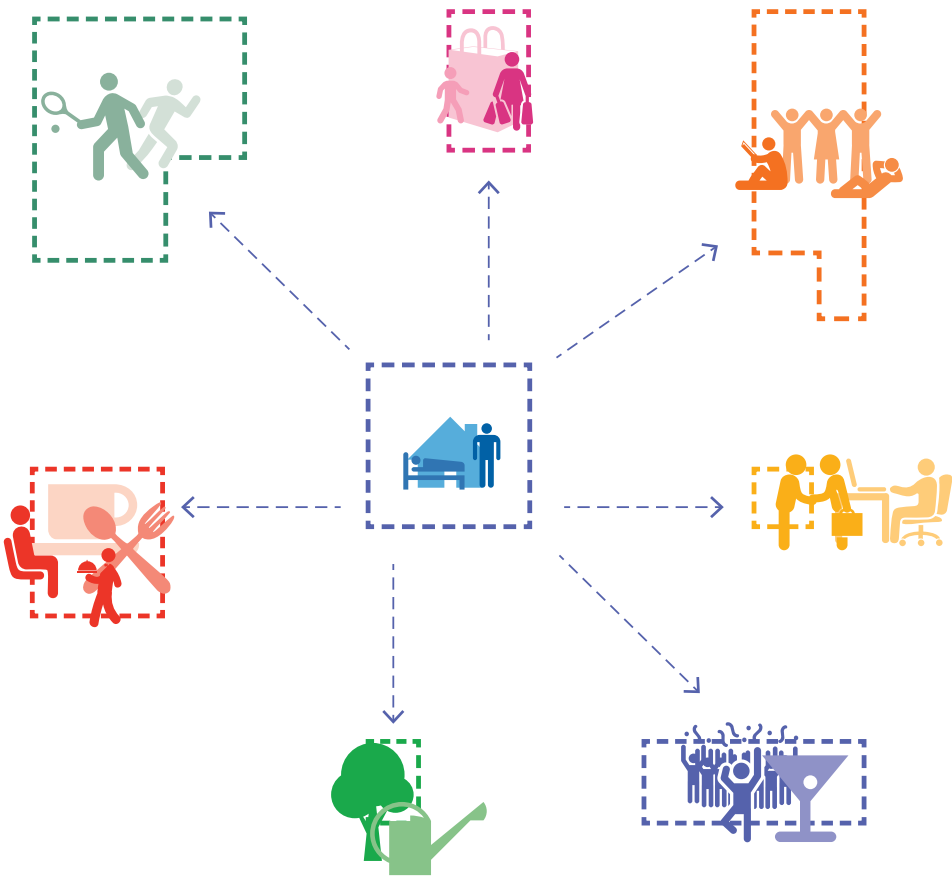
...from the **small and intimate** to the **vibrant neighbourhood**.

# More than a home

A co-living home must be perfectly accommodating, with places to sleep, eat, wash and relax. But a co-living home extends beyond its four walls, reaching out into the whole building, and the wider community. These additional amenities means that co-living residents have access to much more space than they would in a standard rental apartment.



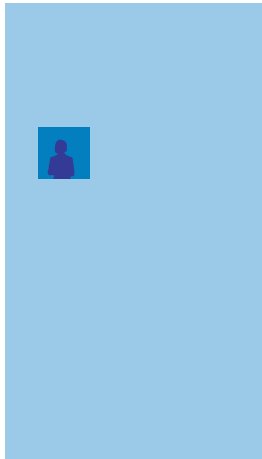
more than a home..



# Community at different levels

Community comes in different sizes and shapes. Within a co-living building, residents will form relationships at different levels, from their immediate neighbours, to the other building occupants, and broader neighbourhood.

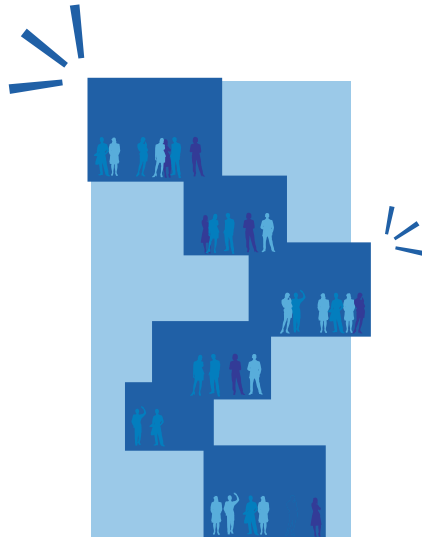
We distinguish four levels of community. First is the community of the private home. Second is the small community of the 'floor'; the direct neighbours in close vicinity of the private home. The third level is the community of the building; the total collection of the homes and collective amenities. The last level is often the ground floor; the amenities that open towards the surrounding neighbourhood. Each level of community has its own kind of collective space, ranging from intimate to open.



private home



small community

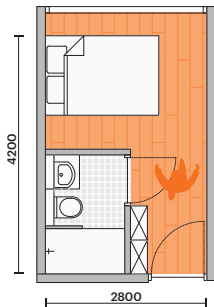


building community



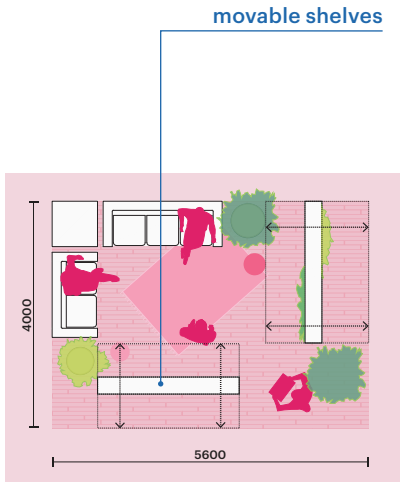
neighbourhood community

# Small community



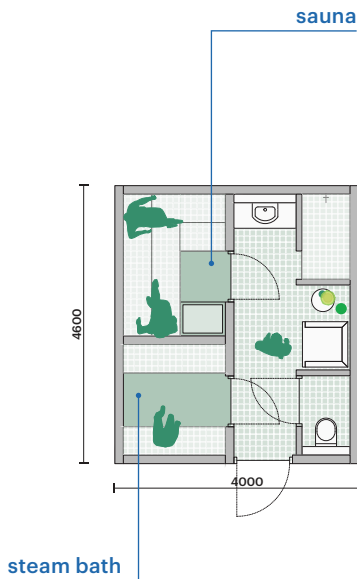
guest room

for visitors of residents



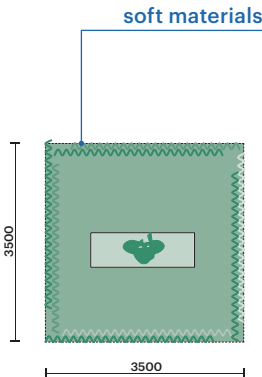
resizable living room

adjustable to different needs



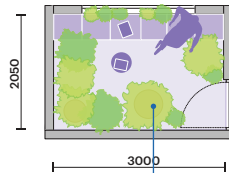
sauna and steam bath

for residents



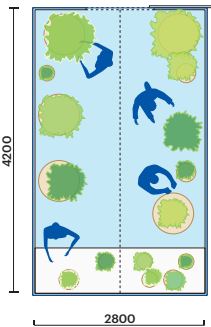
yoga room

calm and quiet place for meditation



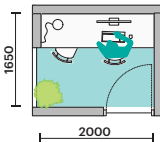
distress room

room to clear your mind



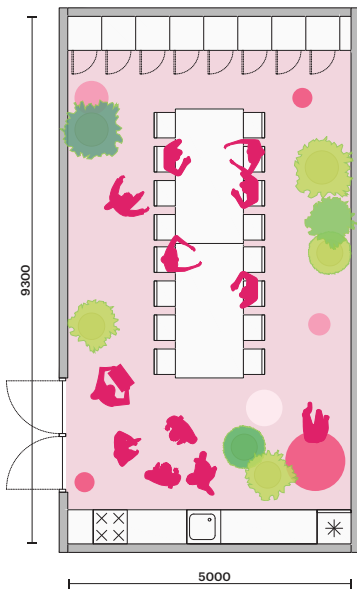
greenhouse for herbs

for all types of herbs



concentration pod

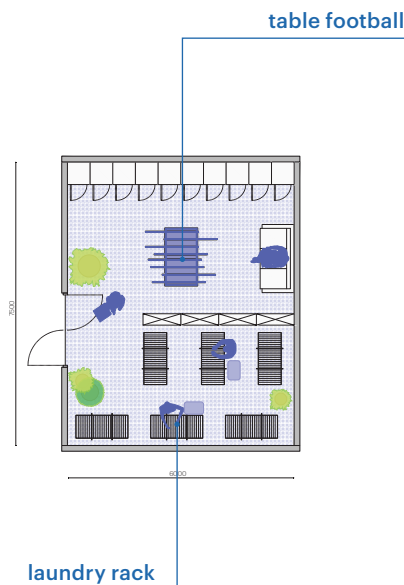
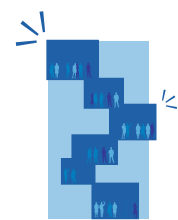
quiet zone



event room

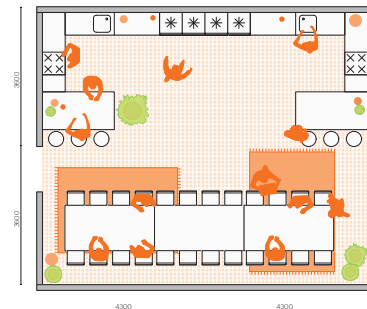
for bigger parties; to invite friends and family for celebrations

# Building community



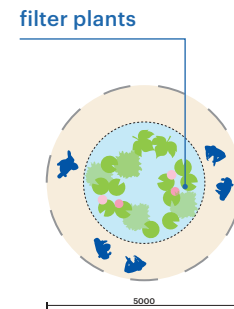
laundry and games room

entertainment while doing the laundry



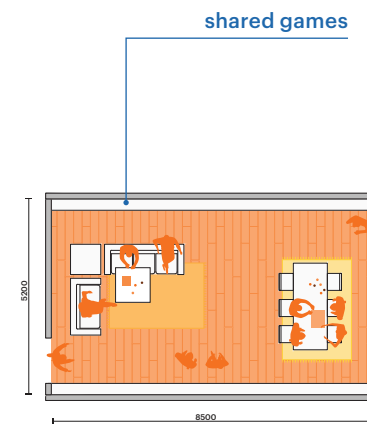
cooking studio

for people who like to share the joy of cooking



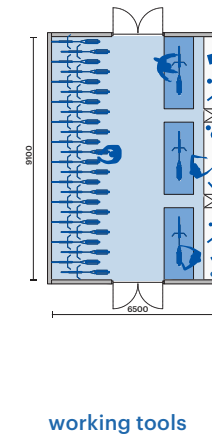
rainwater filter

atrium garden with filtering plants to clean rainwater



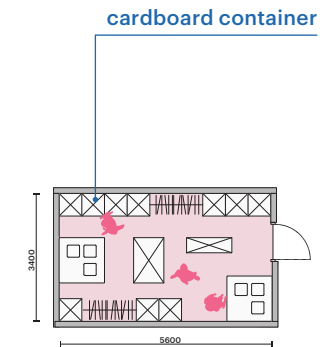
board game room

for bigger gatherings of board games fans



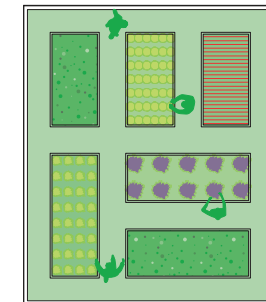
bike storage and repair

space to fix and store your own bike



waste recycle and exchange room

zero waste philosophy

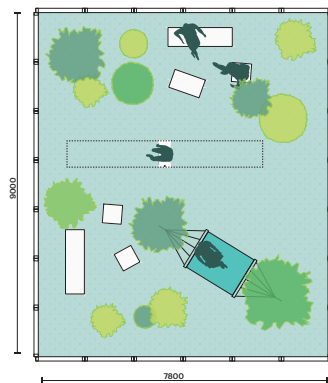
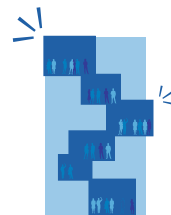


vegetable garden

space for urban gardening

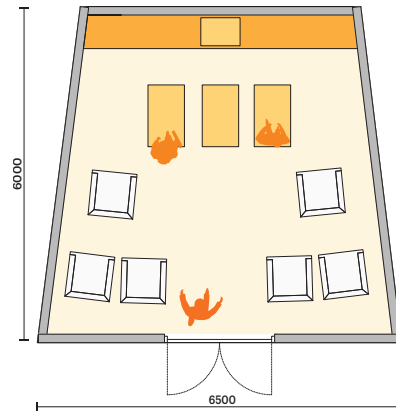


# Building community



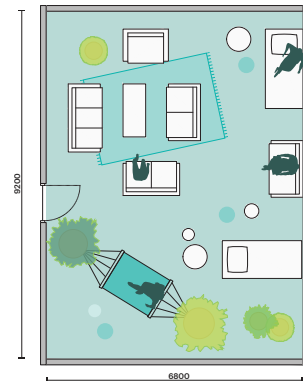
indoor garden

space to enjoy greenery even during winter



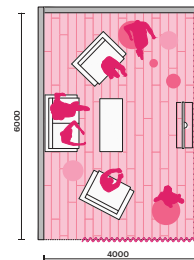
multifith room

quiet prayer room



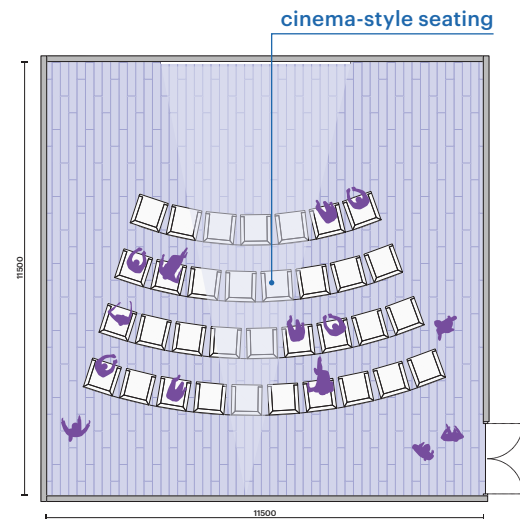
offline room

no network connection



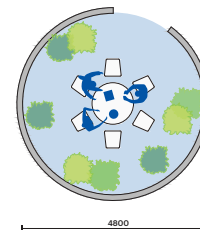
video games room

prepared for groups and individuals



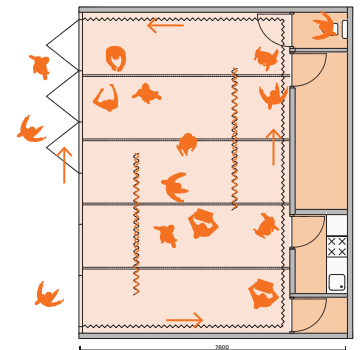
cinema

screenings of films chosen by residents



meeting room

for study groups and shared discussions

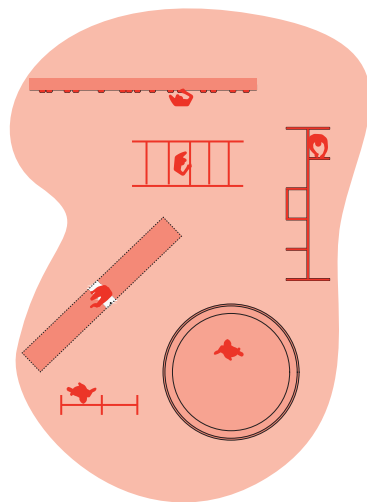
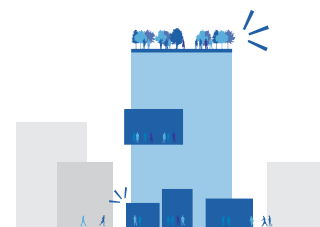


flexible room  
'for all purposes'

curtains, movable furniture, flexible walls, openable facade

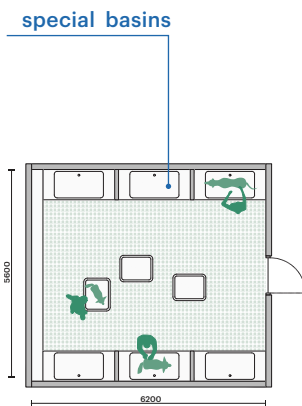


# Neighbourhood community



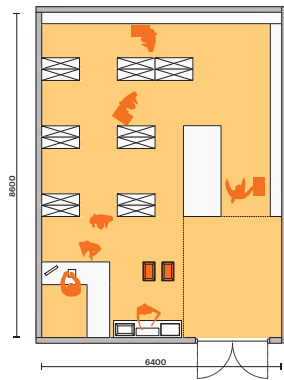
outdoor gym

for people of all ages



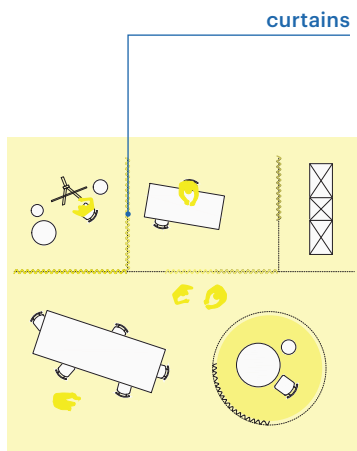
pet bath

located close to the entrance



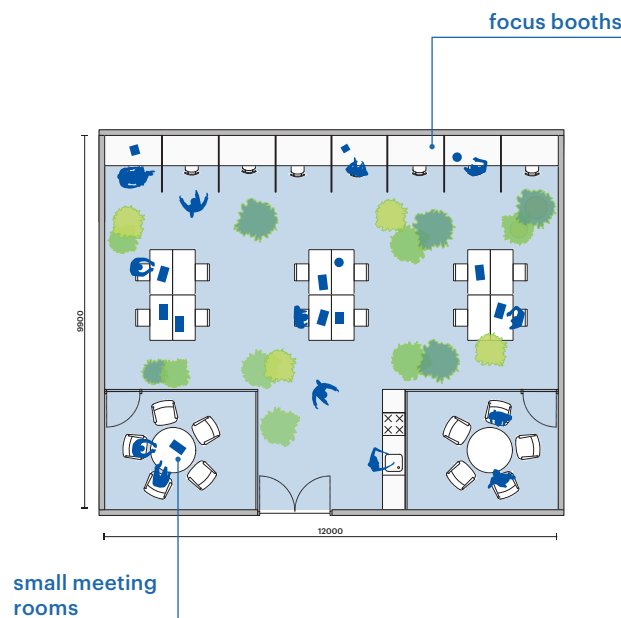
grocery shop

small shop with local products for everyday groceries



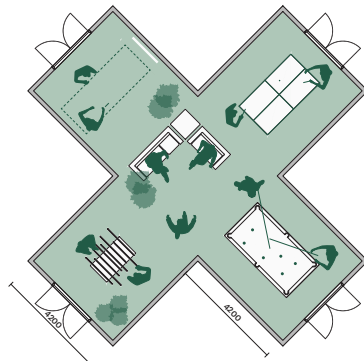
arts and crafts room

shared space for artists to collaborate or work alone



co-working room

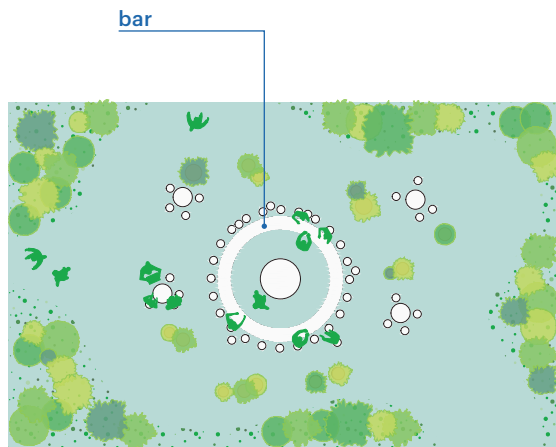
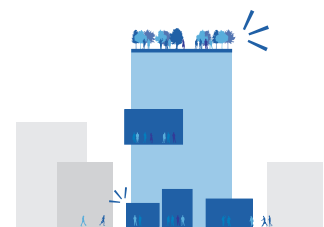
open space with extra facilities



games room

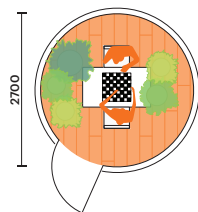
for table tennis, pool, table football

# Neighbourhood community



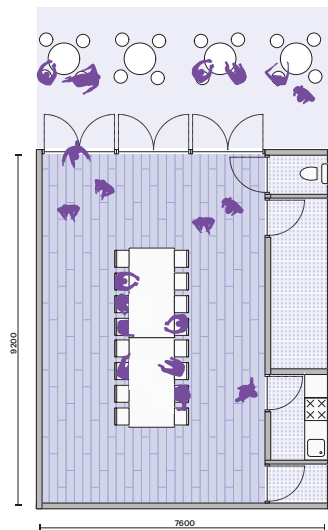
rooftop garden

garden with planting,  
seating and other  
uses



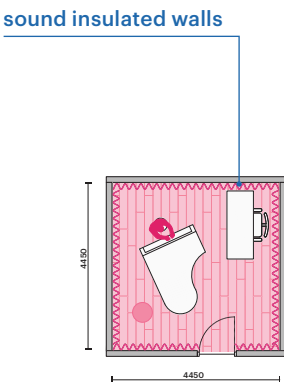
chess room

focus space for a  
game



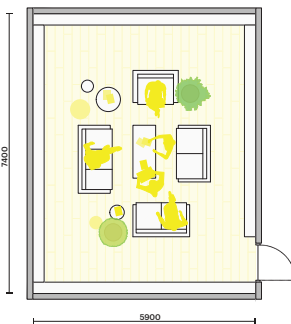
neighbourhood house

place for community  
events



music room

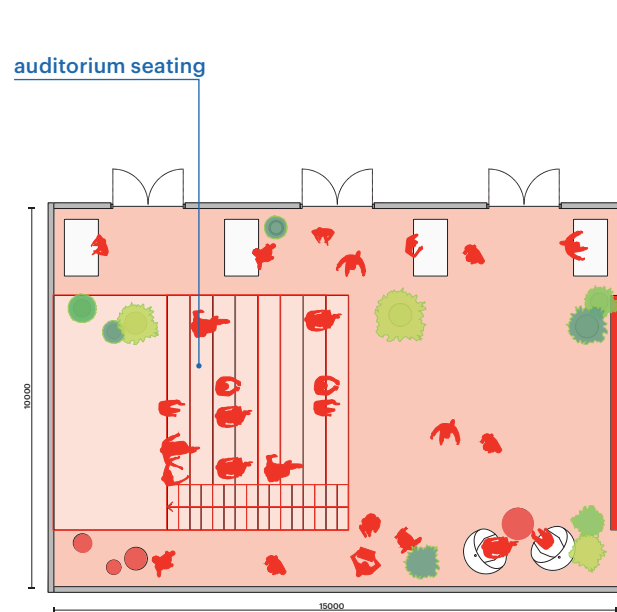
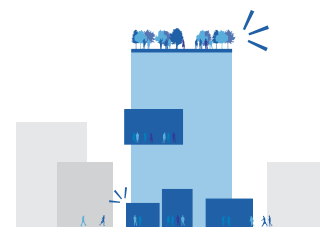
studio for creative  
musicians



book club room

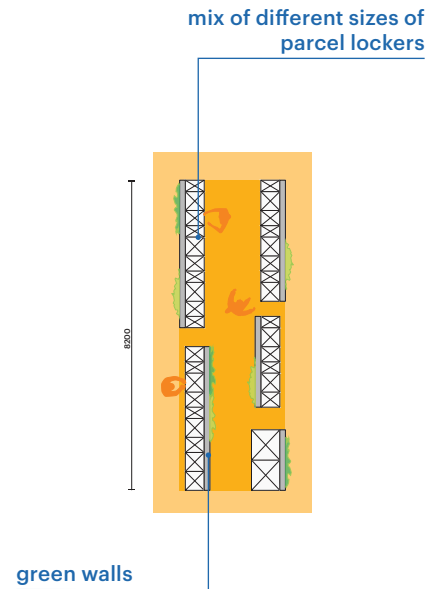
meeting space for  
readers and a library

# Neighbourhood community



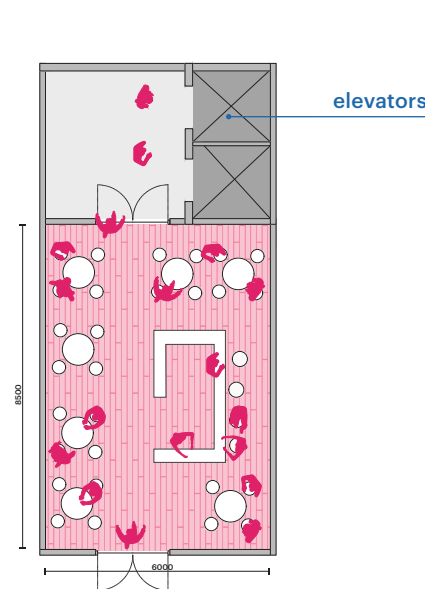
event room

for different types of performances and social gatherings



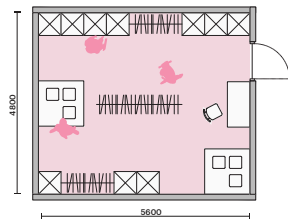
parcel walls

system of walls with integrated lockers



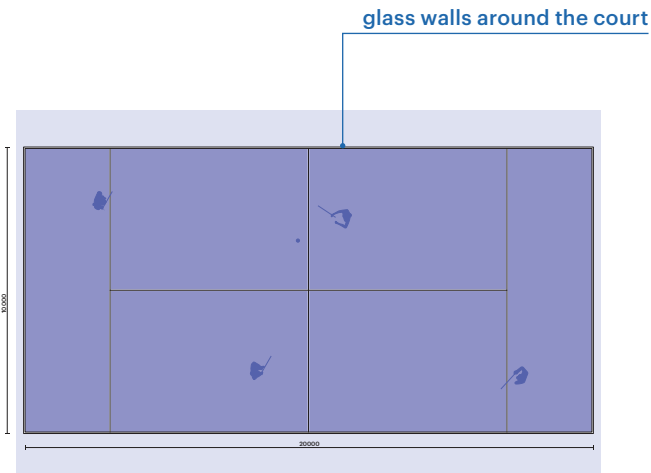
coffee bar entrance

entrance lounge to grab a coffee on the go



second hand shop

place to sell pre-loved items



padel court

outdoor sports

Co-living accommodates a **diverse target group**...



Fuggerei Next500 Pavilion, Germany. Architect MVRDV. Photo by Saskia Wehler



Vindmollebakken, Norway. Architect Helen & Gard. Photo by Jiri Havran

...residents from **young** to **old(er) age**.

Accommodating **different lifestyles**...



The Fold, London. Developed by HUB and Bridges. Architect: Morrow + Lorraine. Photo by Timothy Soar



Future Towers, India. Architect MVRDV. Photo by Ossip van Duivenbode

...from **high end**, or a green oasis to **DIY**.



# Our residents

Often co-living attracts young people that reside for a relatively short period. However, co-living can also have more wide-ranging appeal: from young to old, from short to long stays. The focus of the collective spaces will change according to the composition of residents. Of course, combinations are possible; for example creatives and DIY enthusiasts will no doubt create interesting synergies.



## healthy urbans

- focused on healthy living; both young and older
- short and long term stay
- socially-minded
- keen on outdoor activities



## academics

- range of ages
- short and long term stay
- socially-minded
- concentration spaces, work spaces, debate spaces



## active later living

- aged 60+
- want to be surrounded by vibrant city life
- long term stay
- socially-minded, very active
- spaces for (grand)children to stay



## sporty people

- passionate about sport
- spend a lot of time doing outdoor and indoor sport
- follow sport events



## creatives

- do creative work professionally or as a hobby
- strong community bonds
- need space for their passion
- need space for thought exchange



## food lovers

- different age groups
- like to use fresh ingredients
- need a space to cook and dine
- go out a lot to search for new taste



## influencers

- need good space to create their online content
- individuals
- maker spaces



## gardeners

- like healthy food and taking care of gardens and greenery
- community-oriented
- feel good in natural environment



## local starters

- grew up in the city and want to stay there
- long and short term
- socially-minded
- have a lot of friends and family in the city



## travellers

- often away on travels
- short-term stay
- want hotel-like services



## young professionals

- energetic
- socially-minded
- have a lot of friends
- co-working spaces



## night owls

- like to sleep in and go out at night
- socially-minded
- flexible working hours



## DIY enthusiasts

- like to improve their homes
- keen on DIY
- workshop spaces



## restarters

- typically aged 25-45
- socially-minded, short stay
- diverse set of collective spaces



## young entrepreneurs

- want to make new (business) connections
- focused on work and networking
- co-working facilities



## expats

- people who have just moved from abroad or a different city
- temporary stay
- keen on outdoor activities
- open to meeting new people



## musicians

- professional or amateur
- need space to perform for friends and neighbours
- need space for practice
- open to social interaction with other creatives

# Curating co-living

Humans like to put down roots. We move home reluctantly, and it's not just about avoiding the stresses and demands of moving. Having a stable home is a key contributor to wellbeing, and research shows that a sense of community is a powerful influence on people to remain where they are.

Co-living schemes, with their shared spaces and activities, help build this sense of community, which can lead to residents staying longer than they would in a typical rented arrangement. But there's a caveat. It's residents themselves that determine a community's health and success by nurturing connections and sustaining their social life. And this depends heavily on how a co-living building is curated.

Environments that are highly serviced and organised often lead to residents leaving sooner; longer stays sometimes need a more bottom-up approach where residents have a say and work in partnership with the building owner. The optimal balance will vary from group to group, and reaching it will mean allowing residents a degree of freedom to shape the kind of community that works best for them. 'Active later living' residents, may be open to self-organisation, for example, while expats might go for a more structured and organised approach.



3

# Social spaciousness

Catalogue of building typologies

# Social spaciousness

Accidental encounters are the lifeblood of any community. Any co-living building needs to include incidental spaces where residents can bump into one another and swap news and views, as they might on a street corner. This way, the benefits of community evolve naturally, without the need for further interventions.

We call this concept 'social spaciousness'. It's about translating the neighbourhood streetscape into a vertical building – streets and local shops, even squares and gardens, where residents can wander and come across their neighbours in a spontaneous, natural and unforced way.

Even at door-to-door level, we can introduce social spaciousness. Connecting corridors needn't be the dark, cramped and anonymous passageways that send residents scurrying to their homes. As spacious, three-dimensional environments they can enliven the building and prevent residents from ever feeling lonely or isolated.

A community needs  
**social spaciousness...**



Hunziker-Areal - Haus M, Switzerland. Architect: Duplex Architekten. Photo by Johannes Marburg



Gleis 21, Austria. Architect: einszueins architektur. Photo by Hertha Hurnaus

...allowing for  
**accidental encounters.**

On the **streets...**



Celosia, Spain. Architect: MVRDV. Photo by Ronald Halbe



Silodam, Amsterdam. Architect: MVRDV. Photo by Rob 't Hart

...and **squares** within  
the building.

# Typologies

The next few pages highlight the diversity of building typologies available based around the concept of 'social spaciousness' – not just providing homes but also fostering communities.

The typologies present a selection of distinct arrangements of homes and communal spaces, all with the shared aim of promoting interaction and social engagement among residents.

The home designs in these examples are based on repetitive volumes, for ease of construction, but this doesn't mean they are all the same: they can still support the wide array of floorplans seen in the next chapter. In many cases, the communal spaces can be reached seamlessly from the ground floor, connecting them directly with the rest of the neighbourhood.

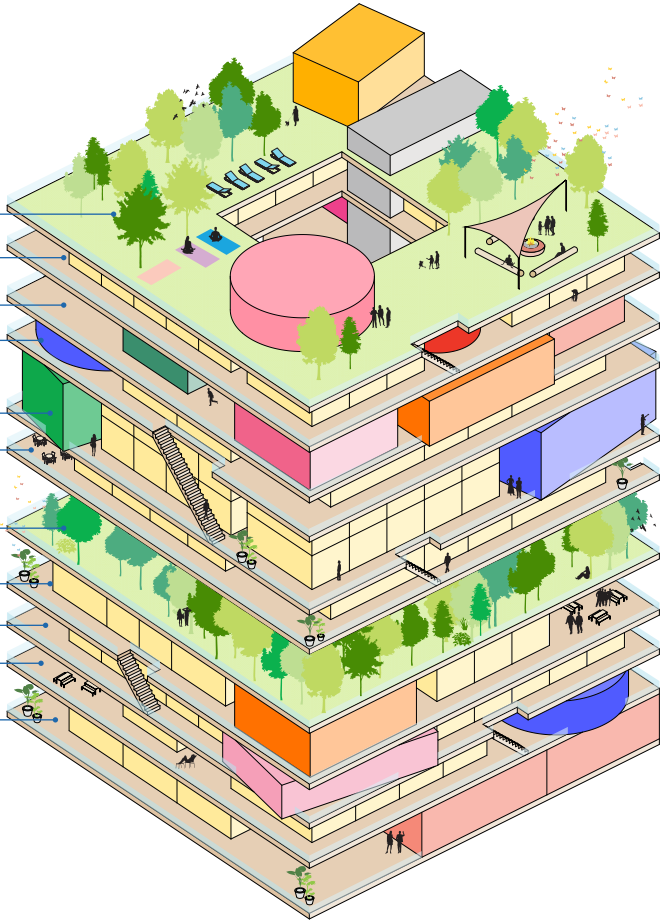
# Stacked village

The concept of the stacked village arranges homes into a vertical community. Each individual floor possesses its distinct character, collectively resulting in a vertical village. With this typology, a floor could be designated for active seniors, offering more spacious private residences alongside amenities such as a clubhouse and a vegetable garden. Another floor might cater to younger entrepreneurs, featuring homes complemented by workspaces. Additionally, some floors could be entirely allocated for communal spaces or greenery.

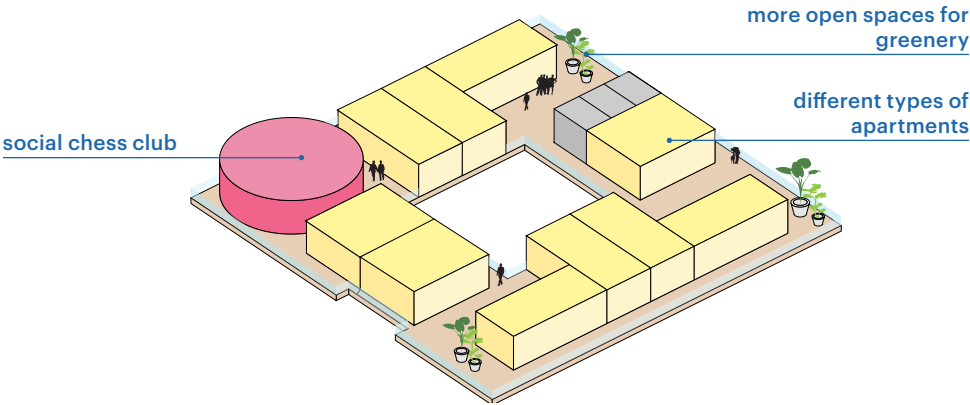
## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces

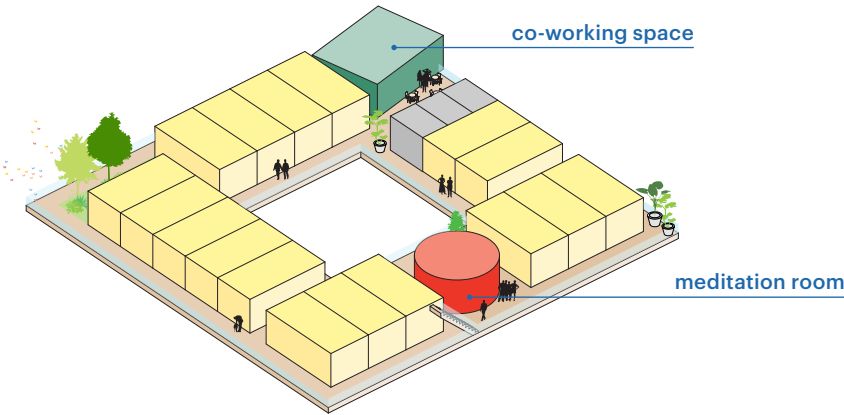
- active green roof
- local starters
- communal spaces
- active older people
- premium duplex
- creatives
- city forest
- healthy urban
- entrepreneurs
- expats
- restarters and commercial



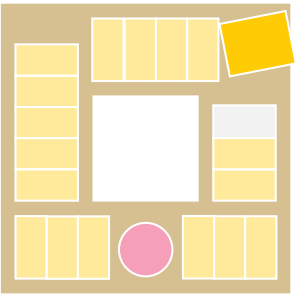
axonometry



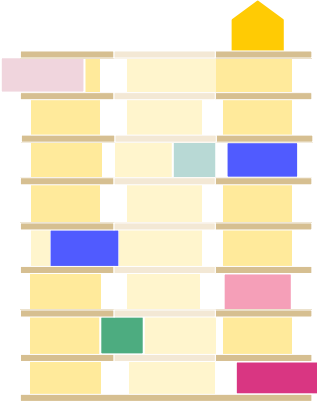
floor dedicated to active elderly



floor dedicated to local starters



plan



section

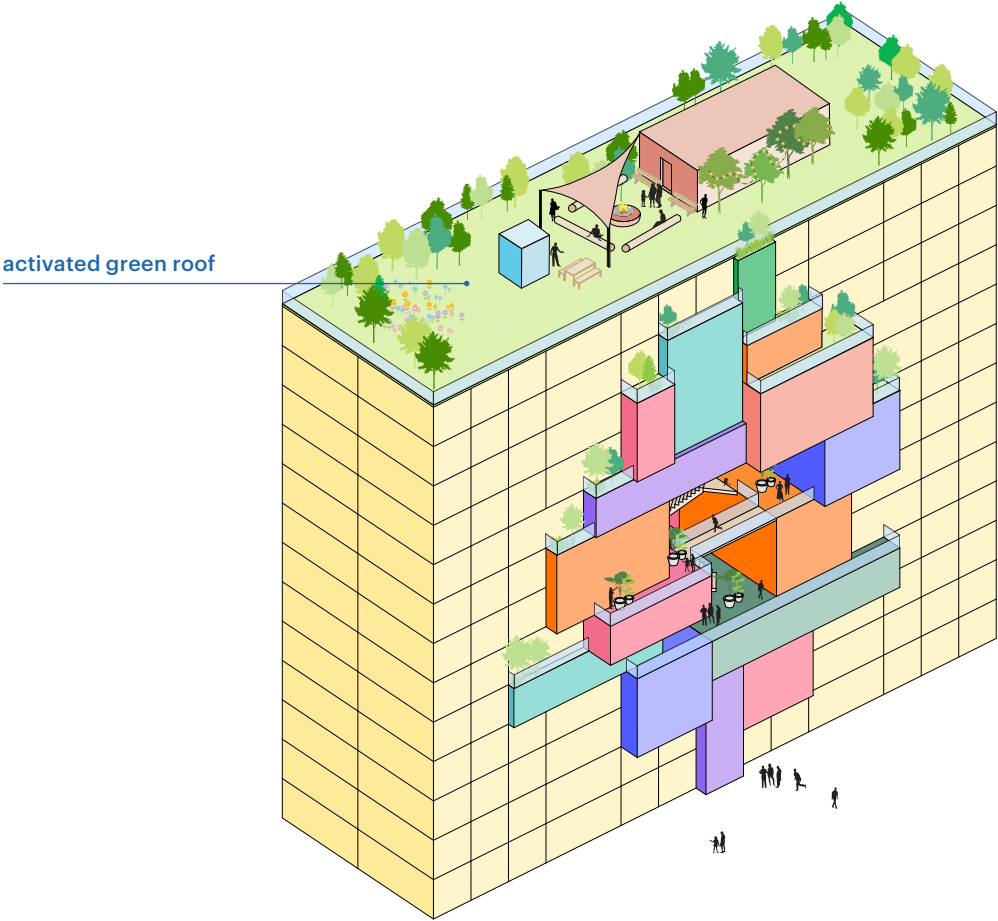


# Vibrant heart

Collective spaces form the vibrant heart of this typology. These spaces are interconnected by bridges, staircases, and terraces, thoughtfully arranged to ensure accessibility to a shared area from each residential level. These communal spaces not only serve the housing floors, but also connect the ground level to the accessible green roof. This arrangement therefore establishes an informal vertical pathway through the building.

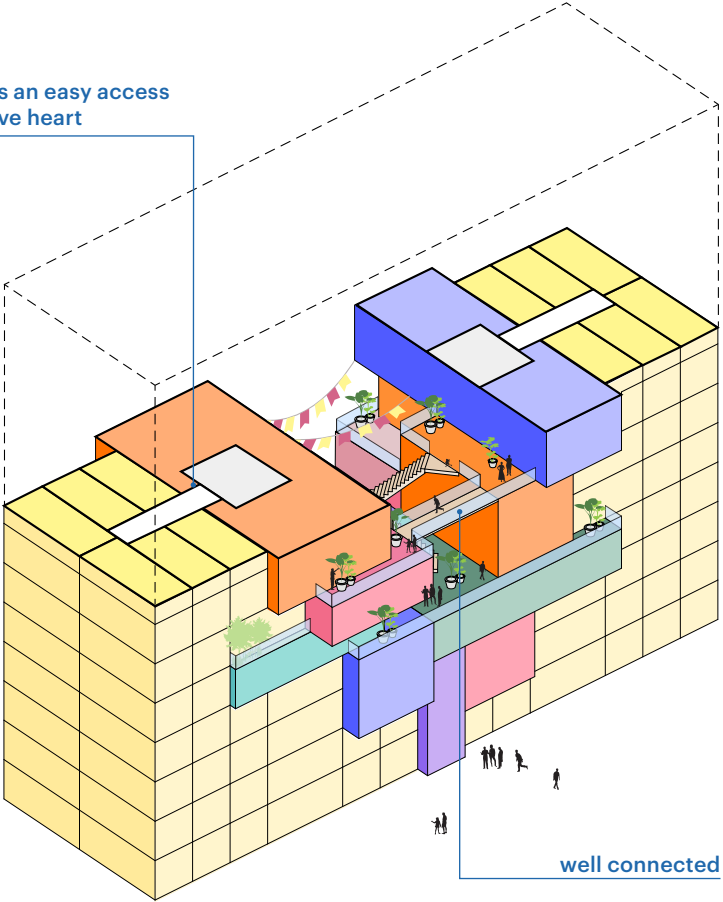
## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces

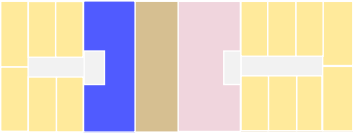


axonometry

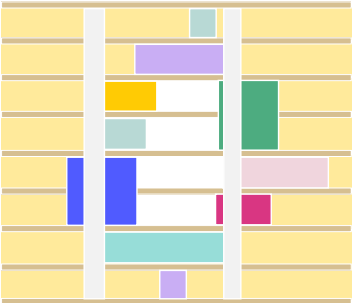
every floor has an easy access to the collective heart



sectional axonometry



plan



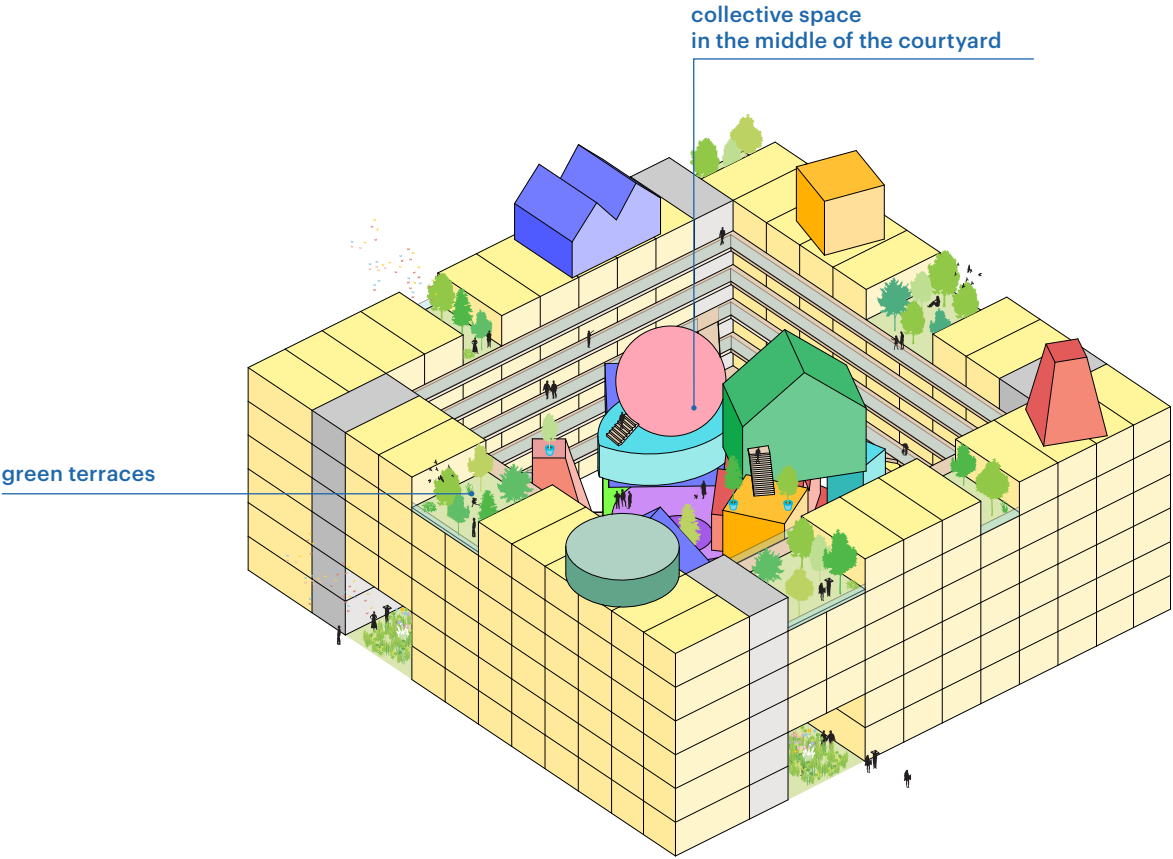
section

# Lively courtyard

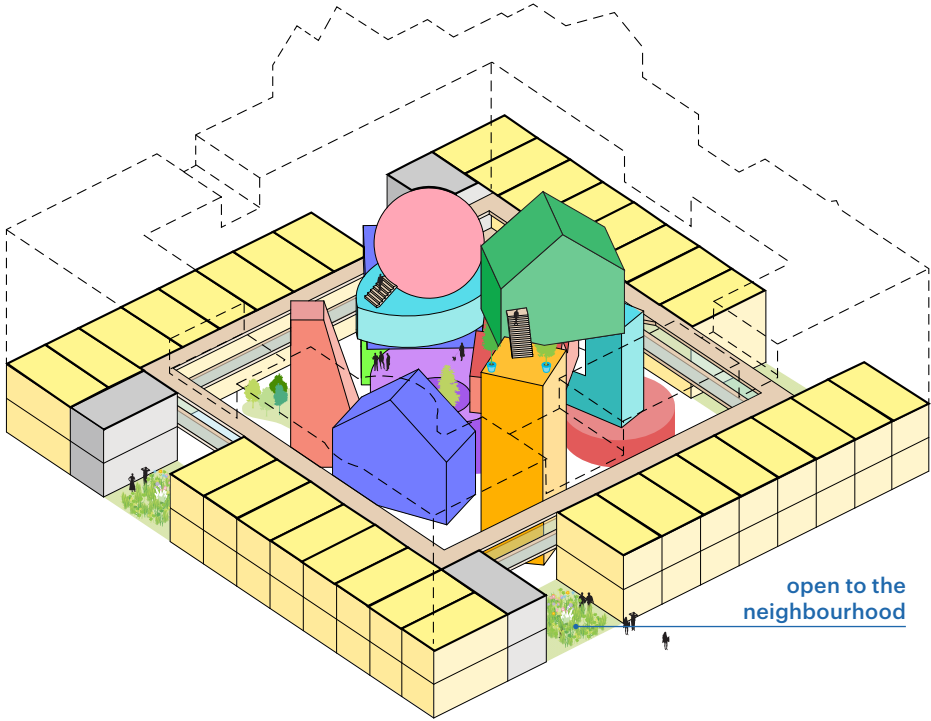
This typology features a courtyard block with a stack of collective spaces in the centre. Galleries provide access to the private residences, and these galleries connect to the collective spaces via bridges. This configuration ensures that the courtyard is lively, and residents always have a view of the activities taking place. Around these communal areas, the courtyard is full of greenery. Portals provide access from every side (which can potentially be restricted to daytime hours), establishing a space that strikes a balance between being open to the neighborhood and offering an intimate getaway for residents – a hidden gem in the city.

## Legend

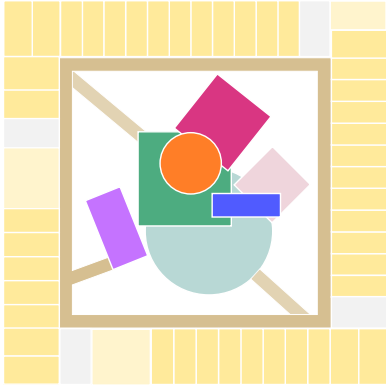
- housing
- collective spaces



axonometry



sectional axonometry



plan



section



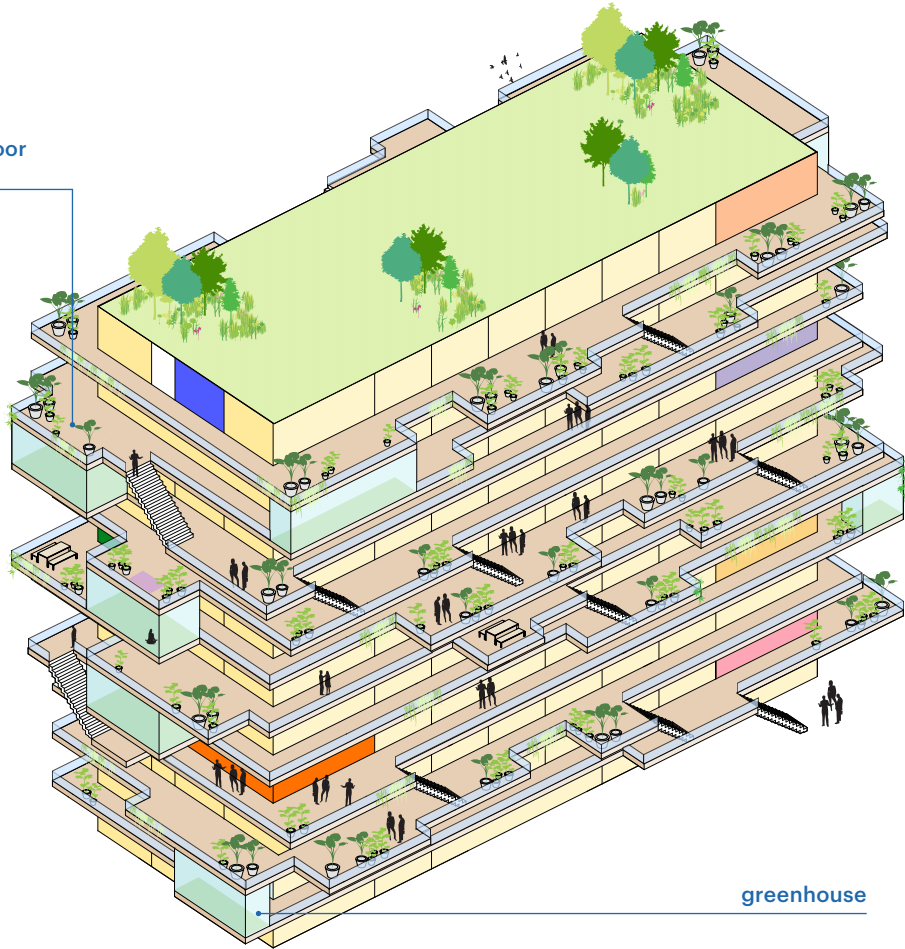
# Inside out

Many residential buildings have an interior corridor that connects the individual apartments; in this scenario, the corridor space is located on the exterior, essentially flipping the arrangement, giving every unit a front door and front garden. In places, the exterior corridor is widened to accommodate amenities like small picnic tables or communal outdoor areas. The communal spaces are dispersed throughout various floors, accompanied by expansive terraces. Staircases connect these different levels, rendering internal staircases unnecessary. With its vibrant exterior, the “inside out” typology brings a positive atmosphere to the neighbourhood.

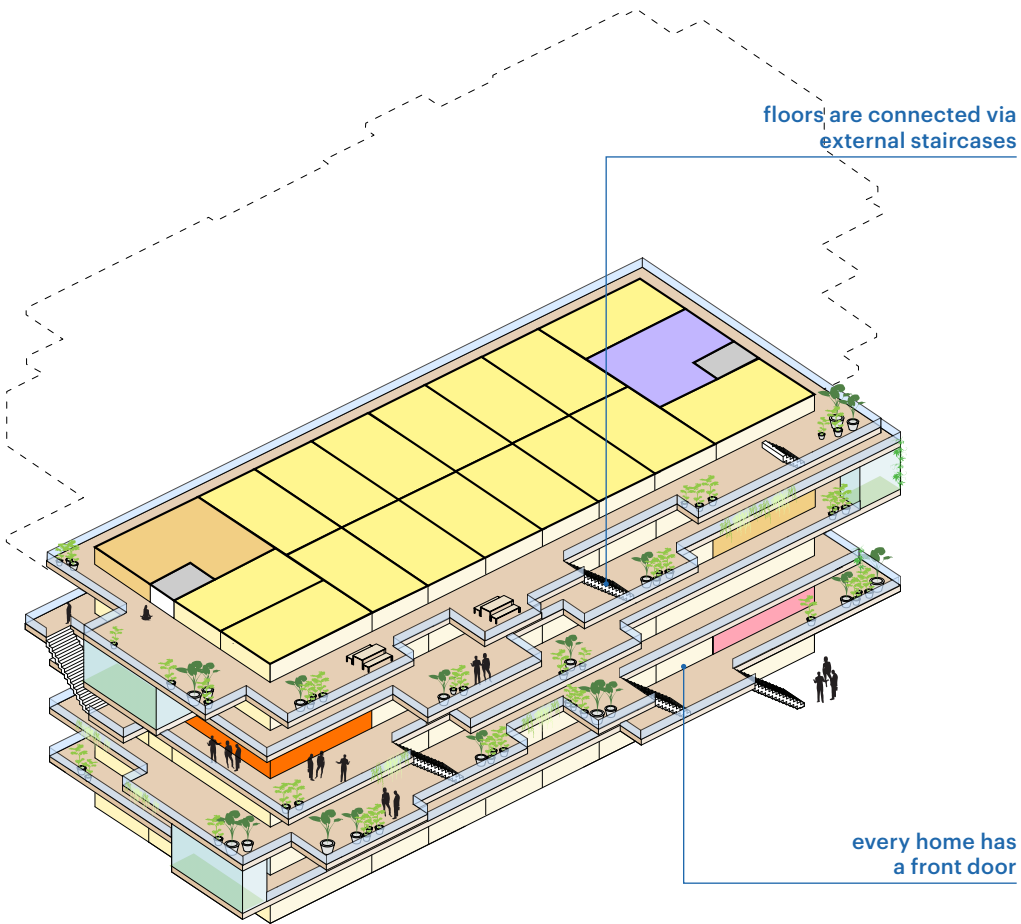
## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces

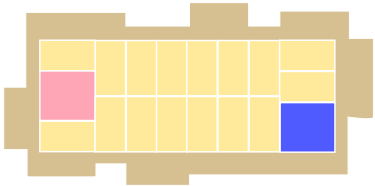
social outdoor spaces



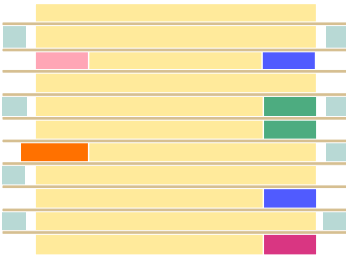
axonometry



sectional axonometry



plan



section

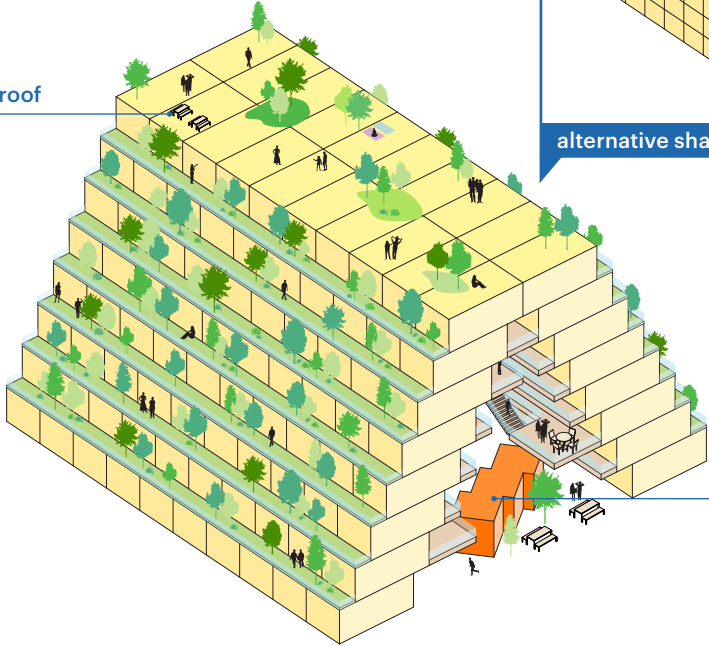
# Grand grotto

The individual residences enclose a large interior space, known as the “grotto”, which hosts the collective spaces. Each apartment offers a view of the grotto, while bridges provide residents with entry to the shared spaces. The grotto space can easily be opened to the wider neighbourhood, potentially serving as an indoor thoroughfare during daylight hours. Furthermore, the typology lends itself to potential collaborations with public amenities like libraries. Additionally, each private home can be furnished with a modest outdoor area situated on the exterior of the building.

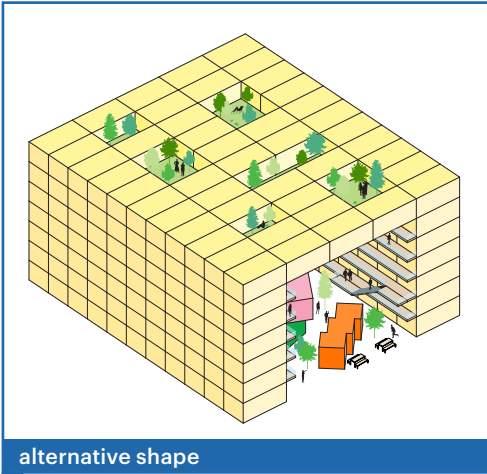
## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces

public green roof



axonometry



alternative shape

collective spaces in the interior of the building

# Super gallery

The super gallery is a reinvention (or exaggeration) of a classic “gallery flat” typology, where apartments each have external access. The communal spaces are spread throughout the block and connected by external staircases, which double as social areas for sitting and meeting others. These staircases can be tailored to specific themes; for instance, the purple staircase serves as a connection to all the sports facilities and the orange staircase might connect all the cultural rooms. Moreover, the staircases offer convenience for residents to interact with those living above them or climb to the green rooftop.

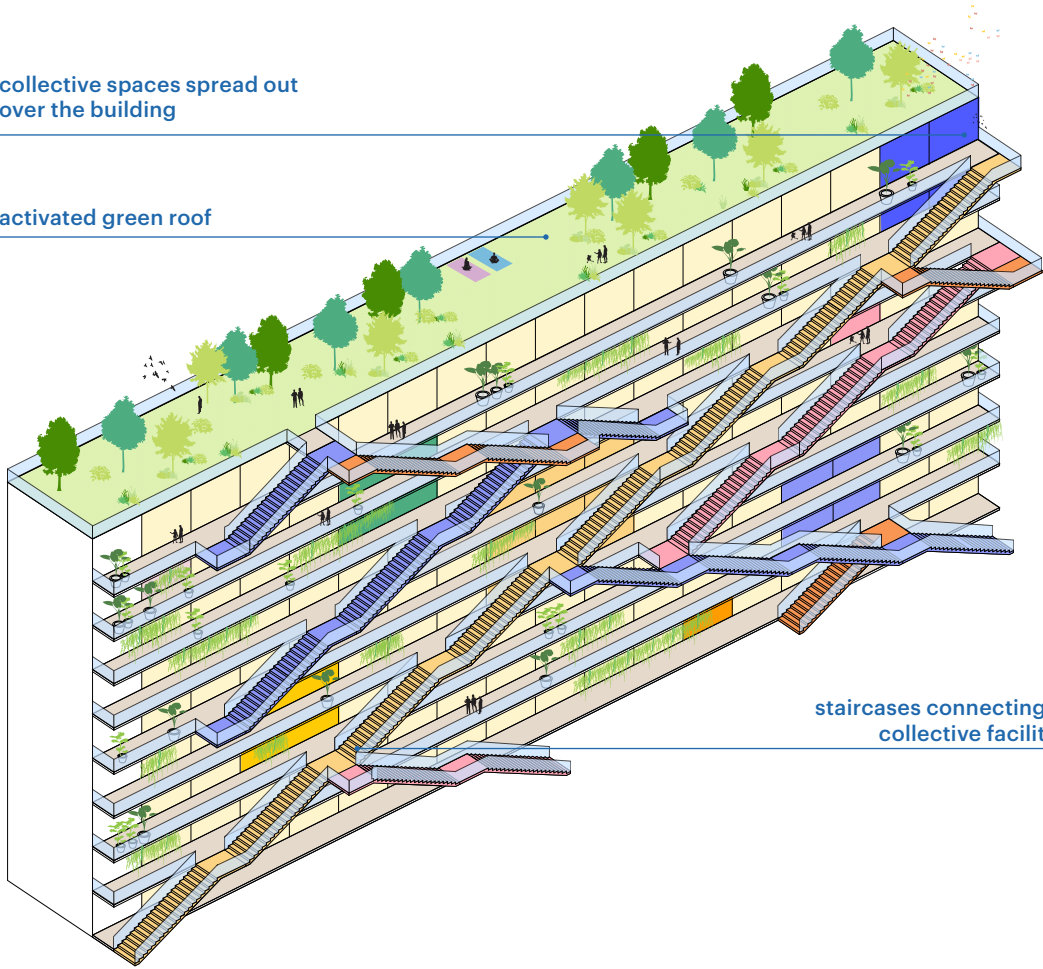
## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces

collective spaces spread out over the building

activated green roof

axonometry front



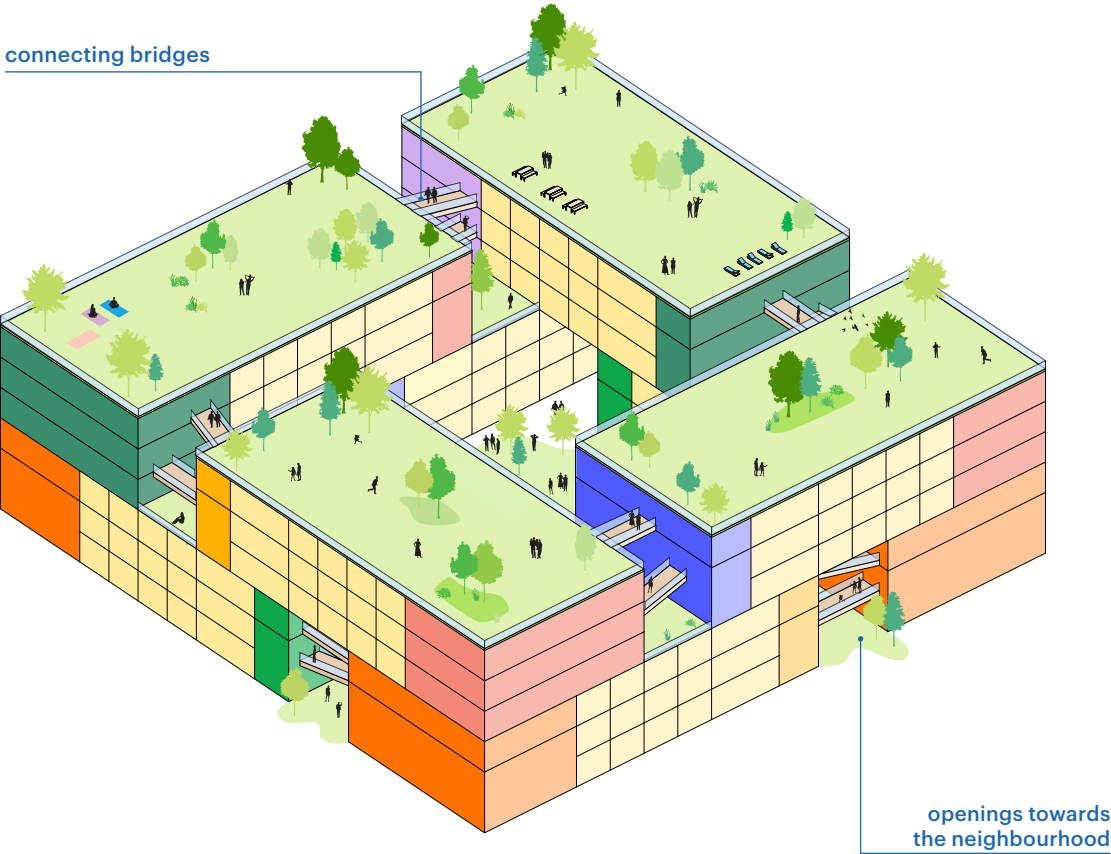
staircases connecting all collective facilities

# Building blocks stack

Each block comprises multiple layers of private residences, encompassing a spacious communal area on one side and a smaller communal space on the opposite side. The blocks are systematically stacked around a green courtyard. Just like assembling children's building blocks, the stacking arrangement can be altered to create diverse configurations – a taller building, or a larger courtyard, for example. These blocks are consistently interconnected by bridges, allowing the entire community to access and utilise the shared spaces.

## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces



axonomy

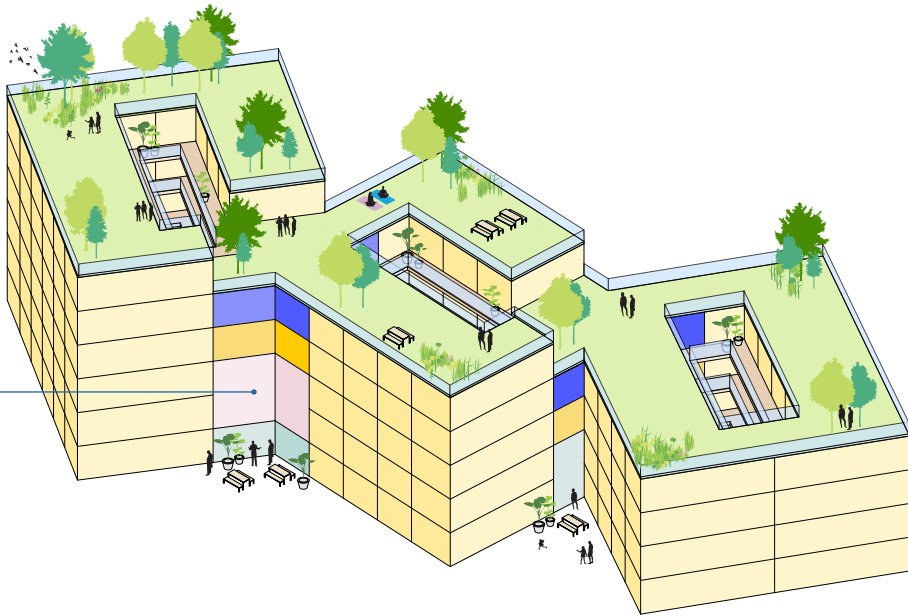
# Intersection

Basic blocks are positioned at the corners of the plot, and communal spaces are incorporated wherever the blocks intersect. At each junction, two blocks enjoy direct access to these shared spaces. The centre of each block features a small atrium, adding a sense of spaciousness to the block itself.

## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces

collective spaces "glue" the blocks together



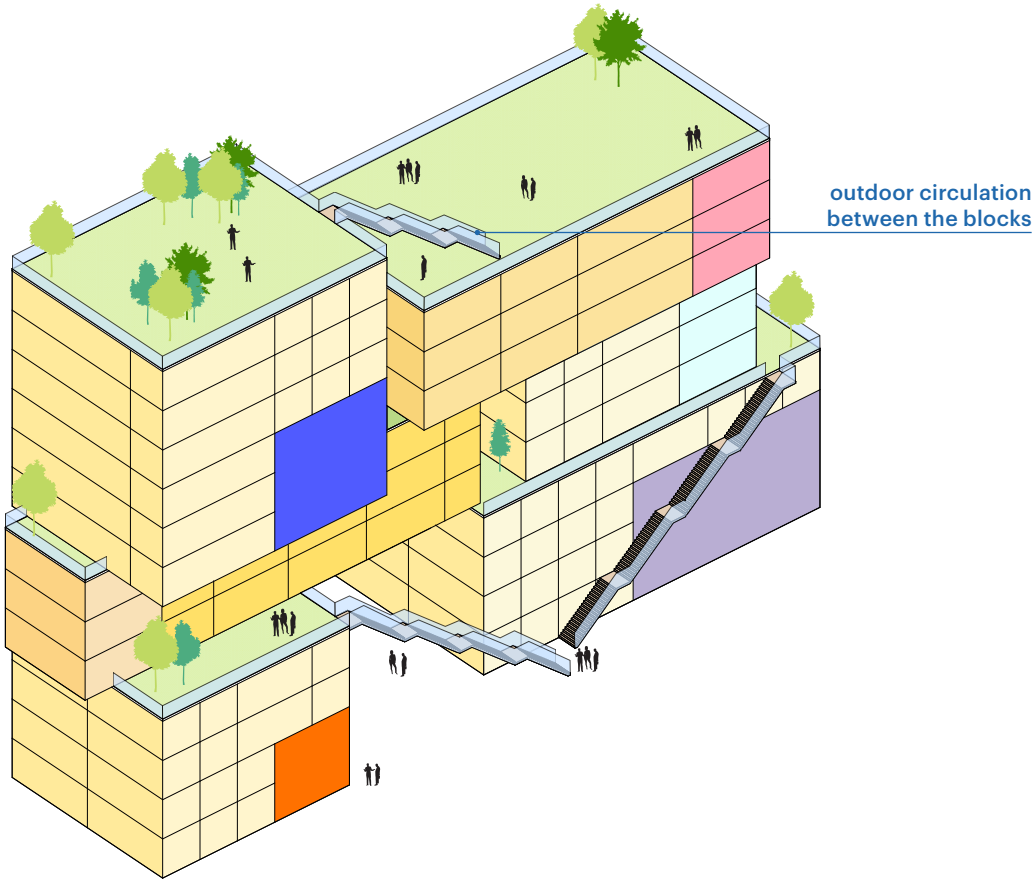
axonomy

# Vertical neighbourhood

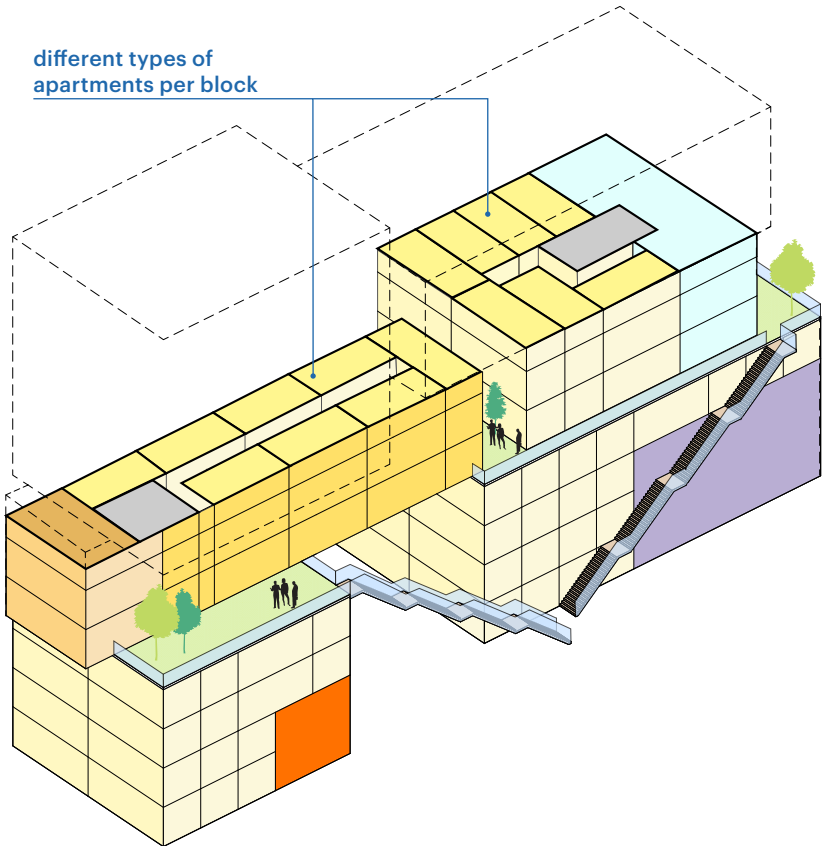
In contrast to the stack of equal-sized blocks, the vertical neighbourhood involves stacking different types of building blocks. Each block accommodates a specific category of private residences, varying in size, height, or shape. This approach allows the building to host a diverse range of residents. Between these blocks, gardens emerge, connected by staircases. This layout permits residents to explore other blocks and access amenities on different levels.

### Legend

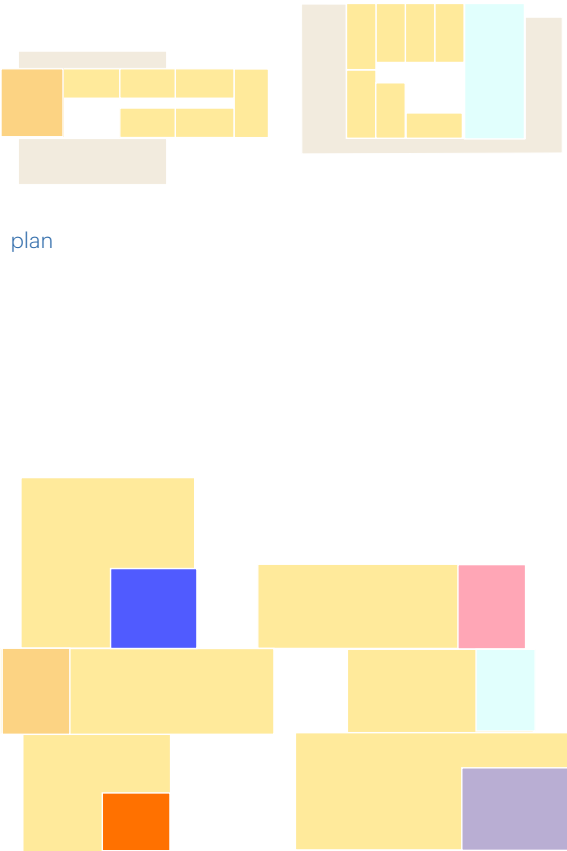
- housing
- collective spaces



axonometry



sectional axonometry



plan

section



# Swiss cheese

Each side of this typology features a large opening with a communal garden accompanied by collective spaces. These gardens are linked by staircases that provide access to the rooftop. Residents of every floor have access to one of these gardens, which function as self-contained communal green spaces where residents can sit, relax, or play sports.

### Legend

- housing
- collective spaces

green terraces

axonometry

sectional axonometry

entrances from the terraces

plan

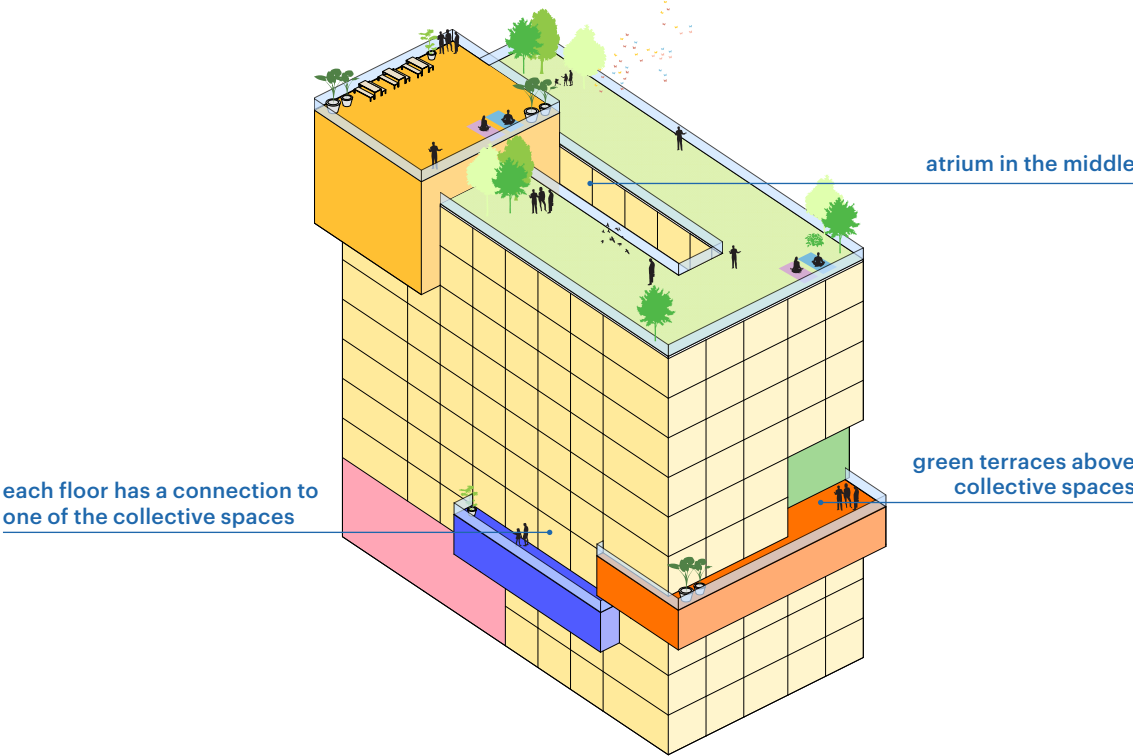
section

# Collective chain

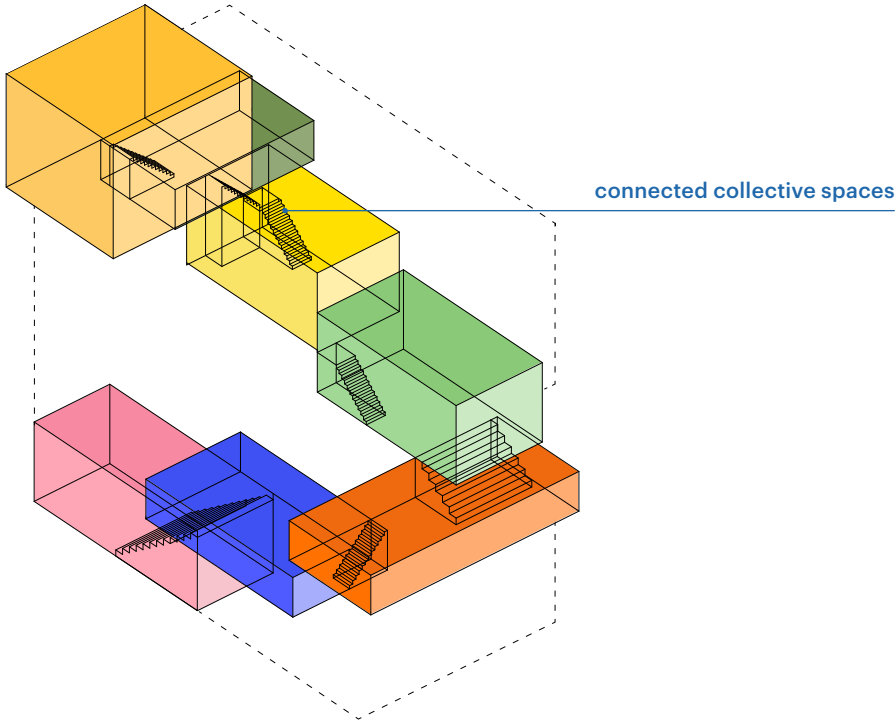
The communal areas are linked in a continuous sequence throughout the building, extending from the ground floor to the rooftop. A compact atrium at the heart of the building makes this collective chain visible from the interior. Externally, this sequence is articulated by designing the collective rooms to protrude from the main façade, creating outdoor terraces that provide additional collective spaces and a secondary route to the rooftop.

## Legend

- housing
- collective spaces



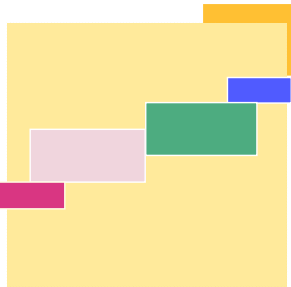
axonometry



sectional axonometry



plan



section



Community living is a **flexible typology**...



w(ego) 'Dream Homes in Density', Netherlands. Architect: The Why Factory (TUDelft professor Winy Maas). Photo by Ossip van Duivenbode



Haus 1, Germany. Architect: MVRDV & HS-Architekten. Photo by Schnepp Renou

...next to new builds...

It's an ideal strategy for **renovation or retrofit**...



Idea Factory, China. Architect: MVRDV. Photo by Xia Zhi



Didden Village, Netherlands. Architect: MVRDV. Photo by Rob't Hart

...and **rooftop extensions**

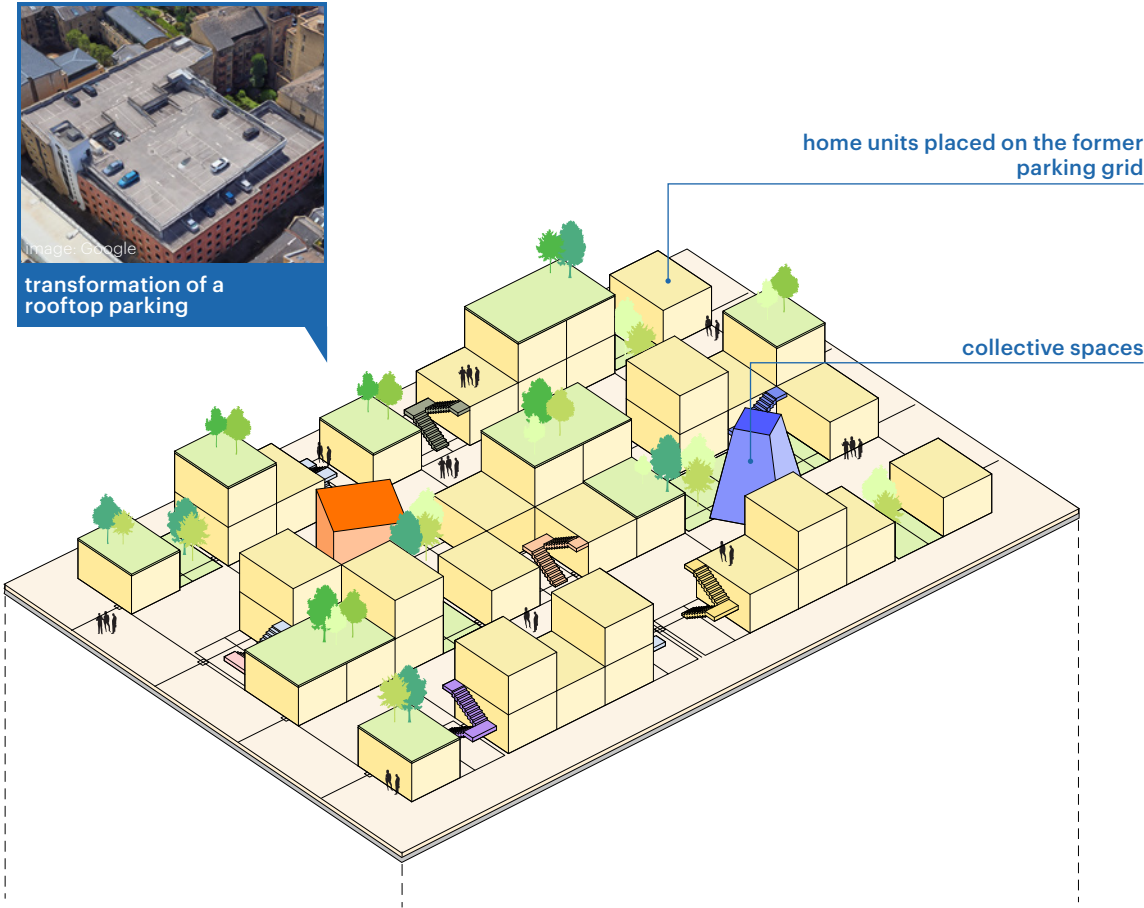
# Rooftop village

As urban areas face a growing scarcity of space for new housing developments, there is a renewed focus on rooftops. Many building types with flat rooftops have additional load capacity built-in, enabling the addition of extra levels without significant structural modifications.

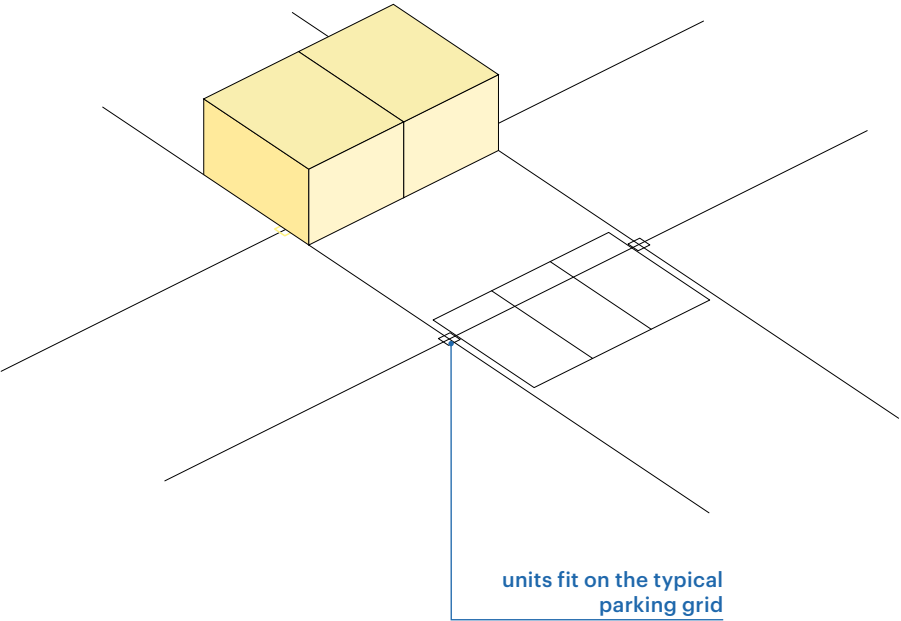
One such category is rooftop parking. In this architectural type, private homes are integrated into a pre-existing parking grid. This arrangement allows for the creation of a small village. Interspersed between the residences are communal spaces and shared green areas. Given that carparks are standardised based on their grids, this system can be adapted to various rooftops with diverse configurations.

### Legend

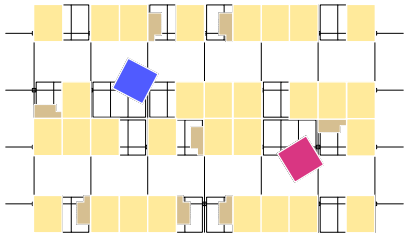
- housing
- collective spaces



axonometry



zoomed-in axonometry



plan



section

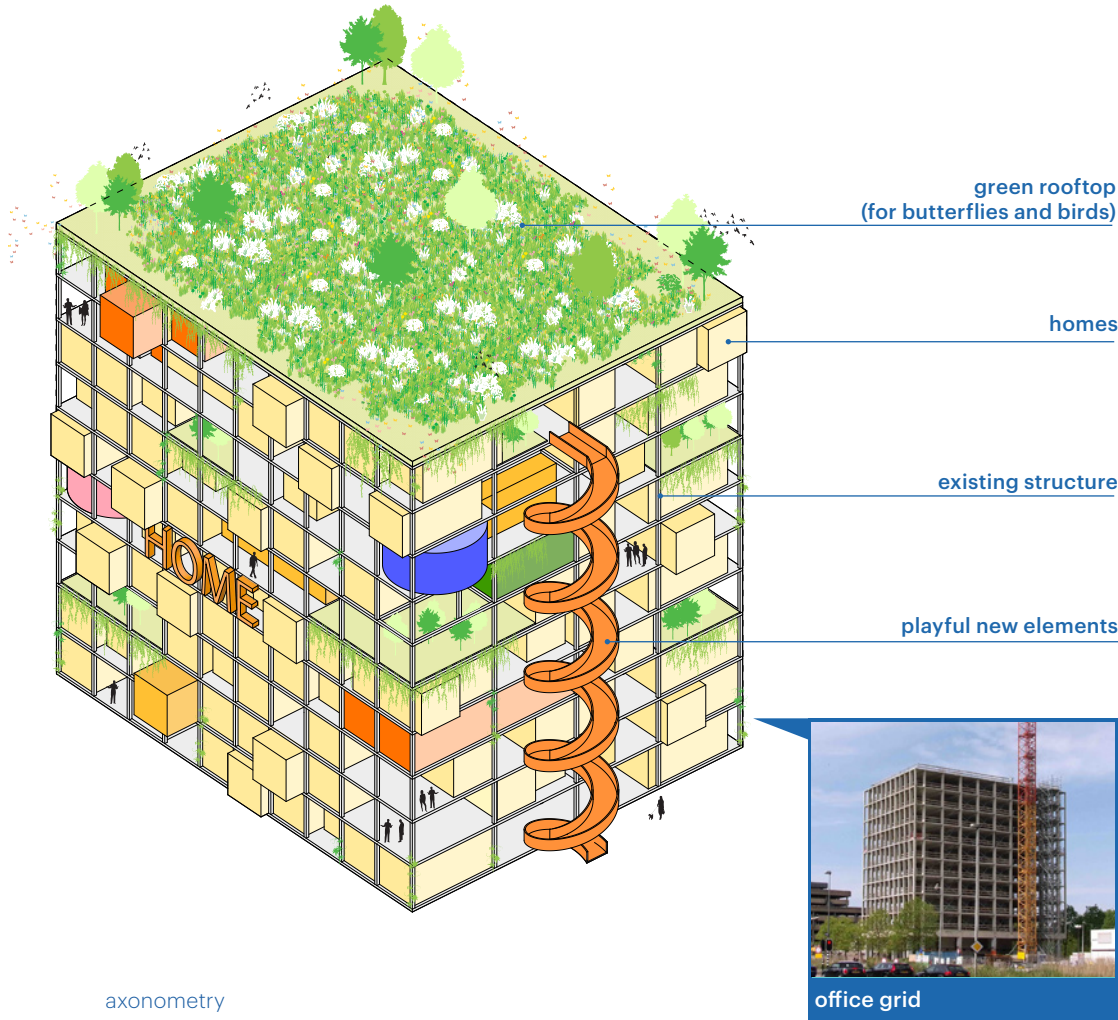


# Office reuse

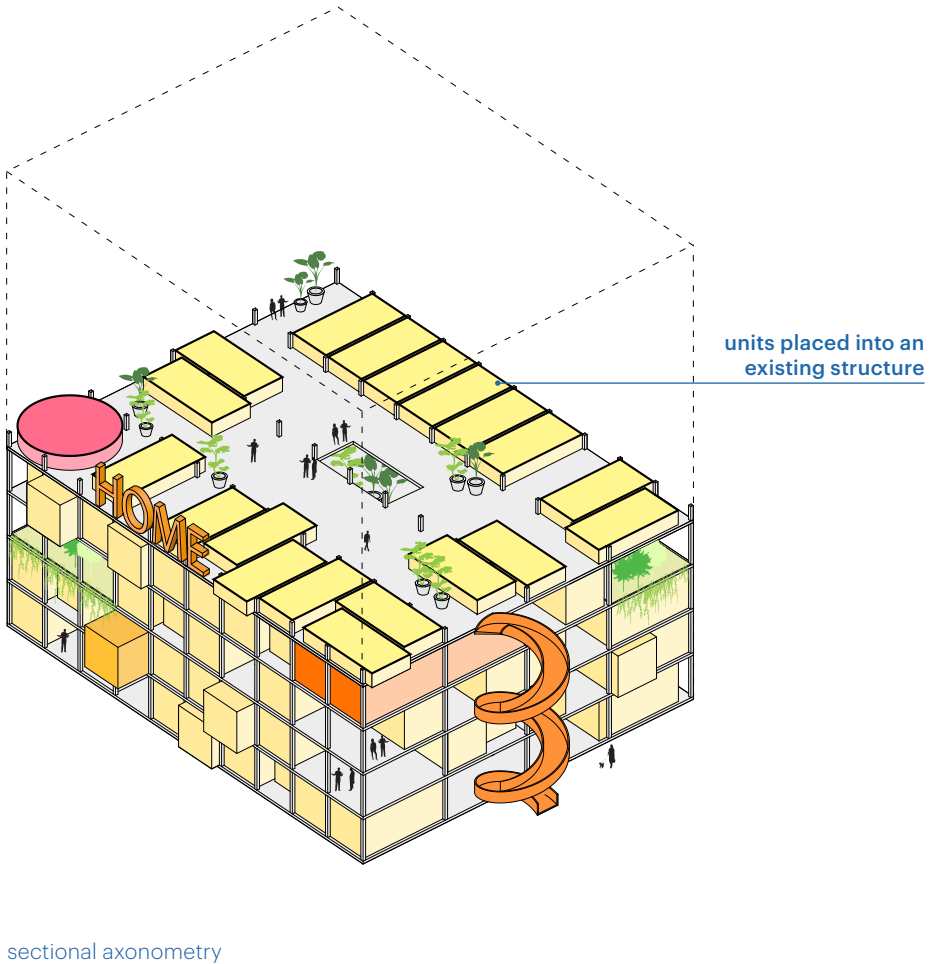
The most environmentally friendly approach to building is to minimise new construction whenever possible. Fortunately, renovation is becoming an increasingly common approach. Often, vacant low-quality office buildings possess a straightforward, solid concrete structure. This typology proposes a system in which private homes and communal spaces are smoothly integrated into the stripped-down office building. Staircases and a green rooftop are introduced to the bare bones of the structure. This offers a flexible method of repurposing an empty office building, while preserving the character of the original structure. Unlike the strategy of erecting a new facade and obscuring the existing structure, this typology presents an authentic representation of the building's evolutionary journey.

## Legend

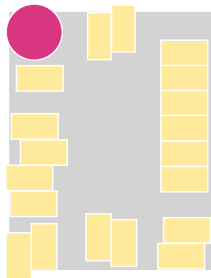
- housing
- collective spaces



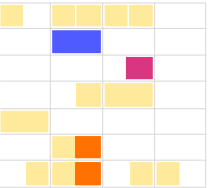
axonometry



sectional axonometry



plan



section

# Collective ribbon

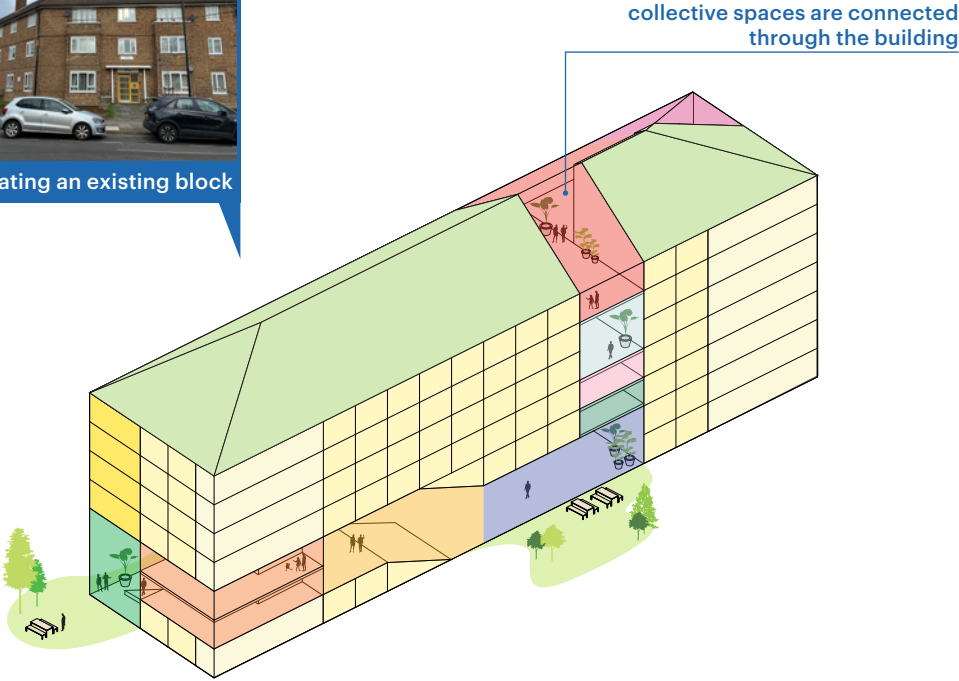
The communal areas coalesce into an elongated pathway throughout the building – a connected snake of collective spaces. Connectivity is achieved through a network of staircases and ramps. This serpent-like structure intersects with each floor, offering residents the option to utilise it as a secondary access route through the building.

### Legend

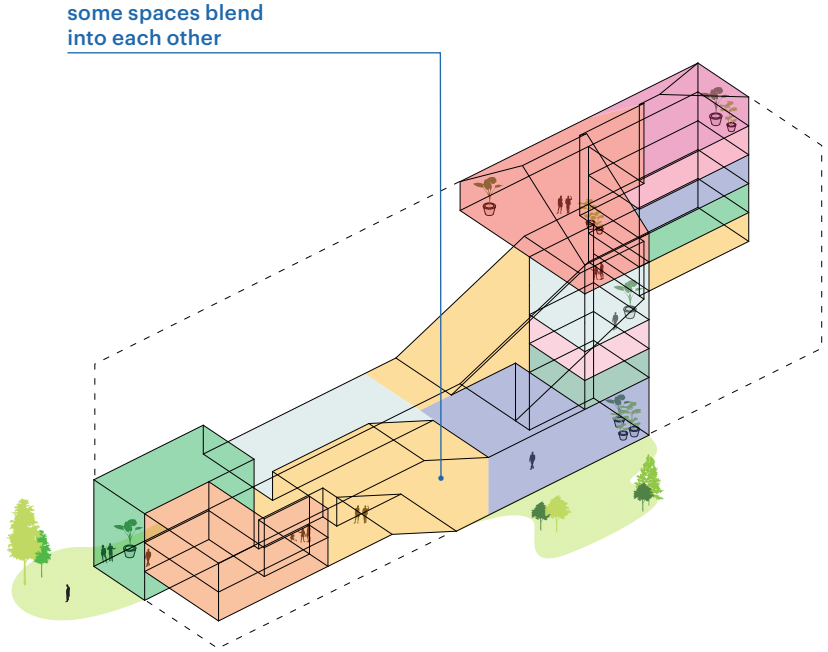
- housing
- collective spaces



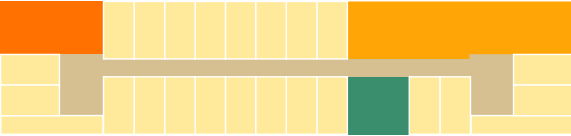
renovating an existing block



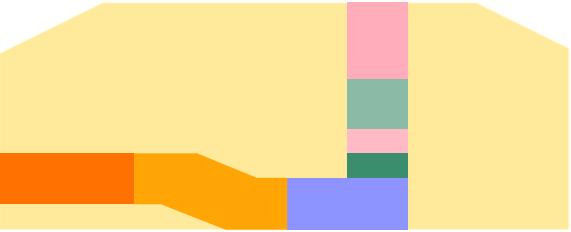
axonometry



sectional axonometry



plan



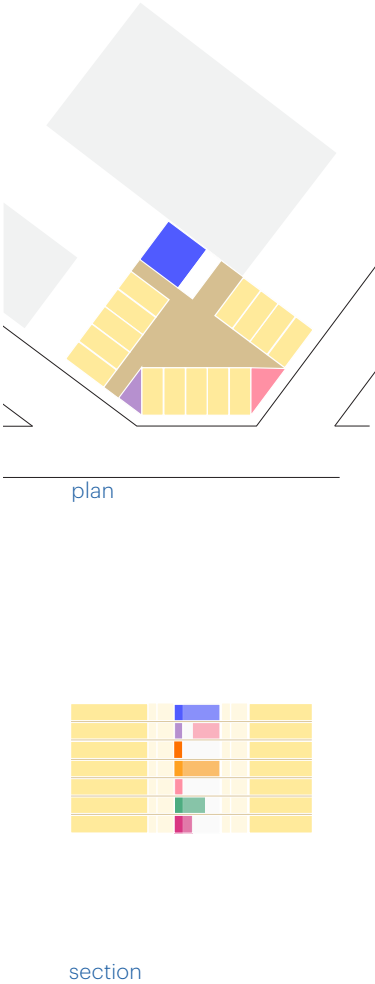
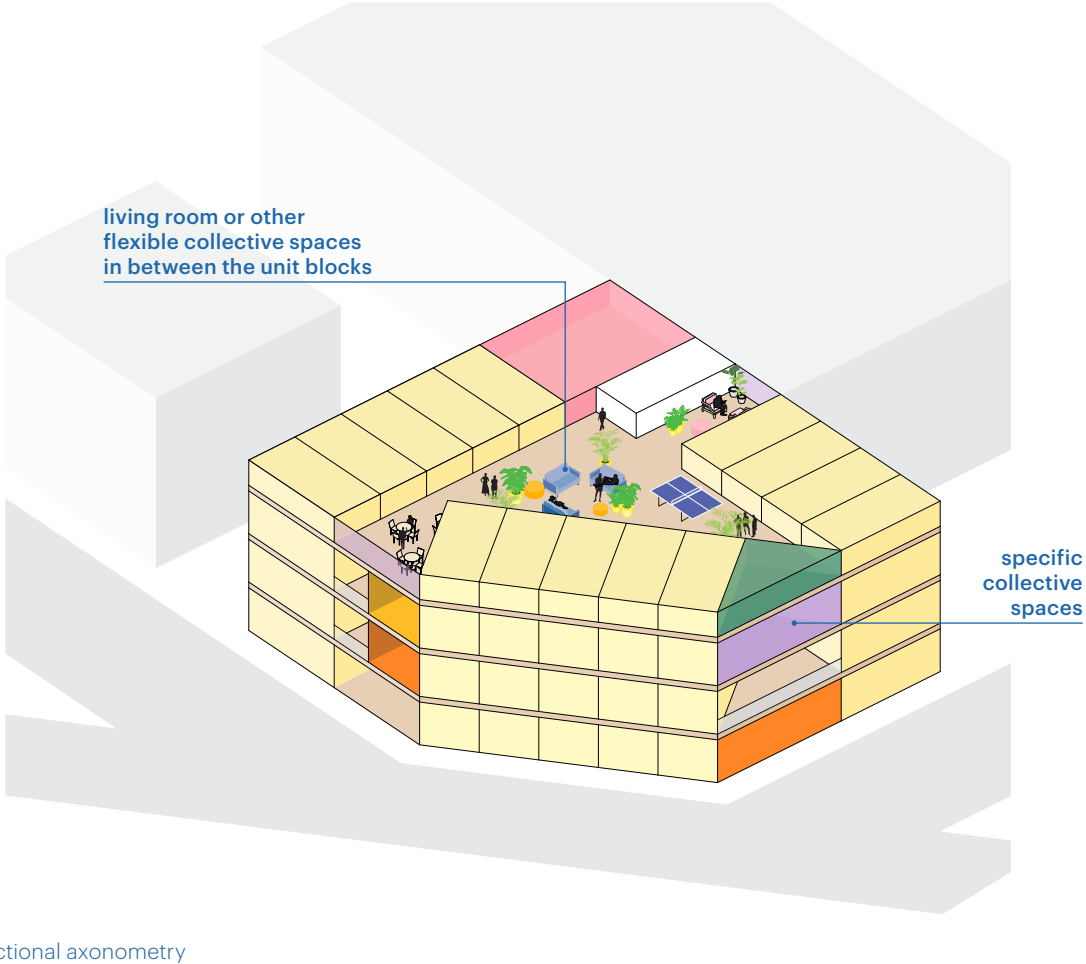
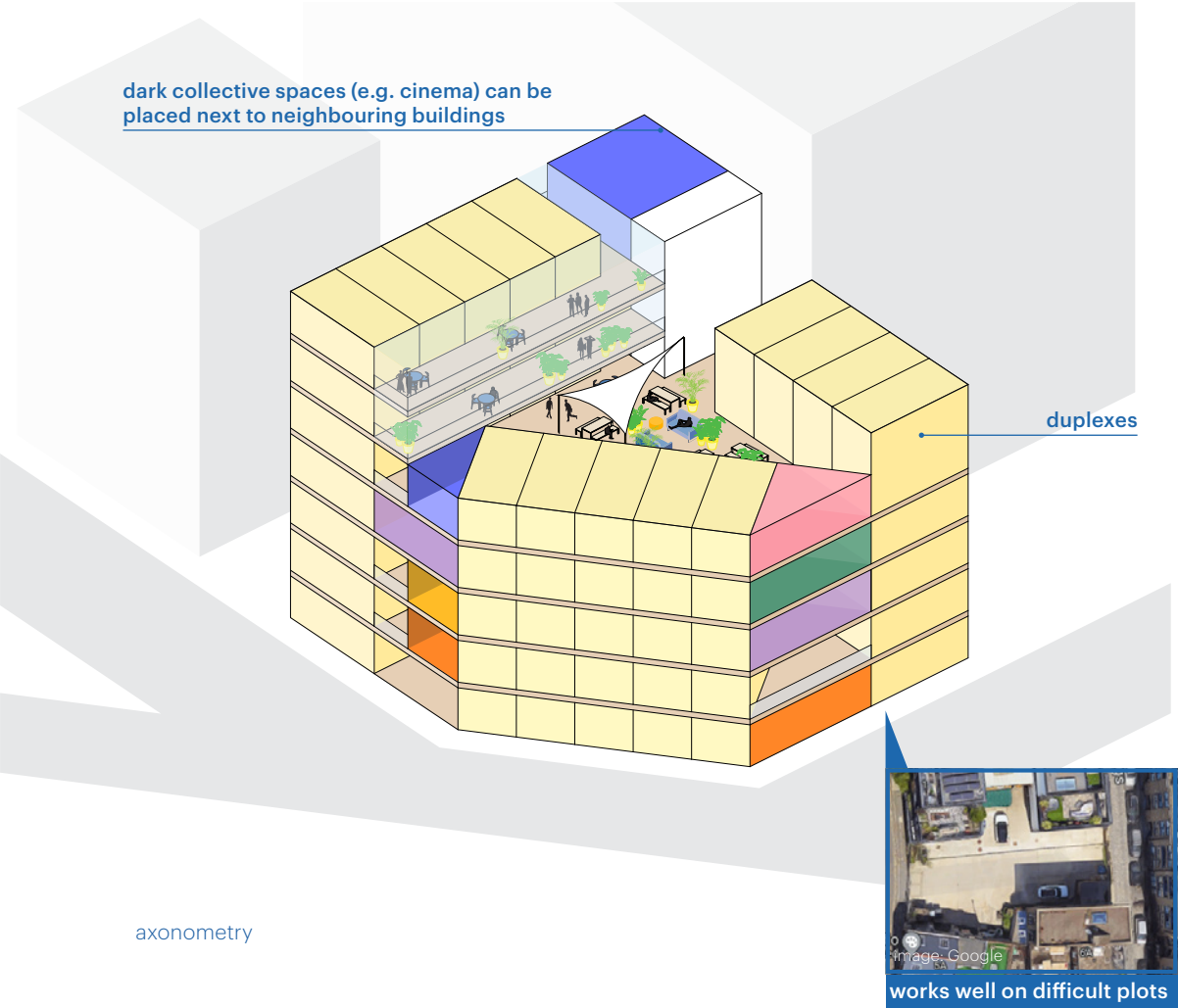
section

# In-between

This typology provides a strategy for using leftover or oddly shaped plots within urban areas in which the volumes of the private homes are simply placed along the straight sides of the plot and the intermediate space remains for communal use. This space can be either indoor or outdoor, offering the choice between a singular open area or multiple enclosed rooms.

### Legend

- housing
- collective spaces



# 4

## Small but gracious

The search for individual uniqueness



# Small but gracious

The 'ideal home' with front and back gardens and plenty of spare space is rarely an option in urban living. What co-living homes can offer, though, are elements of the ideal home's gracious, accommodating way with space, translated to smaller living areas.

We all need room to eat, sleep and relax. But many of us would like space for other activities that are important to us, such as yoga, art, entertaining or caring for houseplants. Flexible spaces can create the generosity residents need from their homes and encourage them to remain in the community.

This section illustrates a range of spatial layouts of co-living homes from the conventional, enabling essential activities, to the individually tailored, allowing residents the freedom to adapt their homes to their lifestyles and create unique places to live.

Just like **'the ideal home'**,  
a co-living home...



La Balma collective housing, Spain. Architect: La Boqueria + Local. Photo by Milena Villalba



Didden Village, Netherlands. Architect: MVRDV. Photo by Jannes Linders

...can have a **front door**,  
and a (front) **garden**.

The interior can be  
**spacious**...



Boiler House, London. Developed by HUB and Bridges. Architect: Studio Egret West. Photo by Jack Hobhouse

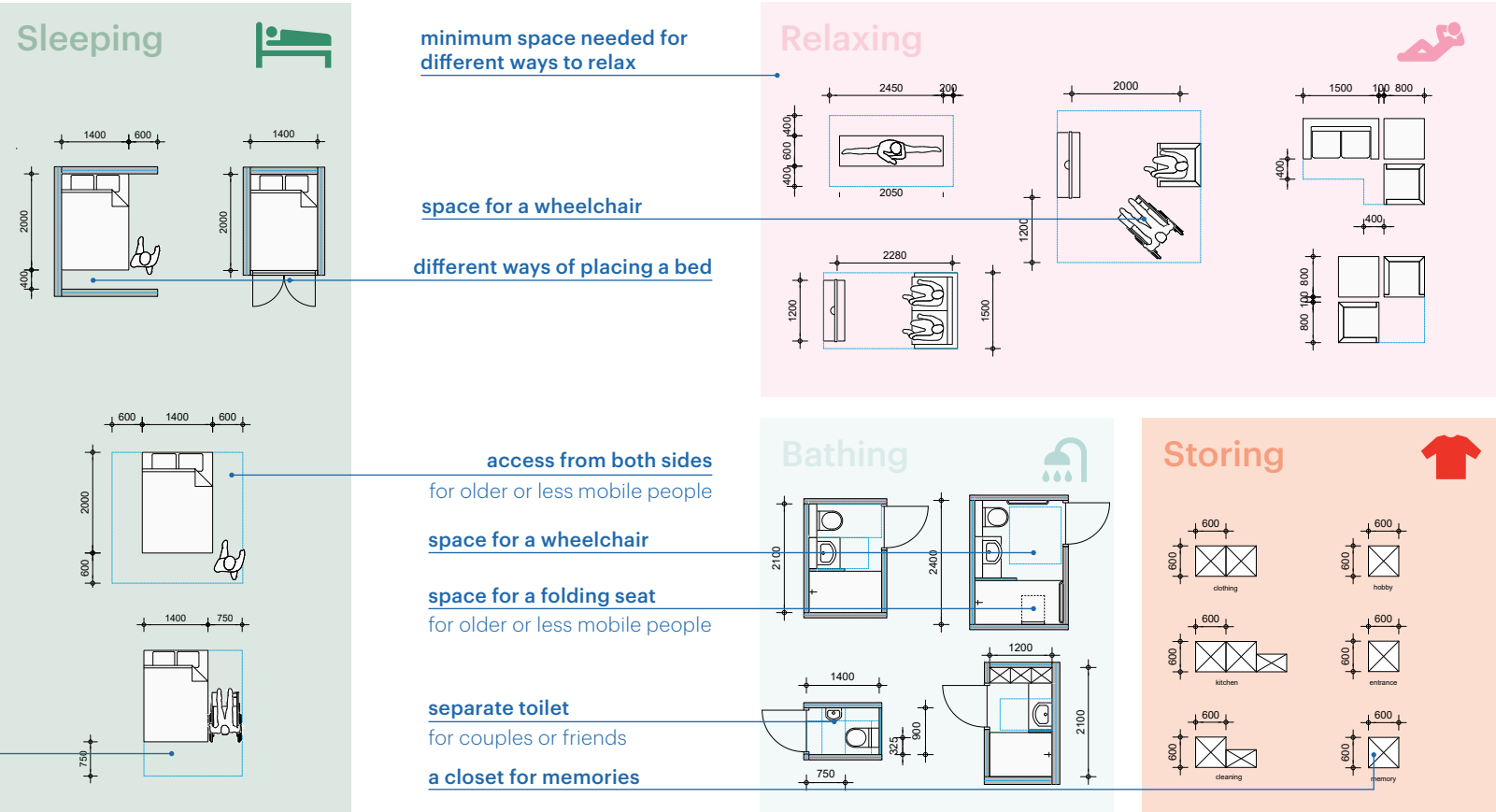
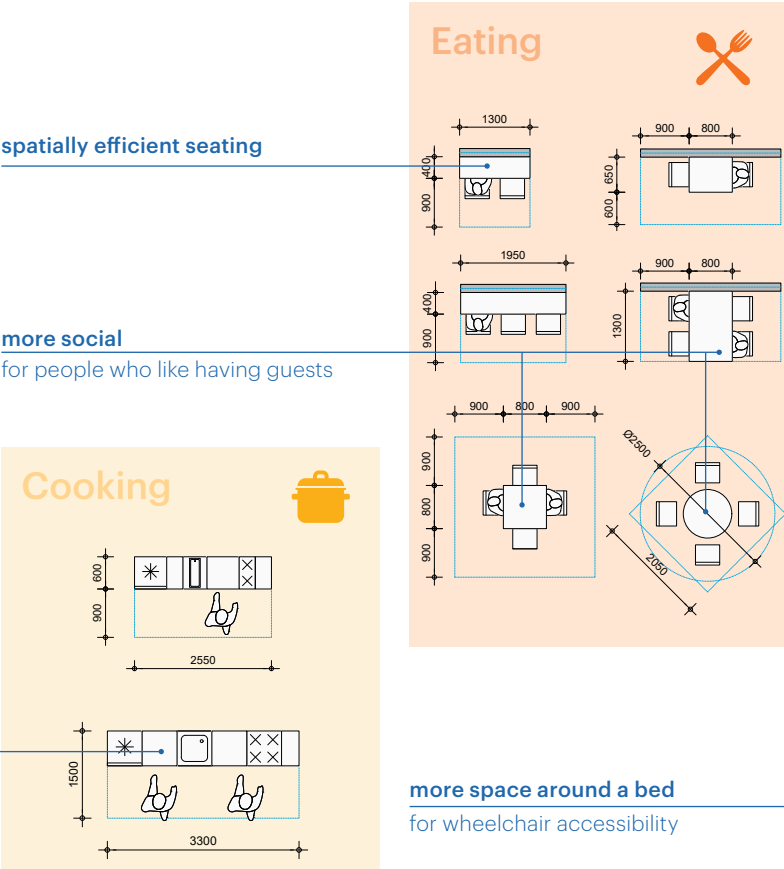


Project Gomila, Spain. Architect: MVRDV + GRAS. Photo by Daria Scagliola

and have room for  
**individual uniqueness.**

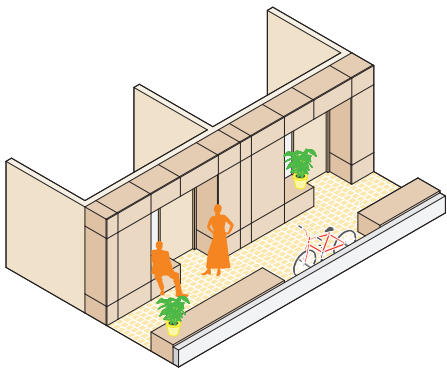
# Activity matrix

Before designing the homes, it's important to know how much space is required for each different activity. This might differ between target groups, for example an older person needs a bit more space around the bed than a young person.



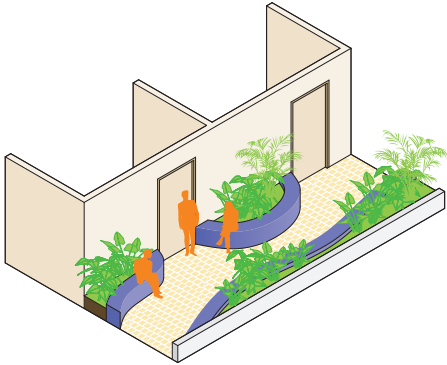
# Social corridor

The corridors are the ‘streets’ of the building. They are often seen as not very important, as an empty space, but they can be functional as well. Corridors are the backbone of the community and should be considered an extension of the private home.



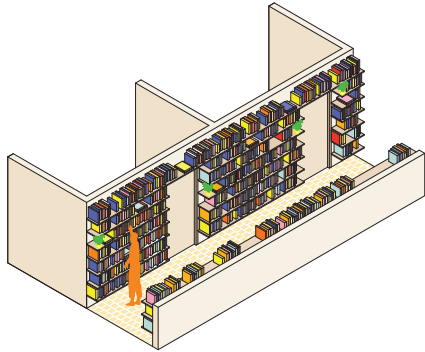
**storage corridor**

store and share stuff in the corridor



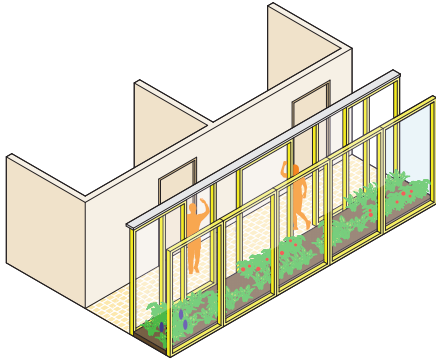
**green corridor**

the corridor as a walk through the park



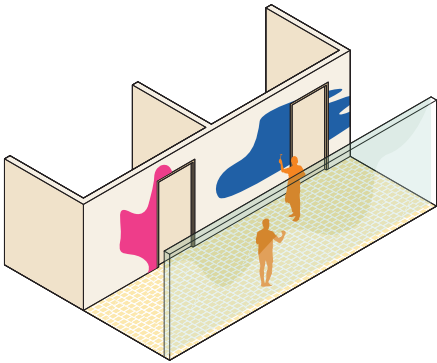
**library corridor**

share and read books in the corridor



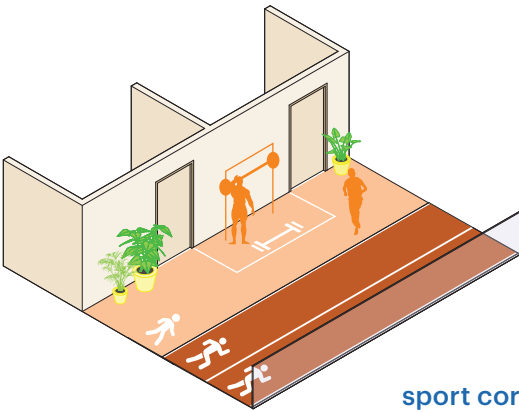
**nursery corridor**

to nurse plants for the private home



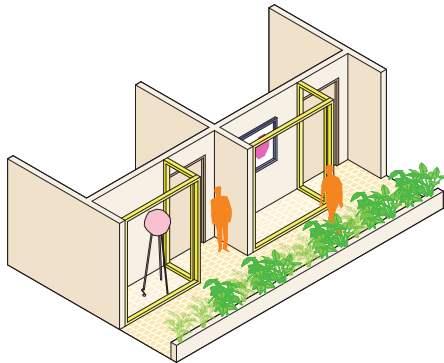
**artistic corridor**

paint your own corridor



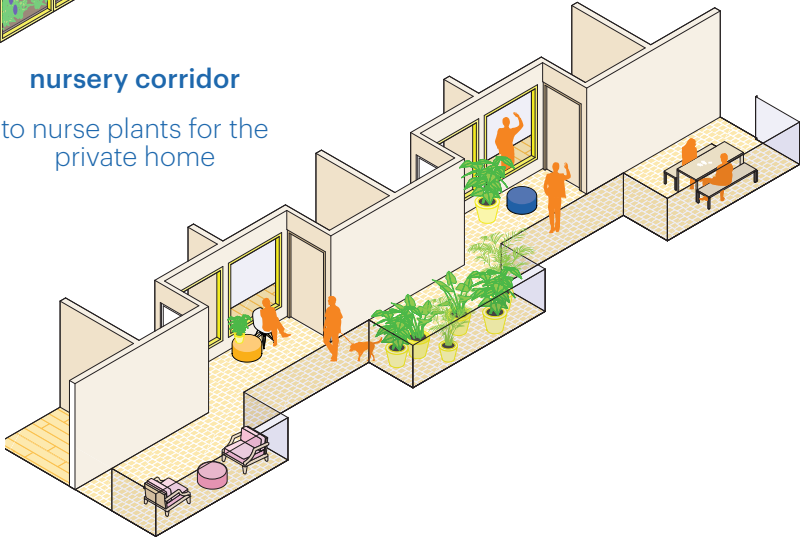
**sport corridor**

stay active on a daily basis



**shop window corridor**

promote your business in the corridor



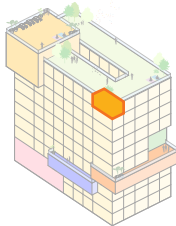
**social corridor**

a place to meet and play games

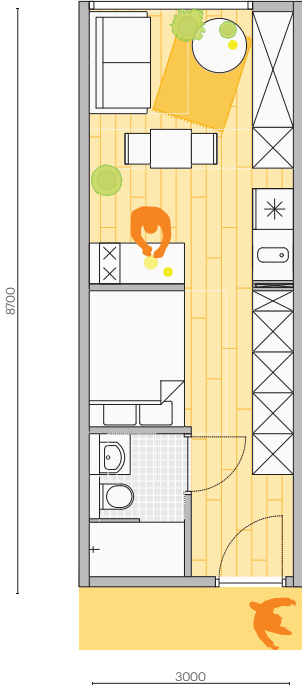


# Base home

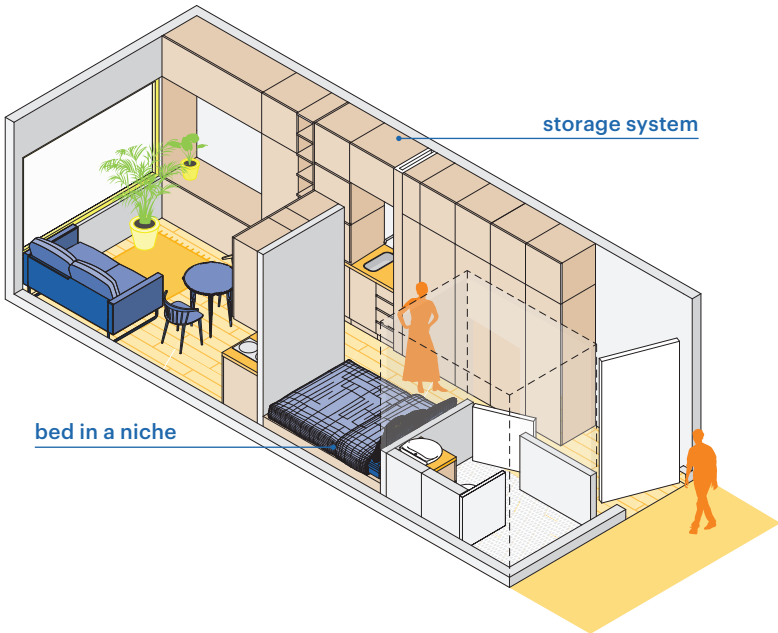
The base home is designed for a single, younger person. The space is highly efficient thanks to the bedroom niche and the extensive storage wall. It accommodates all fundamental living activities, but lacks the flexibility to accommodate additional individual needs.



sample location in the building



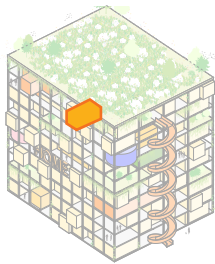
plan



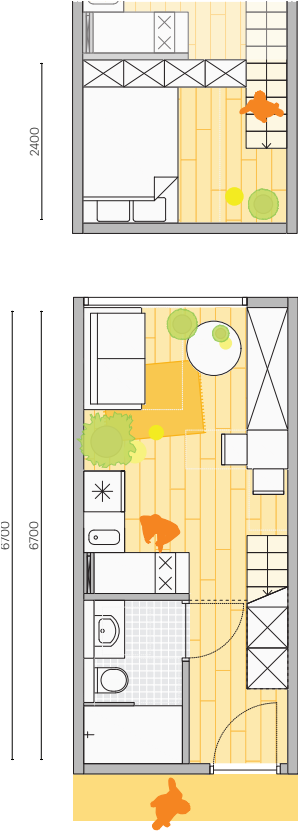
axonometry

# Loft

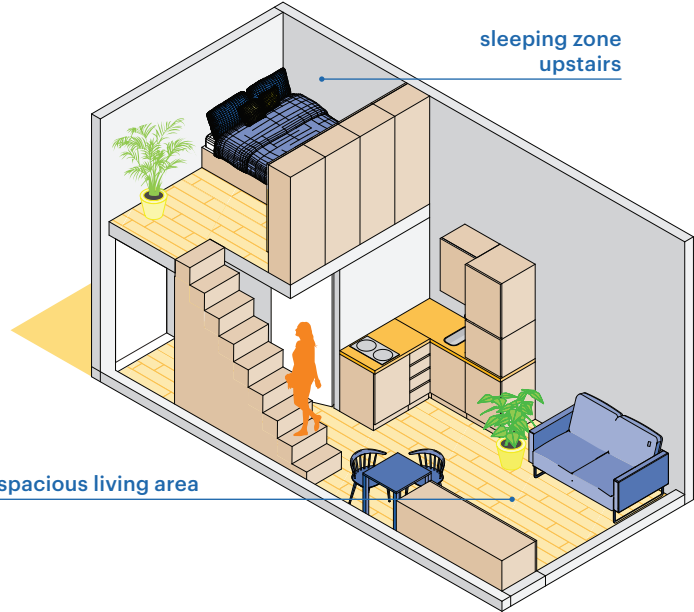
The loft is a home with a bedroom on a mezzanine level. Consequently, it requires a greater floor-to-ceiling height, resulting in a particularly spacious living room. This allows for a bit more flexibility towards individual needs.



sample location in the building



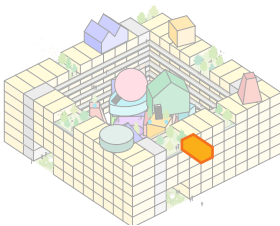
plan



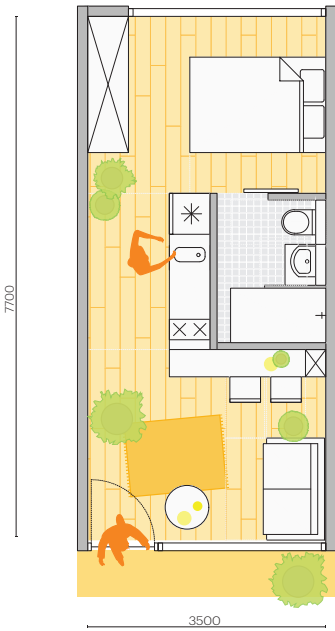
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# Double sided

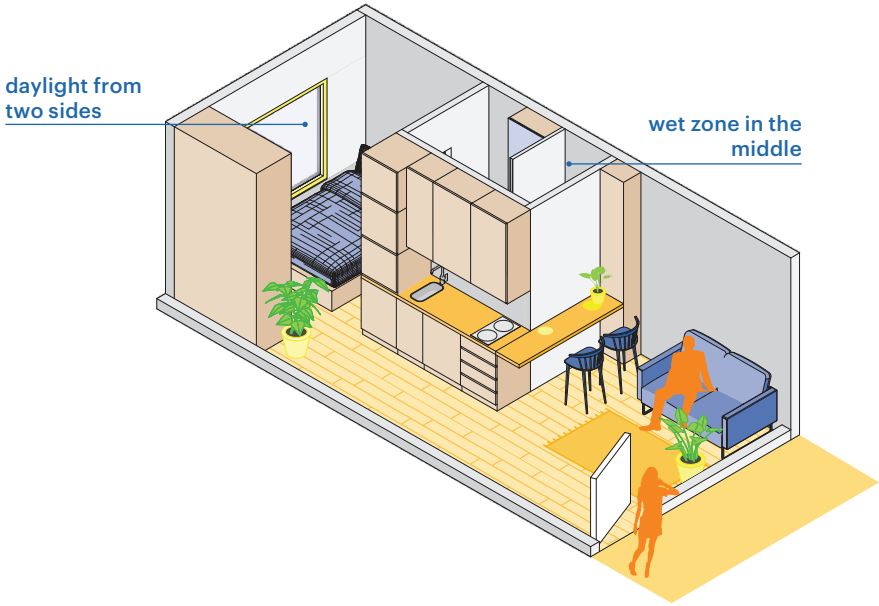
This home benefits from daylight coming in from two sides. To make use of the natural light, the home is divided into two zones, one for sleeping and the other for living. These zones are separated by the wet zone in the middle, housing the bathroom and the kitchen.



sample location in the building



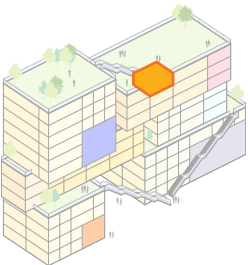
plan



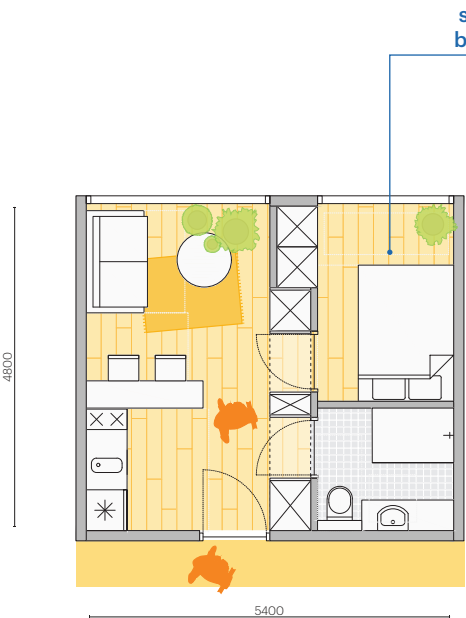
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# Storage wall

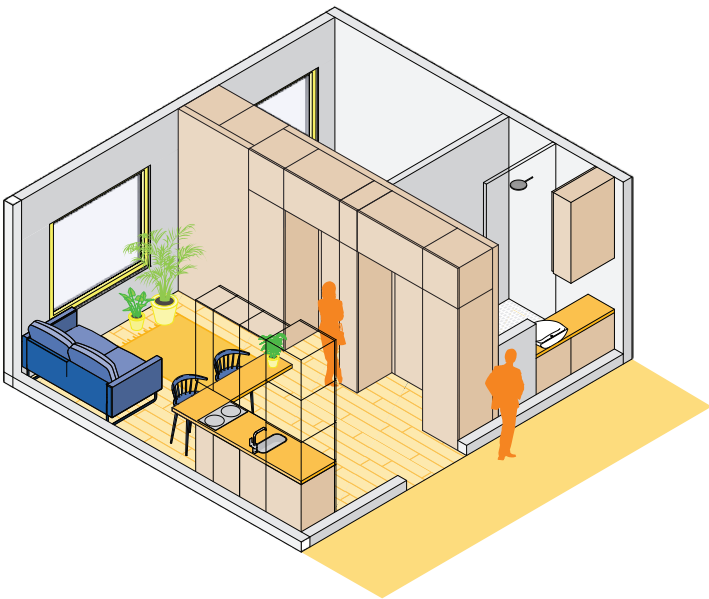
In this home, a storage wall facilitates a division between the living area, a sleeping area, and the bathroom. This arrangement provides residents with a separate bedroom and greater flexibility in the living space.



sample location in the building



plan



axonometry

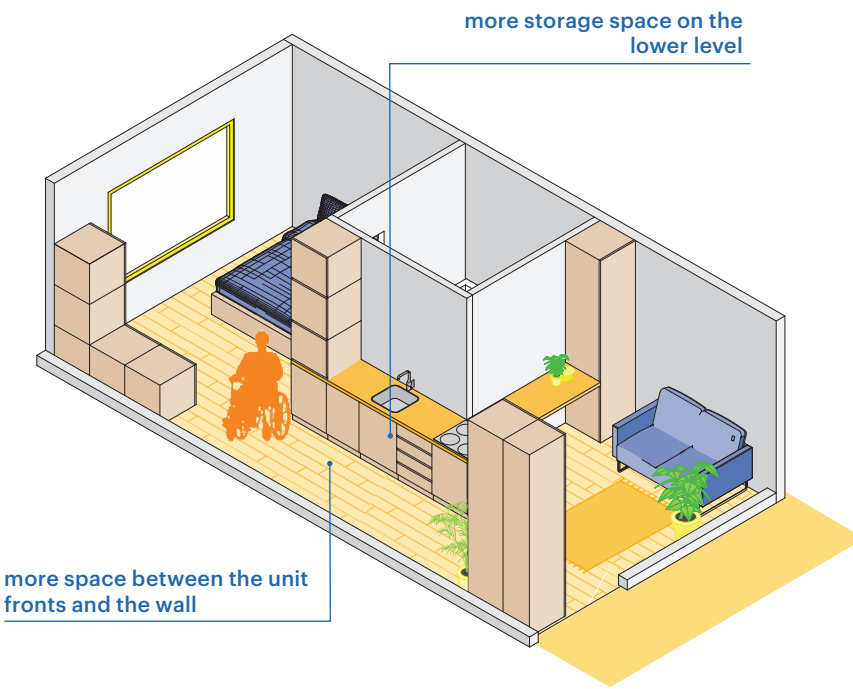


# Double-sided +

This home follows the same principle as the double-sided house, but has been made accessible for a wheelchair. Co-living is an inclusive typology and can easily be wheelchair accessible.



plan



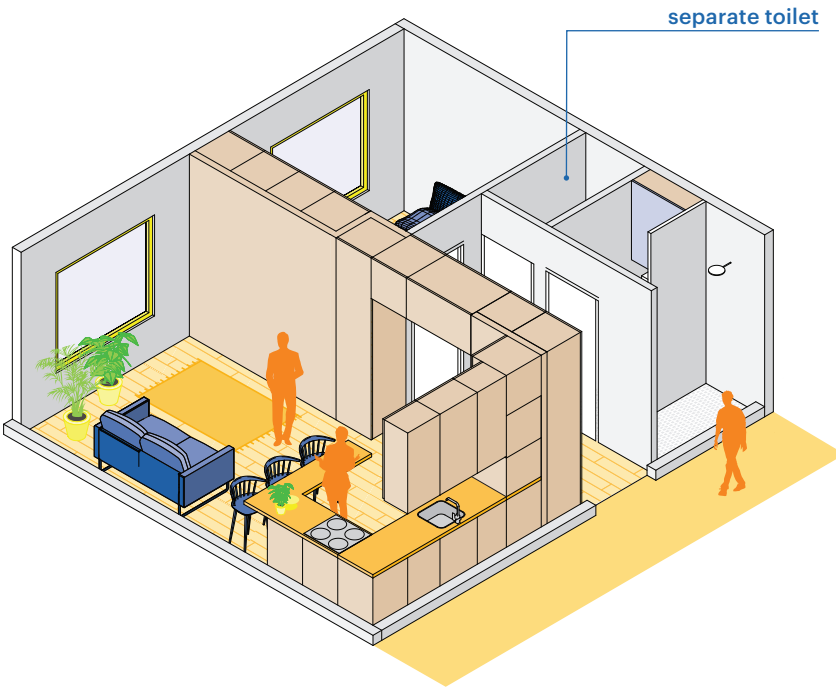
axonometry

# Couple's home

This home follows the same principal as the 'storage wall' home. It is slightly bigger to host a couple.



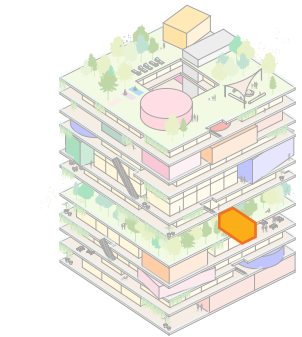
plan



axonometry

# Row house

The row house is a long small version of the double sided home in which all functions are arranged sequentially. A loft variant is also a viable option.

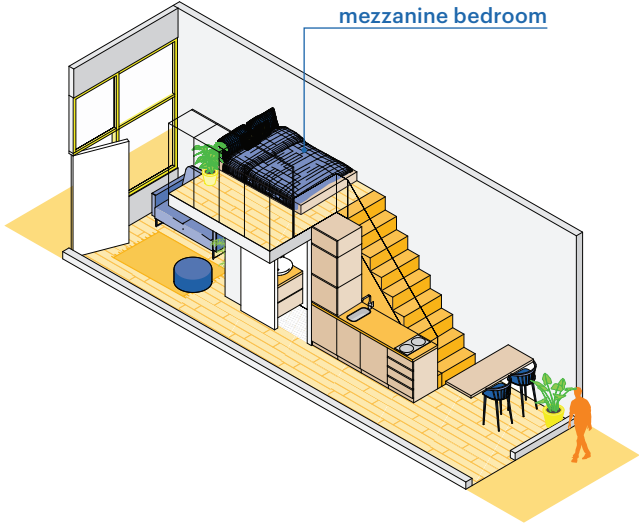


sample location in the building



plan

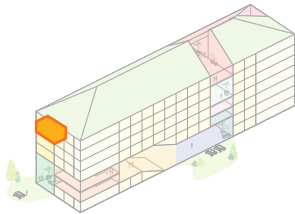
plan loft variant



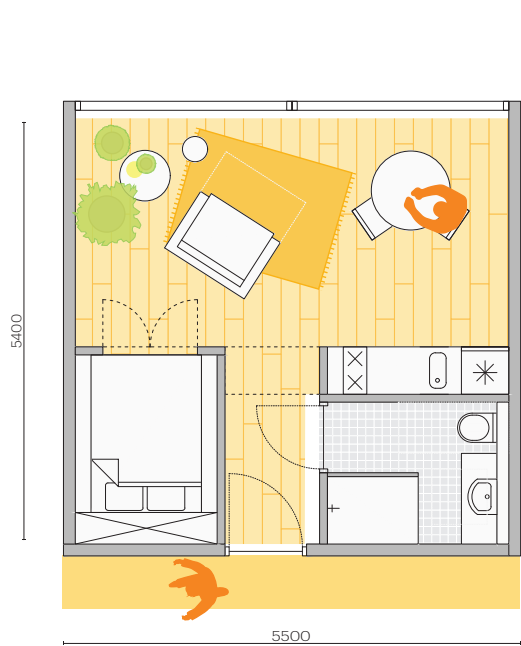
axonometry loft variant

# Open space

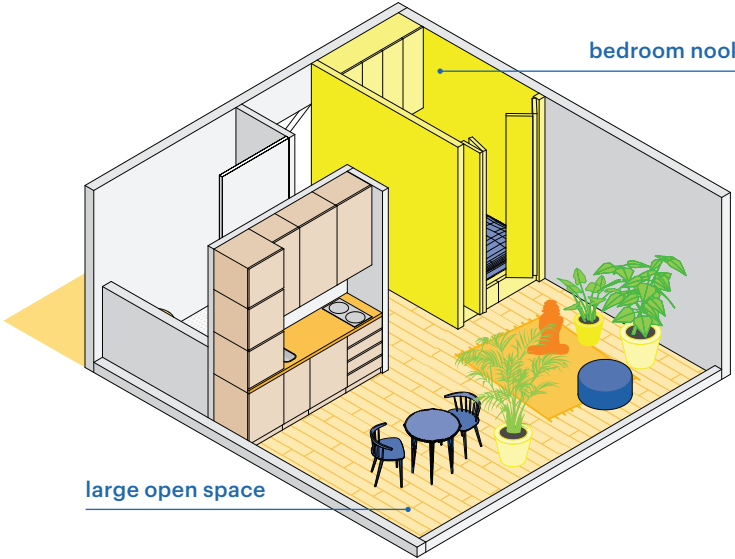
In this home, the bedroom is contained within a compact nook allowing for the living area to be more spacious. Thanks to the increased space, residents enjoy greater flexibility. Hosting a dinner party or a game night suddenly becomes an option.



sample location in the building



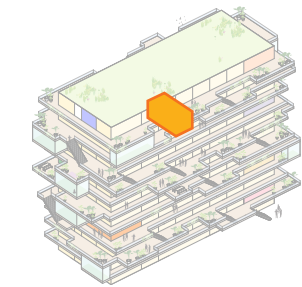
plan



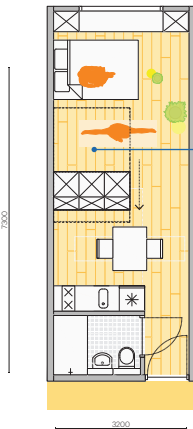
axonometry

# Movable wall

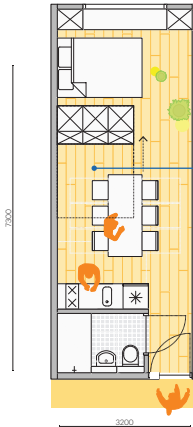
This home offers residents the freedom to choose how they use the space throughout the day. A movable storage wall can be shifted to create additional space in the bedroom or living area. For example, the wall can be pushed towards the kitchen to create room for yoga, or moved towards the bed to make room for a dinner party next to the kitchen.



sample location in the building

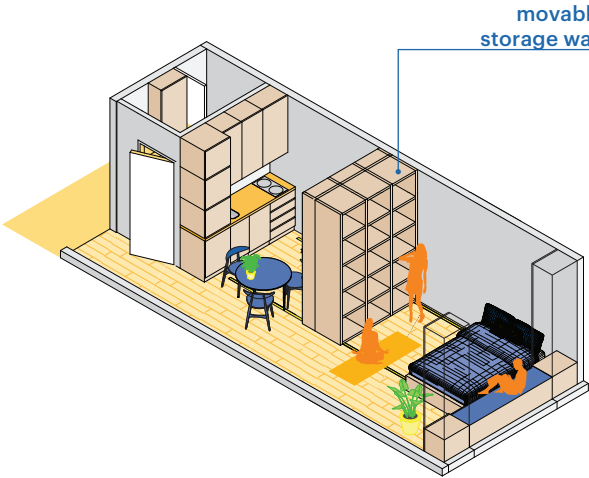


more space in the bedroom area



space for larger dinner party

plan

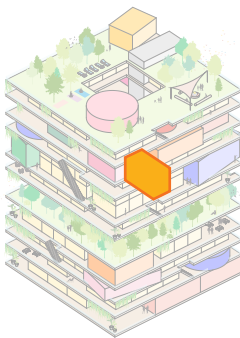


movable storage wall

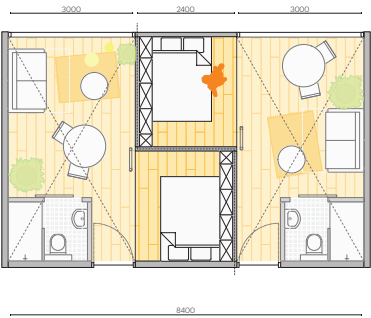
axonometry extra space in bedroom

# Flip-flop house

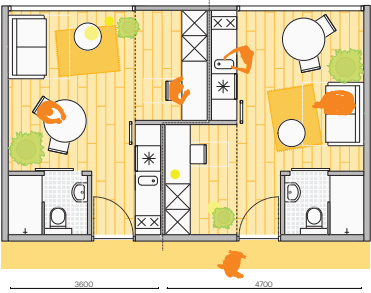
The flip-flop house consists of two interlocking apartments, allowing for the optimal use of space. The living space is slightly higher. Within the central area, an interlocking mezzanine provides a bedroom space above for the first apartment and an office space underneath for the second home.



sample location in the building



mezzanine bedrooms



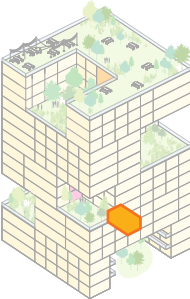
plan



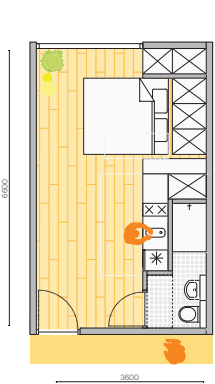
axonometry

# Facility zone

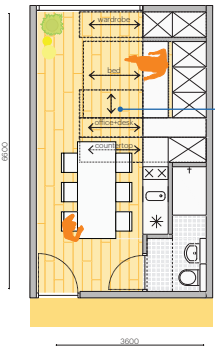
On the longer side of the home, a compact zone houses all the amenities: a foldaway bed, storage, kitchen, office space, and the bathroom. These amenities can be pulled out of the designated zone. When folded in, residents have a large living area at their disposal.



sample location in the building



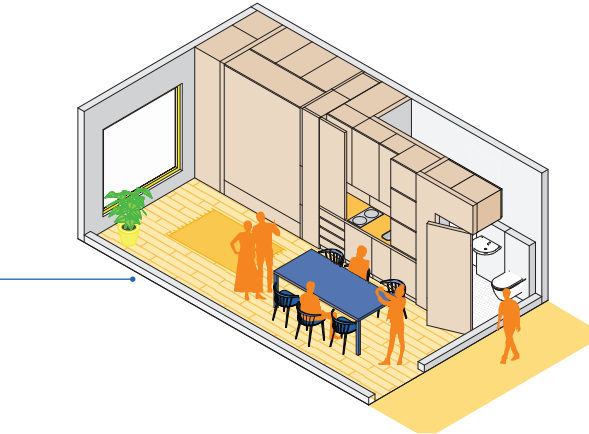
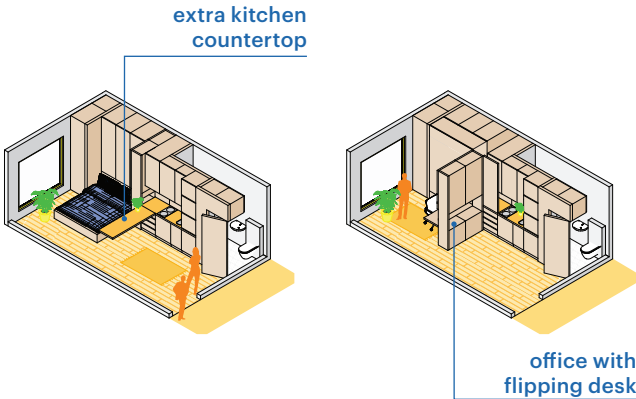
plan - unfolded wall



plan - folded wall

all foldable features

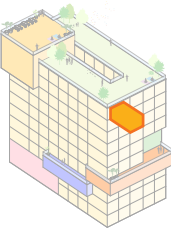
flexible space



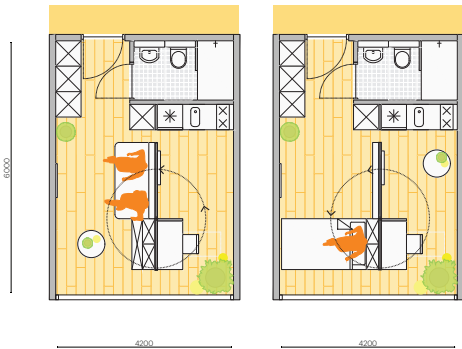
axonometry

# Rotating wall

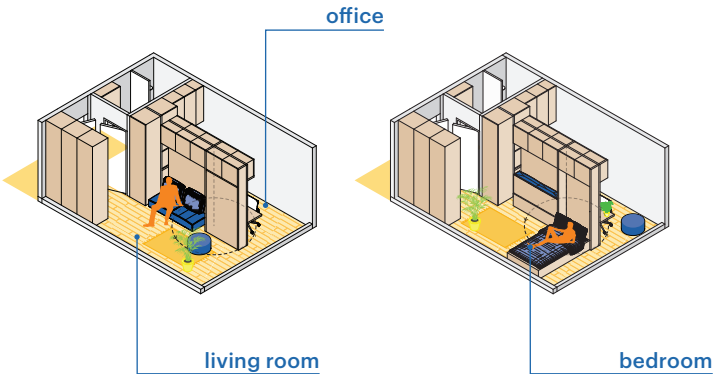
In this concept, a cleverly designed thick wall accommodates the foldaway bed, collapsible table and sofa, as well as an expandable office. The combination of the wall's ability to turn and the furniture's foldability offers residents a wide range of possibilities for use. For instance, when working from home, the office space can be positioned in front of the window to create a pleasant working area.



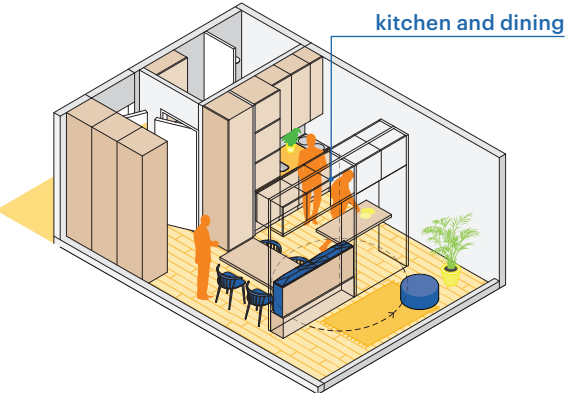
sample location in the building



plans

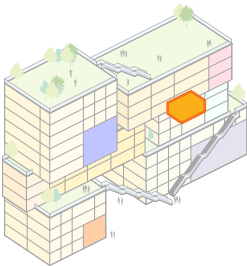


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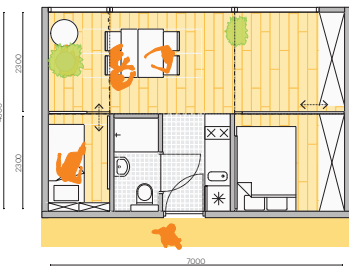
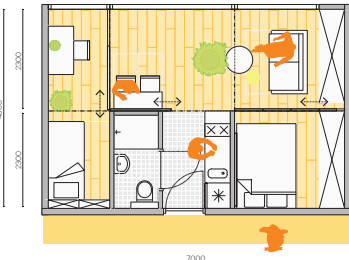
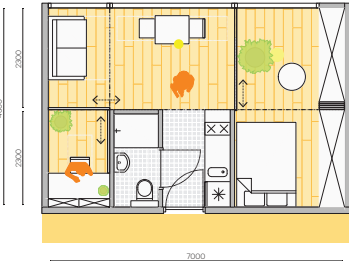


# Make your own room(s)

A substantial array of sliding walls around the central area of the apartment provides residents with the capability to configure their own set of rooms. Residents can easily adapt their home if, for instance, they require an additional office or bedroom space. The central area holds the entrance, bathroom and kitchen.



sample location in the building



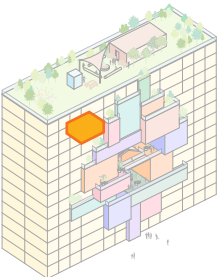
plan variations



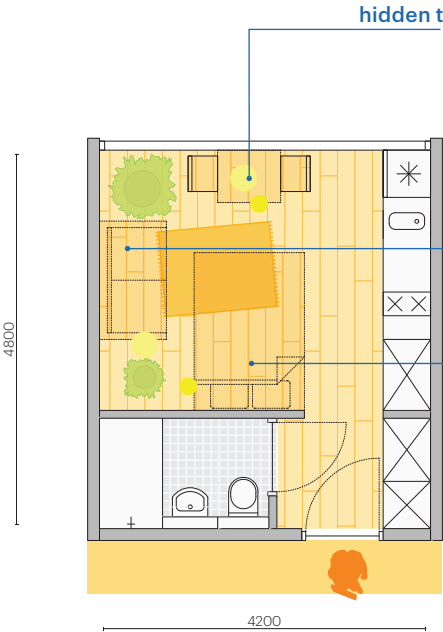
axonometry

# Unfolding floor

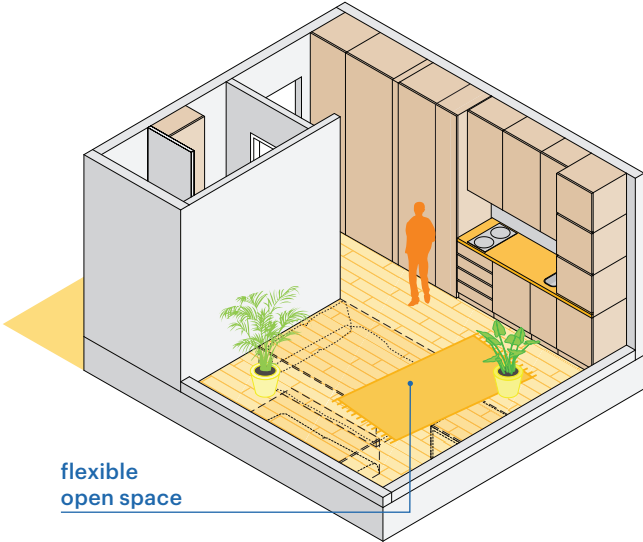
The concept of this house is straightforward: one flexible room can easily transform into a living area, dining area, or bedroom by folding in and out the required furniture from the floor. Naturally, leaving everything in the floor and repurposing the space for an entirely different use is also an option.



sample location in the building



plan



axonometry

5

# A radiant heart

To create a lively neighbourhood



# A radiant heart

Co-living schemes can become vibrant focal points of their neighbourhoods and cities, when they bring together all of the elements discussed here. And when they include a level of porosity and accessibility, with ground-floor spaces – courtyards, cafés and workspaces – that are easily reached from the street, the integration with the surrounding neighbourhood can help build a more resilient wider community.

Co-living is about living with the wider community with inviting public areas and shared facilities, not shutting it out with private, impenetrable spaces. We believe its vibrancy can radiate throughout neighbourhoods, encouraging the opening-up of green spaces, rooftops and adjacent buildings to the community.



Community living improves the **neighbourhood**...



Zollhaus, Switzerland. Architect: Enzmann Fischer Partner. Photo by Martina Meier



Ilot Queyries, France. Architect MVRDV. Photo by Ossip van Duivenbode

...by providing **open and porous ground floors**...

...by adding **greenery**...



Queen's Quarter, Croydon. Architect: AHMM. Photo by Timothy Soar



Concordia Design, Poland. Architect MVRDV. Photo by Juliusz Sokółowski

...and activity on **rooftops**

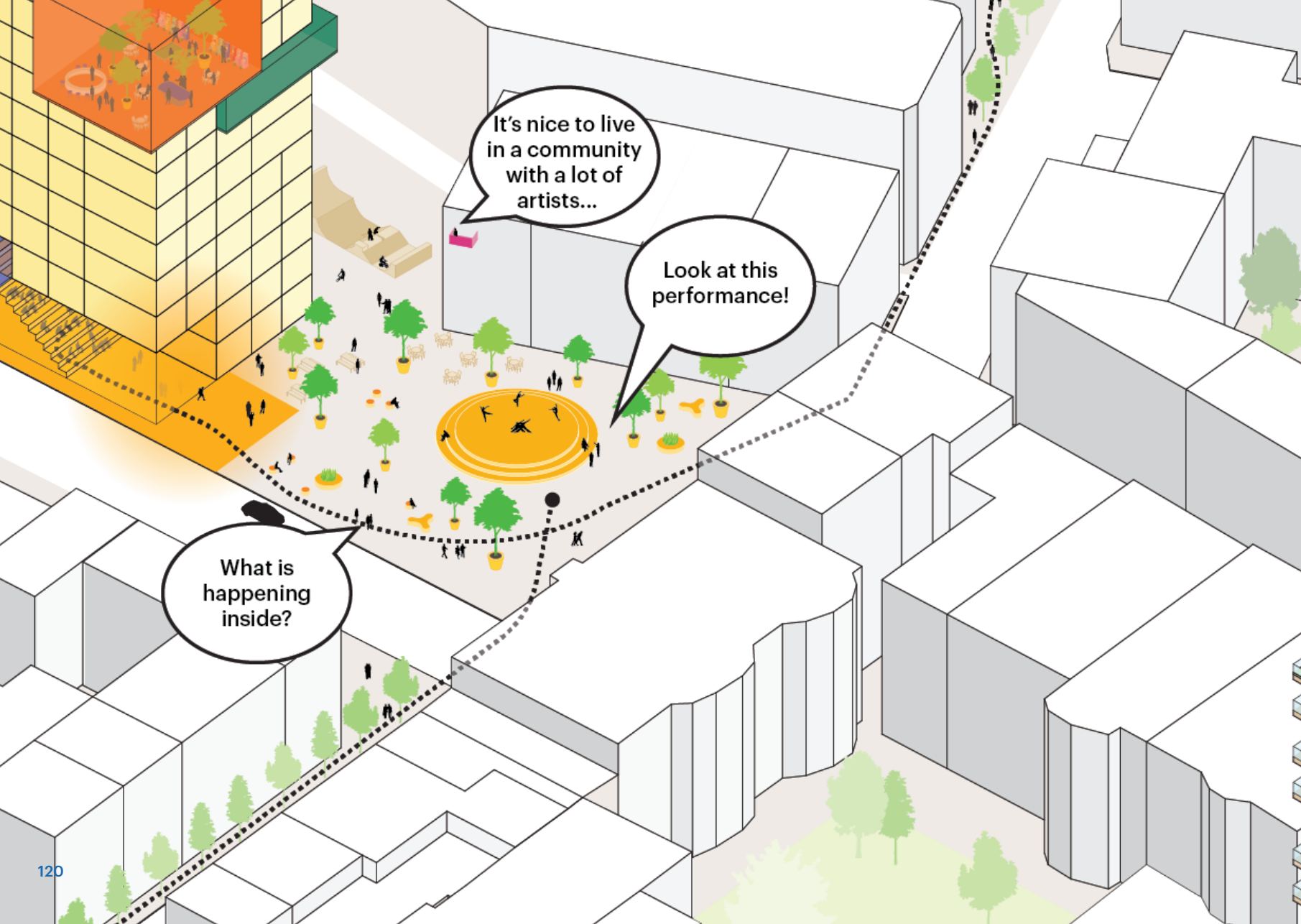


Before

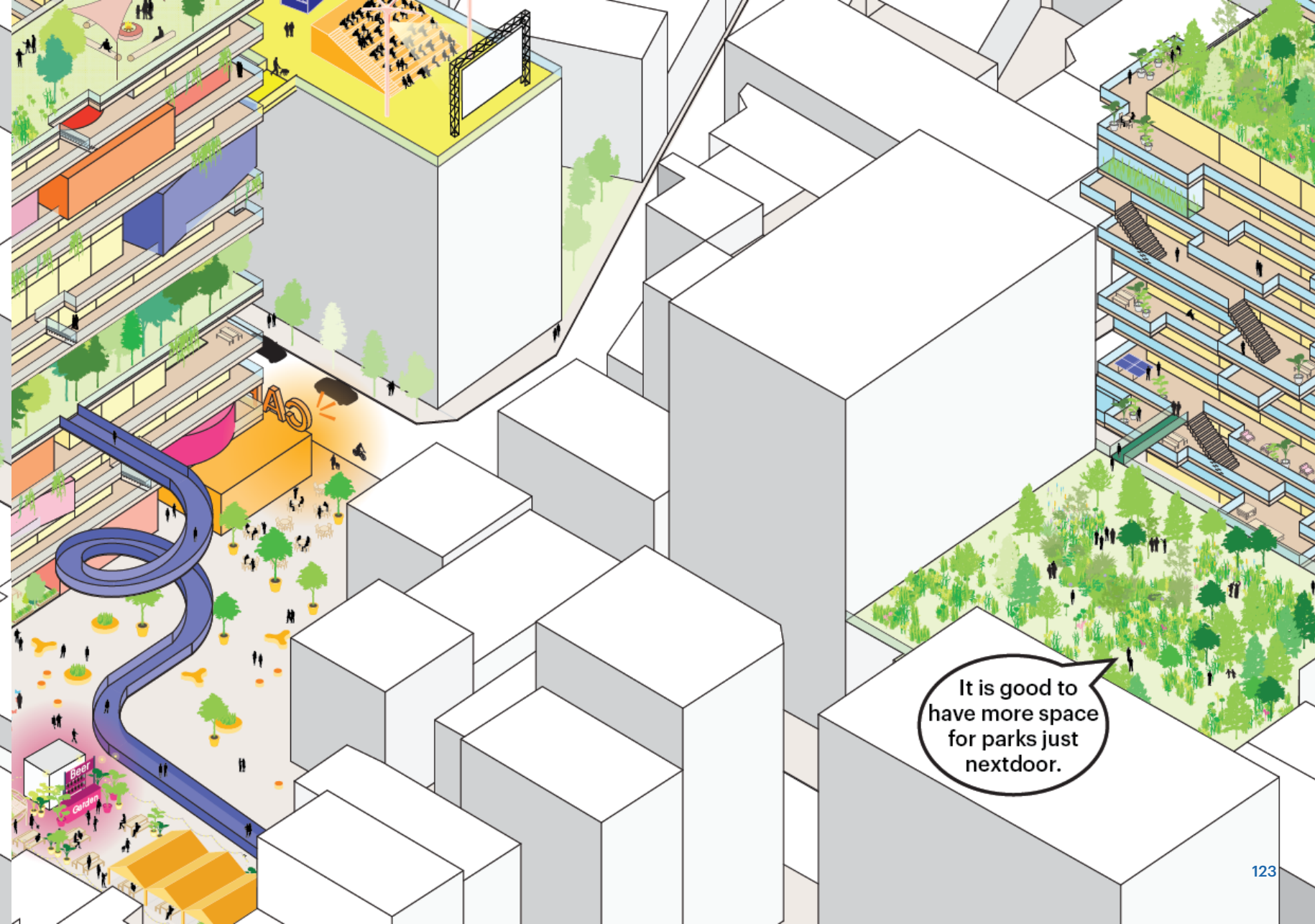
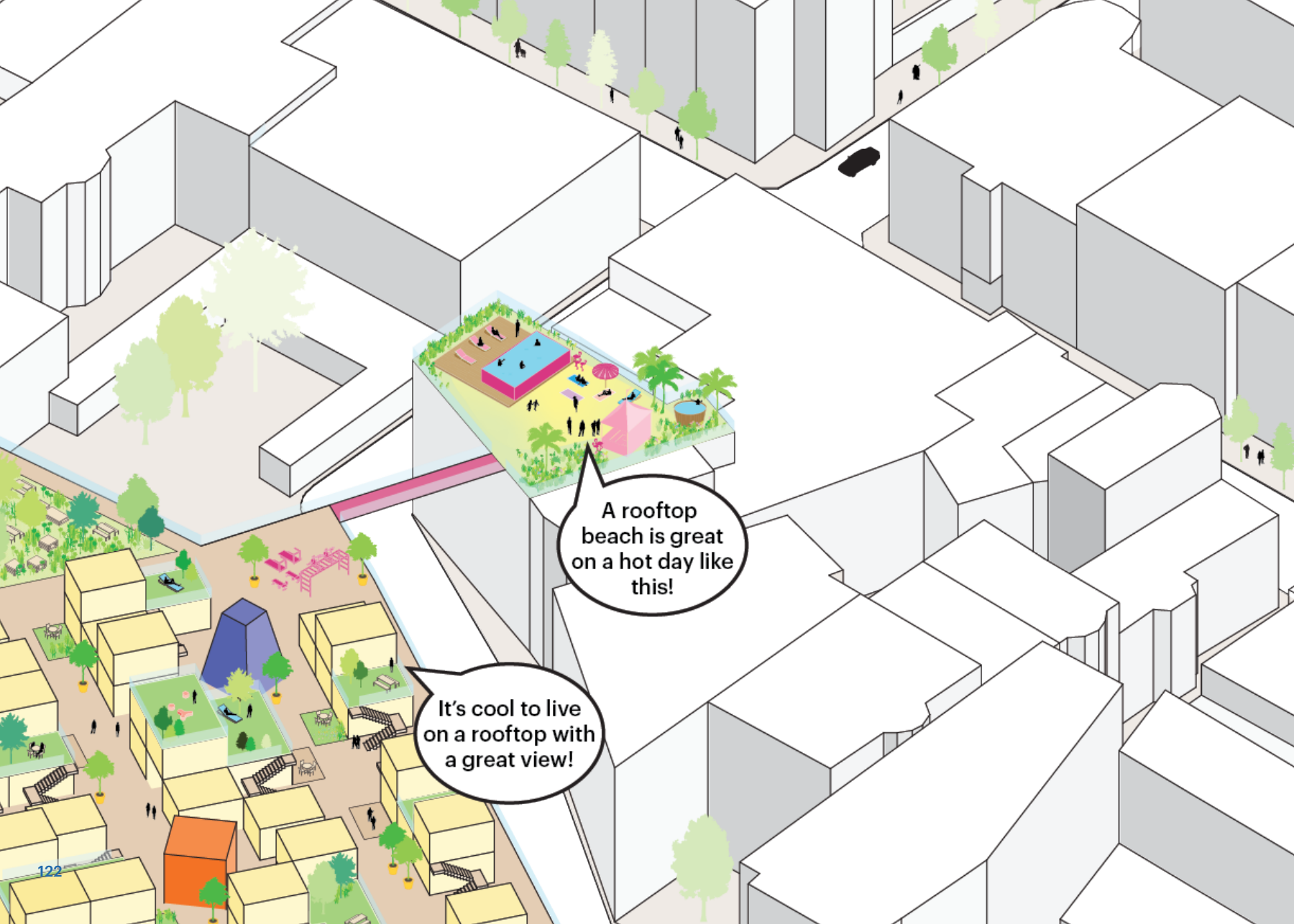
After











6

# What's next?

How to deal with future challenges



# What's next?

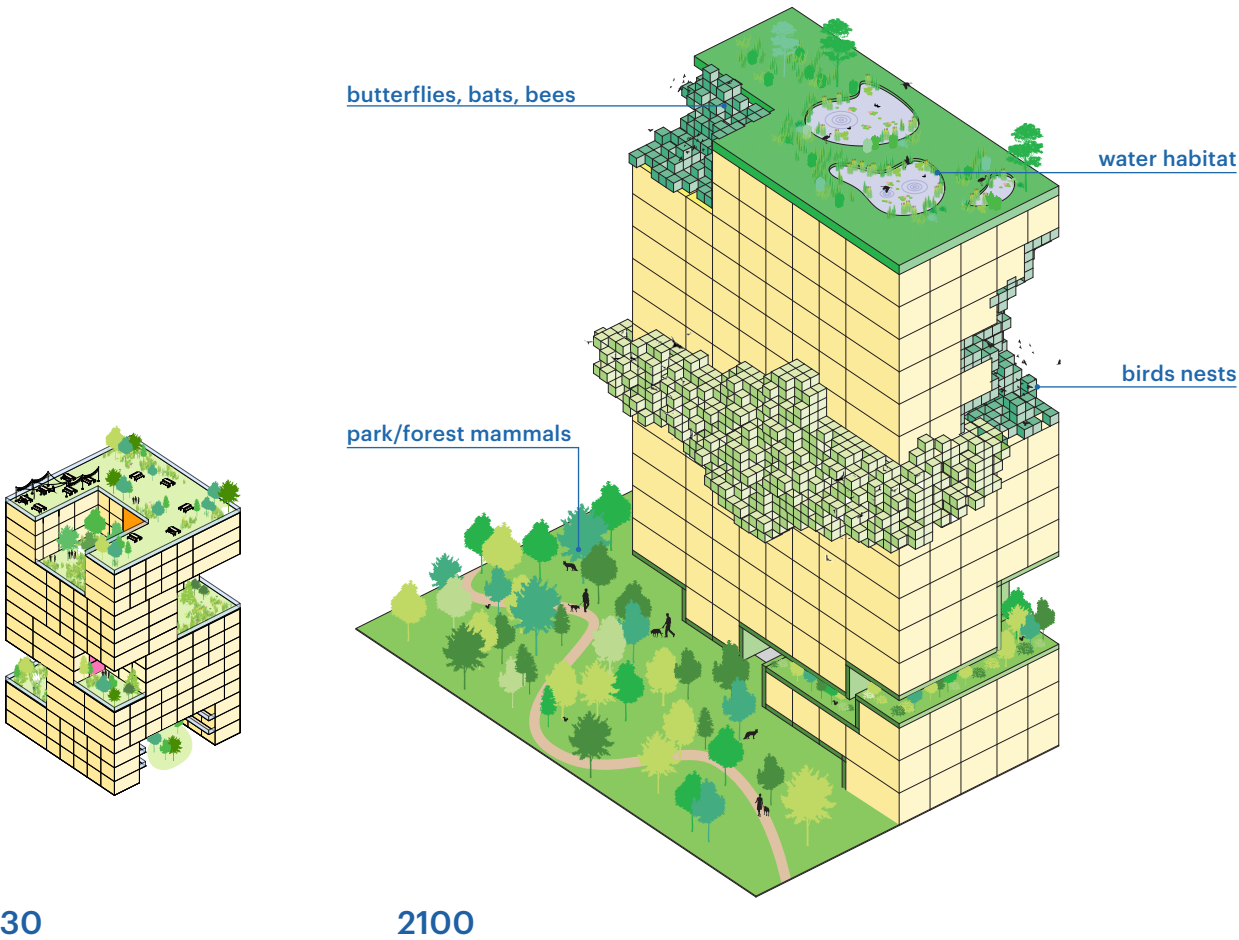
Let's not forget the future. As climate change threatens to alter weather patterns and make many cities inhospitable in hot summers, how can we create homes that adapt to these changes? Can we turn the challenges we face into a platform for progress?

We have created a set of co-living typologies for tomorrow's cities that take these future challenges to extremes. Why? First, because they turn future risks into opportunities. Co-living environments that provide safe, affordable refuges from the effects of flooding, urban heat islands and biodiversity loss could lead to extraordinary buildings that bring greenery and cooler air to their neighbourhoods.

Second, because facing these extremes will help us develop new possibilities in community living: possibilities that push boundaries and give urban-dwellers fair access to their cities' resources.

# Biodiversity tower

This tower serves as a vertical park for animals and plants. Greenery on the ground floor spirals upwards to the roof of the building, with different levels within the spiral designed for the specific types of animal that live at that height. Lower levels hold sheltered spaces for small creeping animals, while a little higher, the building houses butterfly meadows and bee hives. In the detailing, small cracks offer space for bats and small birds, while the rooftop offers a landscape for larger birds. The animal's habitats are not accessible to people, with the vertical spiral offering separate green terraces for human inhabitants.

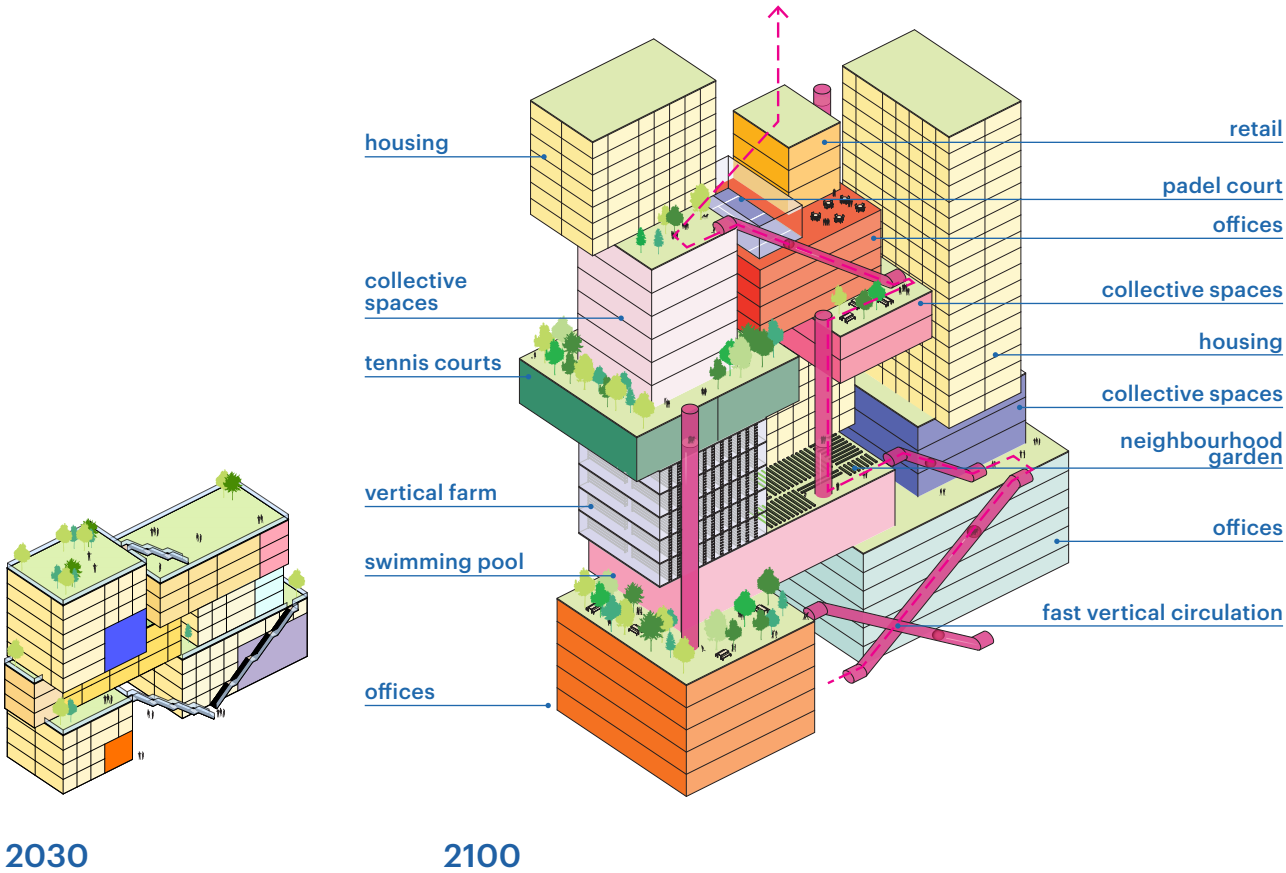


2030

2100

# Vertical 15-minute City

As more and more people relocate to urban areas, we will experience ever-greater pressure on our urban space. At the same time, the need for community cohesion will increase. The "15-minute city" is an urban planning concept in which residents of a neighbourhood can access all the fundamental amenities such as shops, schools, parks, recreational spaces, and healthcare within a 15-minute radius by foot or bicycle. This typology translates the 15-minute city idea into a vertical arrangement. On a relatively small plot, an interlinked set of blocks accommodates all the aforementioned functions so that residents can ascend or descend to access all essential facilities in 15 minutes or less.

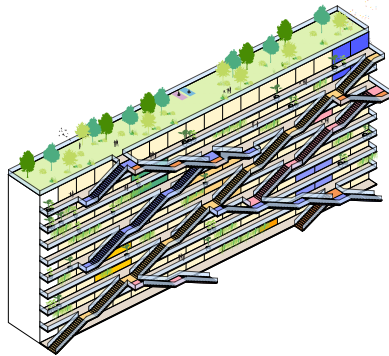


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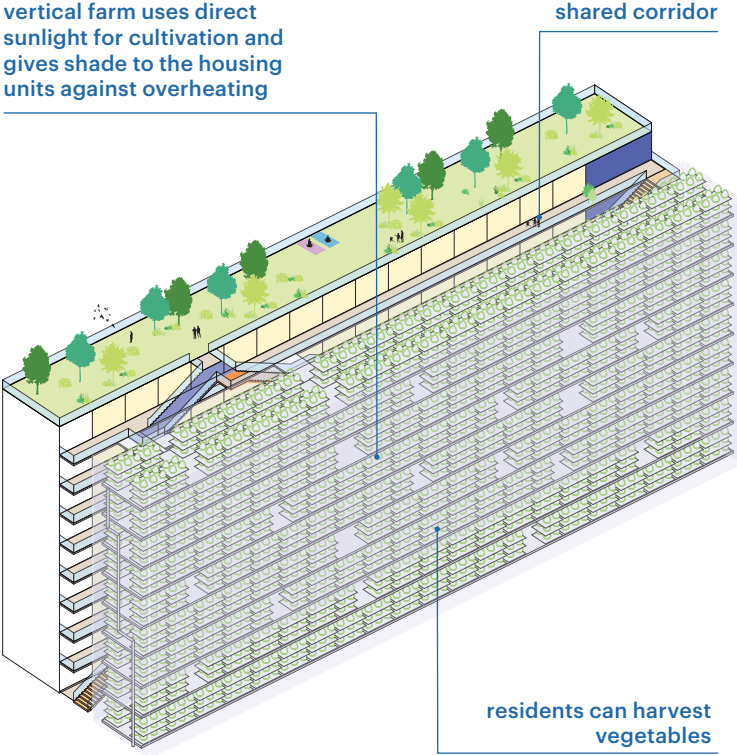
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# Vertical farm city

Vertical farming is a novel agricultural concept that, unlike traditional farming, could be suited to urban environments. Crops are cultivated in vertically stacked layers, resulting in an exceptionally efficient and space-saving agricultural approach. This page shows a typology that incorporates this technology. The vertical farm is positioned in front of a gallery-style building. Residents gain access to their private homes adjacent to the vertical farm, offering a beautiful green view. This option is particularly suited to locations next to bustling roads or railways, as the farm functions as an acoustic buffer.



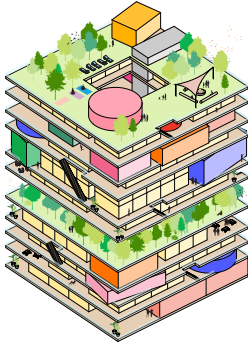
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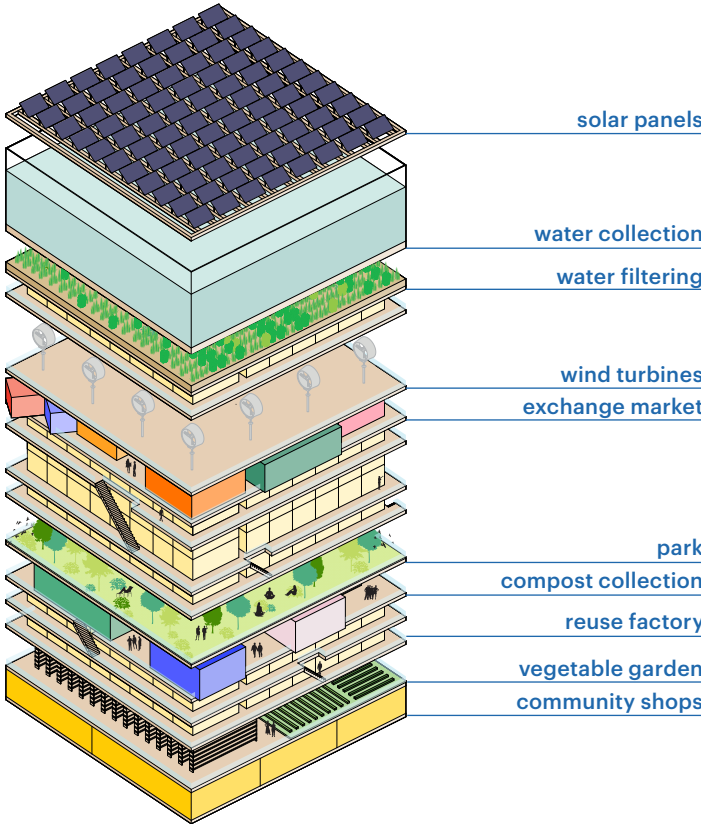
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# Autarkic tower

The autarkic tower is a fully self-sufficient and independent structure. It generates its own energy, produces its own food, purifies rainwater, and processes its waste. It may even produce its own construction materials. Each level is dedicated to one of these activities, while homes and communal spaces are positioned on the intermediate levels. In the heart of the building, a public exchange market enables residents to swap various products, promoting efficient use and stimulating the circular economy. When products reach the end of their lifecycle, they are transformed into new items within the reuse factory. On the ground floor, any leftover food or products are sold in community shops.



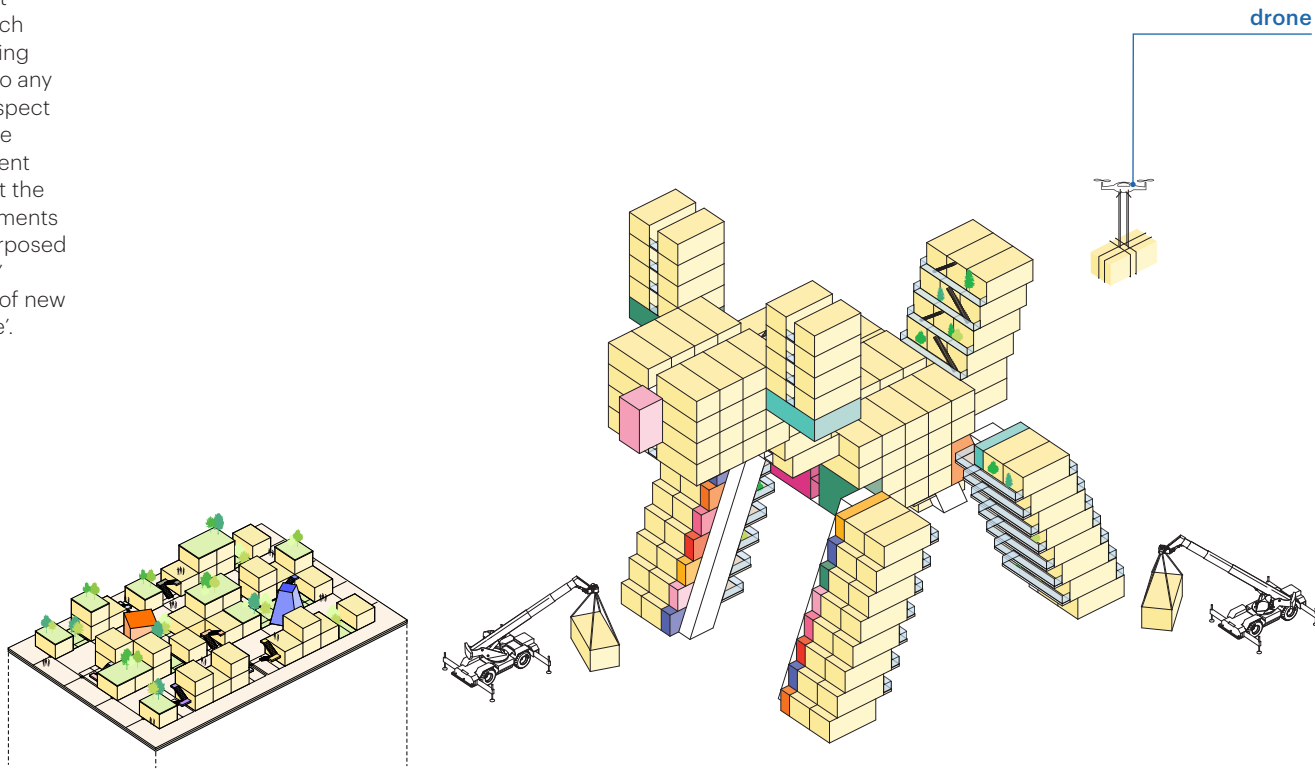
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# Scripted sculpture

Further automation could result in a construction system in which drones are capable of assembling standardised private homes into any form on a project site. This prospect could give rise to an imaginative collection of sculptural apartment buildings dispersed throughout the city. Imagine if historical monuments or statues could be easily repurposed as homes, such as the ‘Big Ben’ Tower; or imagine the creation of new icons like the ‘Puppy Residence’.

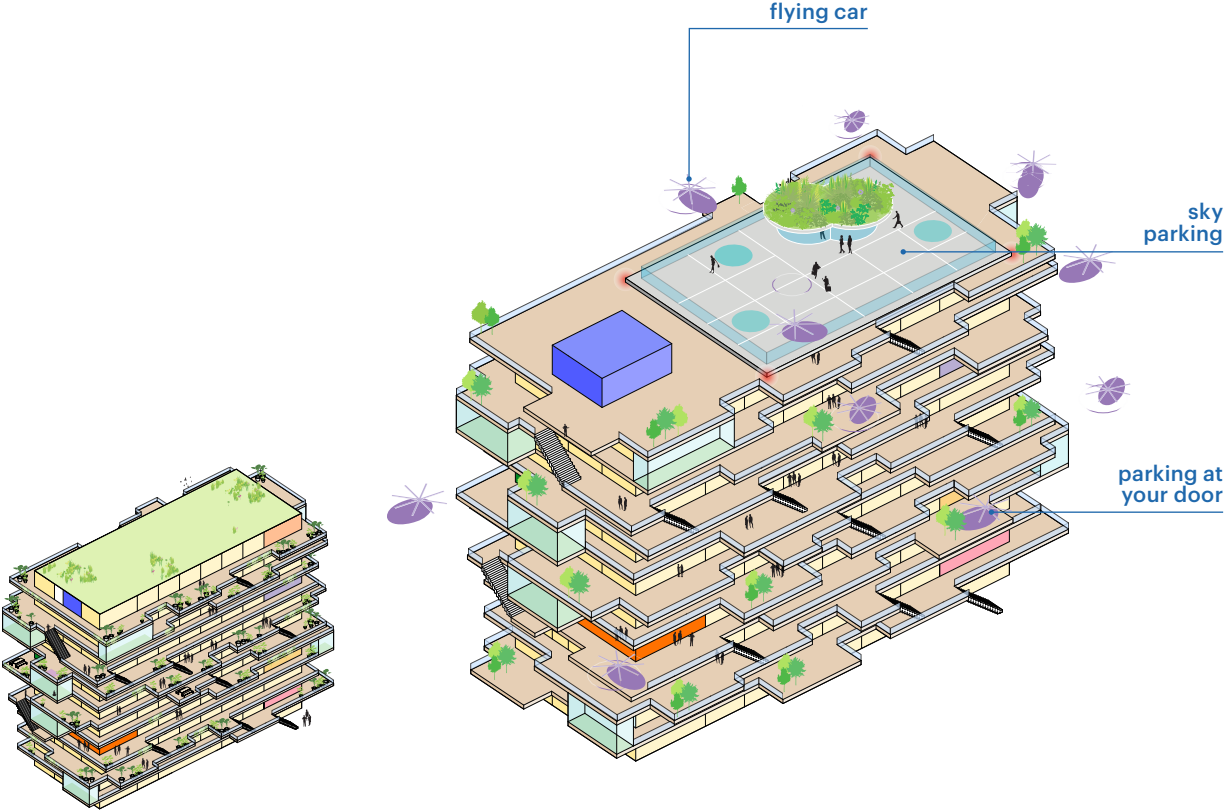


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# Flying mobility house

In the future, mobility could undergo a significant transformation. If the long-awaited evolution towards private flying vehicles takes place, this would have a profound impact on our cities. Streets would no longer need to allocate space for cars, enabling them to be exclusively designated as green spaces. Apartment buildings would also change dramatically. Residents would no longer access the building through a shared ground-floor lobby or an elevator from an underground car park, but instead could conveniently park their flying cars on their balcony to enter their home directly. Internal corridors, elevators, and staircases would be replaced by external ‘streets’, as everyone would ‘fly in’ from the outside of the building.



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# Conclusion

## (Q&A)

**“What we have learned in developing this booklet is that co-living is so much more versatile, and can be just as practical for long-term stays.” - Damien Sharkey**

Continuation of the Q&A with HUB’s Managing Director, Damien Sharkey and Head of Brand, Kate Brown, alongside Celia Harrison, Investment Director Bridges Fund Management, and MVRDV’s founding partner Winy Maas and Senior Associate Sanne van Manen.

They discuss the main learnings and next steps of the research towards co-living.

### What have you learnt from the book?

**Damien:** Co-living developments often have a hotel-like format. They are highly serviced, fully furnished, and are currently viewed as being suited to short-term stays. What we have learned in developing this booklet is that co-living is so much more versatile, and can be just as practical for long-term stays. In the UK, people move an average of eight times in their lives. If we can create the right conditions for people to feel at home and build a community, they might stay for several years.

**Kate:** Co-living communities aren’t just for younger people; they can be designed to appeal to a wide range of residents, such as active older people who still want to live in the city. They might need a slightly different type of



co-living – with a vegetable garden, say, and spare rooms for the family when they visit – but it’s essentially a very similar arrangement.

**Sanne:** For me, this booklet brings together all the ingredients needed for a great housing project. With a variety of communal spaces to accommodate the needs of both residents and neighbours; a mix of streets and squares to create the social spaciousness; and of course the private home, which each resident can configure to their own needs. Every co-living building will be a unique project, catering to a wide range of target groups and their collective needs.

## “Good design can aid social interaction.” - *Celia Harrison*

**Celia:** This study demonstrates how good design can aid social interaction. If we can do that while also reducing the carbon footprint of our projects, we have the chance

to design buildings that are not just great places to live in today, benefiting both people and the planet; they’re also sustainable and future-proofed.

**Winy:** I would take it even further. In the (W)ego project we did, ‘ego’ becomes ‘(w)ego’: there is a constant negotiation between the desires of individual residents in a housing block, which helps determine the design of their units, and the shared spaces. In a similar way, co-living is a labyrinth of smaller rooms which link together with communal areas, sometimes vertically, sometimes horizontally, which creates a kind of space puzzle to encourage residents to interact with each other and become curious about their neighbours.

### How realistic are the proposals in this booklet?

**Celia:** There’s something important to take away from each of the typologies. We know some of the proposals may seem a bit unorthodox – and we’re constrained by a mix of planning, regulations and cultural norms – but that meets one of our objectives in commissioning this booklet, which is to look beyond the status quo. It doesn’t

just provide workable solutions for now; it’s also an ideas document for what lies ahead. And we can certainly draw on aspects of all these ideas in our development of new homes, both now and in the future.

**Damien:** I don’t think any of the ideas are unrealistic, but we do need to strike a balance between an understanding of the sector today and ambitions for the future – really looking ahead at what’s possible, such as how this can address climate change, for example. Although some of these ideas are conceptual, and may not be able to be realised today owing to regulations, they could become viable in the future. It will definitely influence how we design our co-living buildings going forward.

**Kate:** Many of the ideas that have been highlighted here are simple tweaks to improve the sociability of a building, or flexibility of a home. They’re both realistic and possible, right now.

**Sanne:** A defining premise of the research within all these ideas is that they’re all possible and structurally buildable – except, maybe, for the ‘Scripted Sculpture’ – and not so unconventional or crazy that they can’t realistically

be achieved. But we know there’s a need to reflect on current regulations and costs, and we’ll need to go on a journey with local authorities and regulators to be able to implement all of these ideas.

### What are the ‘next steps’ from this research?

**Celia:** We want to continue to invest in the co-living sector and bring the lessons and ideas from this booklet into the selection and the design of our next projects. We see an opportunity to increase co-living’s share of the residential market, and to broaden the range and variety of housing. At the same time, we want to make these homes and their communities more sustainable, environmentally as well as socially – future-proofed and climate-resilient.

**Sanne:** I’d also be interested to see whether co-living can move away from the commercial model that’s most common now. I’d like to see opportunities to use the ideas in this book for cooperative housing projects, community land trusts or even social housing. That would be amazing. In the long history of social housing

in the Netherlands, it has always been those projects that stood out in terms of their quality.

**Damien:** In the short term, we'll use the research to help broaden people's understanding of co-living, including talking to local authorities, funding partners and stakeholders in the sector about what co-living is today and what it could be in the future. After that, we'll actually design a scheme that draws upon some if not all of the findings, and deliver a development that represents the 'end product' of this research – and maybe the starting point of something much bigger.

La Balma collective housing, Spain. Architect: La Boqueria + Local. Photo by Milena Villalba



Colophon

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Co-living is a housing solution that is growing in popularity. Why is it attracting attention? What do we mean by 'co-living'? And what can it contribute to our cities?

This book is a design study on co-living, looking at its potential from the scale of the private home to the scale of the city. Considering how co-living can help to create vibrant communities, with social spaciousness and unique homes for residents, this study also looks into the future challenges that our cities face, and how co-living can help address them.

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