

Coming of H

H
The H neighborhood in Amsterdam is the remaining outpost of a futuristic urban project. Like a satellite - yet splendidly connected to the identity-supplying inner city - the psychological distance between "H" and the city is vast.

The modernist separation of car traffic, pedestrian and bicycle routes renders the study area an inverted island with traffic shores and tunnel connections to the neighboring quadrants. The potential of this cultural making pot, the vibrant ethnic mix of people and their stories as well as their occupancies remain largely invisible within vast parkscape and gargantuan gallery flats.

More than 80 % of the inhabitants have a migration-related background, more than 30 % of the households live on a minimum income and more than 50 % of the households generally depend on welfare support. H is Amsterdam's version of an arrival city quarter. It is also a neighborhood where kids grow up much more often with only one parent (and a low income). This is accompanied by physical and psychological struggles that go along with economic pressures and feelings of isolation.

The quarter's paradox lies in the flourishing (underlying) economy and the quarter's limits to advertise this abundance of micro services and products that form the invisible local (subsistence) economy. The livelihoods of hundreds of families depend on welfare, social networks, hand-downs, direct exchange of goods/services and on their most valuable asset: an affordable apartment. It is at home where businesses start and grow here.

The asset of H is youth with 27% of the local population younger than 18 years. Many of these youngsters are aspiring entrepreneurs and unlike their parents massively participate in local interest groups, supported by professionals and municipality.

By 2025 a 26% growth of the neighborhood is anticipated. What can be done to enact the best possible process and to create a balanced development strategy?

Concerted approach for H

The tools for an inclusive development lie in process participation by locals, information flow and an open discussion. Although general public engagement is relatively low in the area, young people form an exception: They're very economy-savvy and already engaging in local interest groups. Together with schools, youth care and municipality these active young players can work towards the quarter's understanding and support for the upcoming transition. They can also best communicate the processes, projects and benefits to their parents. The neighbourhood can be reached through the future generation.

Phased satellites

Taking clues from the neighborhood setup as a whole, the proposals are developed as satellites working towards each other. The design is based on keeping the existing (built) structures of the area intact to direct financial means to other equally urgent investments. The concept must of course be adapted in case the structural integrity of the parking garages is insufficient. The plans are based on the rigid grid of the parking spaces and can therefore be replaced by new concrete structures making use of foundations and existing groundworks.

Empowering young citizens

Due to the mixed population setup and the desired commercial development, an unusual way for communication is proposed. The young population is invited –with the support of schools, interest groups and youth care - to lead the participational citymaking process for the quarter. They literally also embody the best ambition for a carbon-neutral and resilient neighborhood. Educated and digitally connected as placemakers, they are also to be the activators of their parents' (economic) participation. A first project-related step can be the upgrade of the vast public spaces, assigning them with the task of putting (restricted) financial means to the most desired development (e.g. a grandstand for the sports area, additional street furniture, connection with the metro entrance, etc.).

Supermarket HQ

To get the quarter's attention and to make change felt in a positive way, a people's supermarket annex transition café opens its doors on the ground floor of parking garage Huigenbos. Based on the idea of a local cooperative, participating youngsters receive refunds through voluntary work and start to engage in the process while helping to run the supermarket HQ and gaining valuable business knowledge. The activation of (visible) public life is essential to the development as a whole. The café also serves as educational workshop and exhibition space for the transition.

Education as tool

In order to activate the process, a design proposal for the Hakfort building is tossed into the ring to start the transition process publicly and to gain further support and input by community members and local entrepreneurs. Financial, juridical and commercial obstacles must be identified, communicated and discussed, empowering the neighborhood's entrepreneurs to create (productive) work and to find ways of financing actors and processes. Social gains are to be valued as high as financial profits from the development. Neighboring Heesterweld Creative Community and students are invited to the Supermarket HQ for talks, courses and events, collecting (development) stories and action plans for the quarter. People can enlist for an allotment garden license and brush up their knowledge in gardening courses held by professionals/informed locals. The chamber of commerce starts giving lectures about economic possibilities and will hold counseling hours at the café. Municipality and investors share development risks and profit opportunities while supporting the process with manpower, juridical knowledge and financial backup.

Economic redistribution

All wealth comes from the ground and the grounds in H are vast. To start the local empowerment, parts of the parkscape enclosed by the Hakfort en Huigenbos apartment buildings are transformed into allotment gardens - gardening courses and professional advice included. The neighborhood's (now invisible) commercial vibe can start the production of much demanded (organic) local fruit, vegetables and flowers – or cater inexpensively to their own needs. As small-scale food production is already present in the area, this can spawn new combinations of business opportunities, provide a more colourful sight and render parkscape maintenance obsolete. Moreover gardens form an opportunity to rid all compostable matter while producing more fertile ground, solving some of the quarter's garbage challenges.

Additional housing

Amsterdam desperately needs affordable apartment spaces, especially if equipped with a garden, well-connected and surrounded by services. The introduction of new housing is to densify and urbanize the vast sleepiness of H and to invite new locals. This can counterbalance the area's income structure while enabling families and other networks to remain in the neighborhood (in case social housing is unavailable) and strengthen demand for (local) services and products.

Stimulating basic start-ups

The step of micro-services from home to a shop/office/workshop is beneficial to business as to the well-being of individuals, social security, local culture, self-esteem and recognition. The local economic community is invited to co-invest by making their services visible and available on the newly created first floor of the developing Hakfort building. From sewing ateliers and a day care collective to tax advisors, sandwich vendors and computer repairs- everyone with a home business is invited to take the first step into public business for free (for a starting period & only while stocks last). The Huigenbos proposal also offers a (small) amount of workshop and office space.

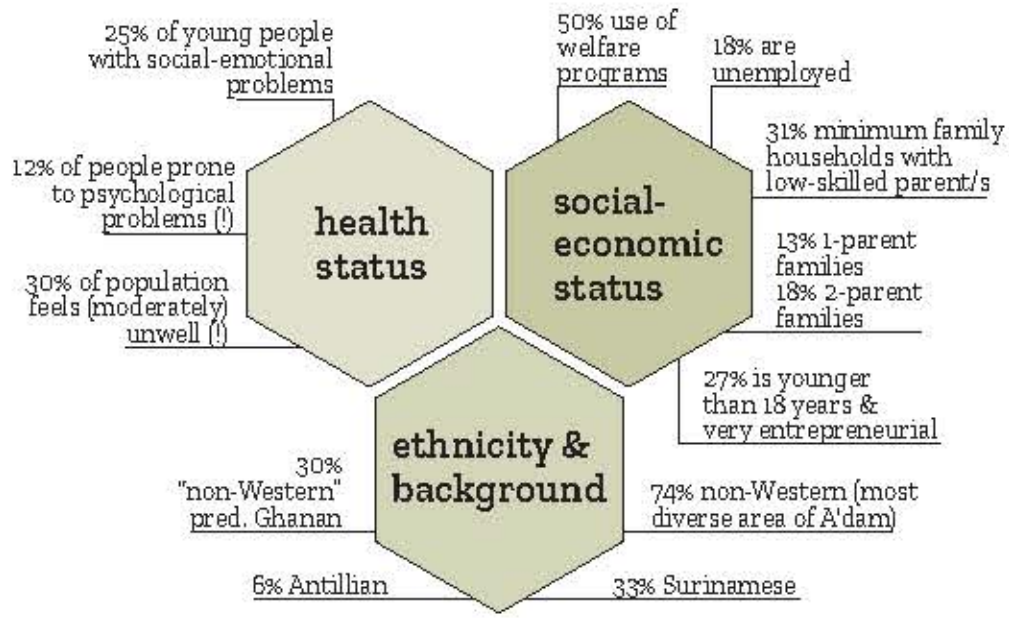
Advertising change

By organizing as many material in- and outflows locally, the circular streams of materials and energy can enhance the status and economic resilience of the neighborhood as well as attract new players, foster valuable knowledge and empower the citizens to take control of their neighborhood. H can become an example of carbon neutrality, self-managed energy production and garbage reduction. As the supermarket is the major source of garbage, maybe it also holds the potential (combined with gardening, education and participation) for a valuable answer to the quarter's waste problem in general.

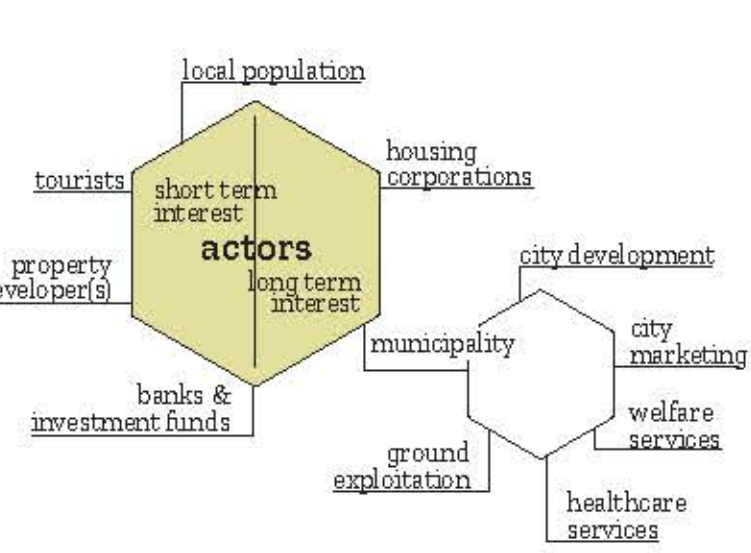
Opening up

Adjacent neighborhood Amstel III is as well in a state of turbulent change, with new housing projects, more tourist accommodation and a vibrant economic development. The much desired general uplift of the community must be based on overcoming the segregation with the adjacent quarters, attracting different groups (daytime workers, tourists, new and old residents of the vicinity). The concerted approach with new satellites (Hakfort development, Huigenbos development, allotment gardens etc.) and the upgrades of public spaces creates the potential to do so. In combination with the empowering of neighborhood citizens the quarter can achieve the gigantic task: a Coming of H.

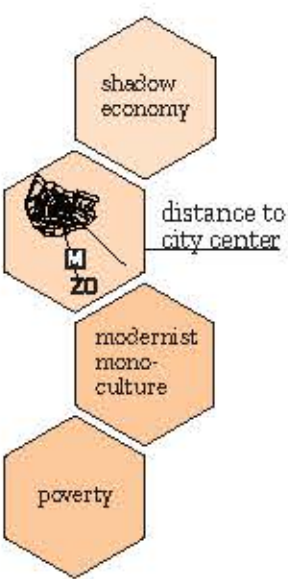
A close reading of the neighbourhood's challenges



Actors involved



Challenges of built H

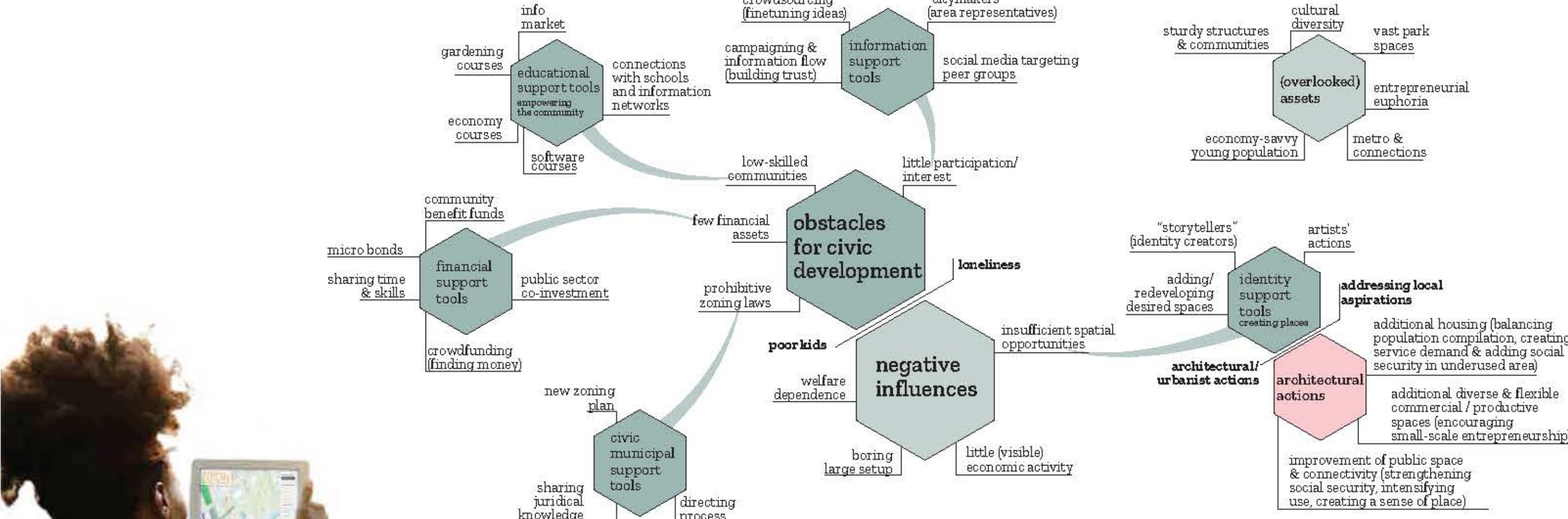


Programs & developments

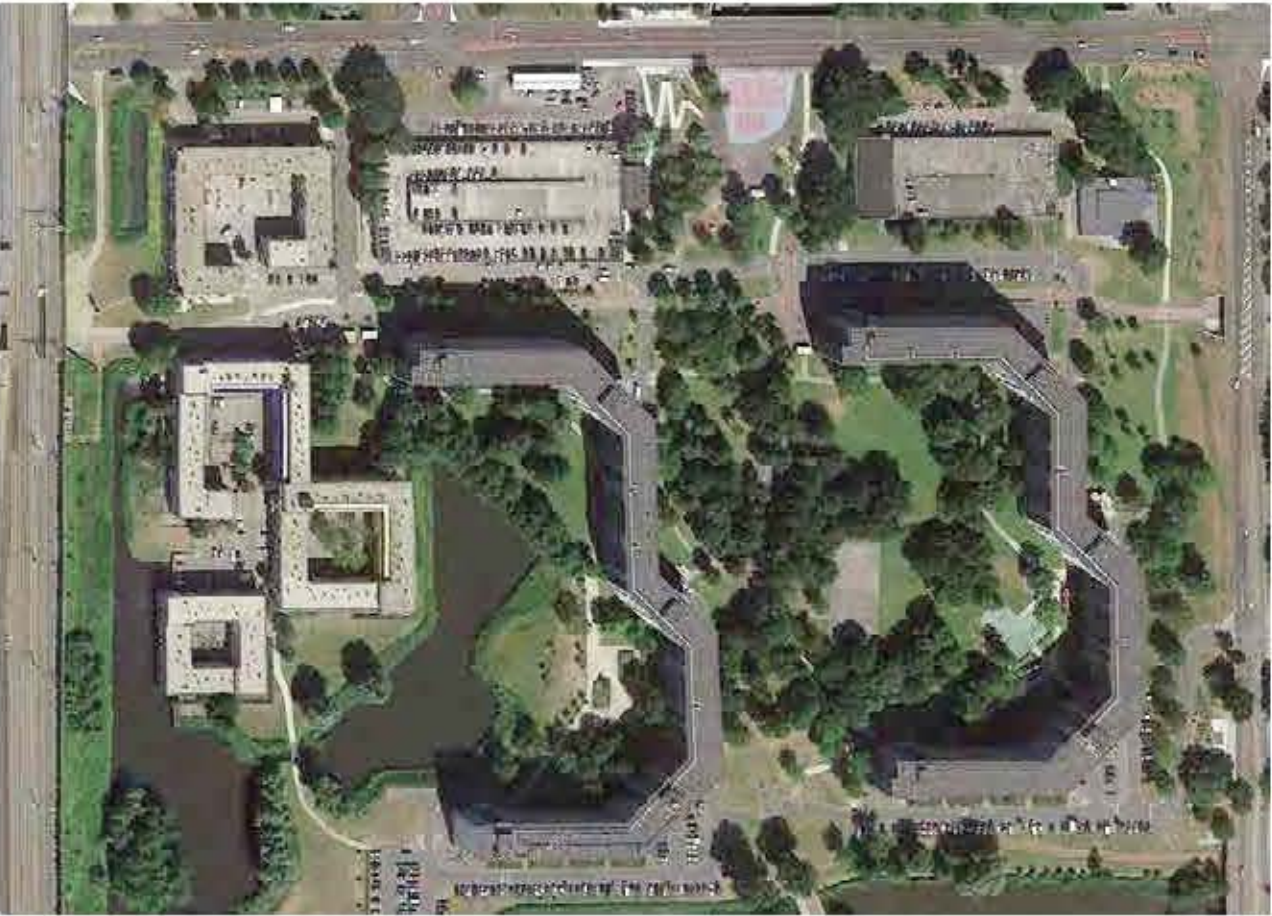


Creation of places

Strategies & obstacles



Empowering city-making



Study area (as existing) from above



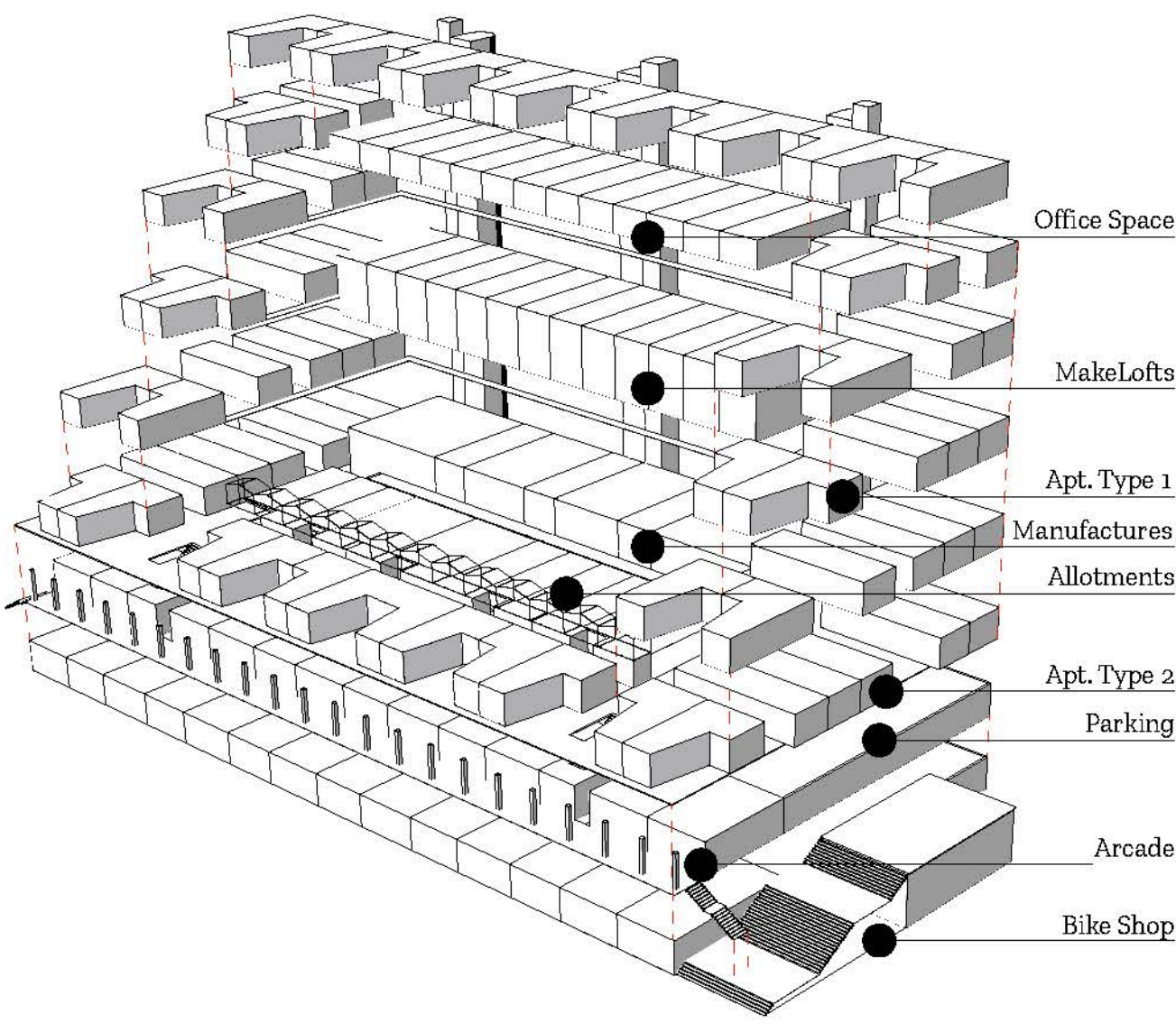
Study area with intervention proposals | scale 1:2500



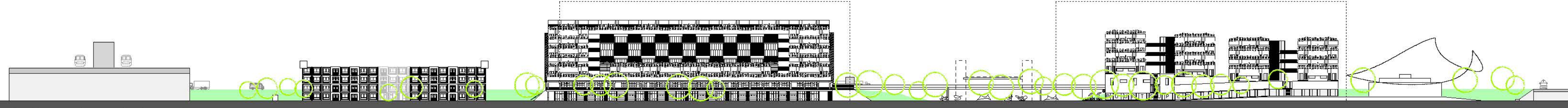
People's supermarket & Transition Café in parking garage Huigenbos



View on allotment proposal between Hakfort & Huigenbos apartment complexes



Satellite proposal 'Fort Hak' with unit programme



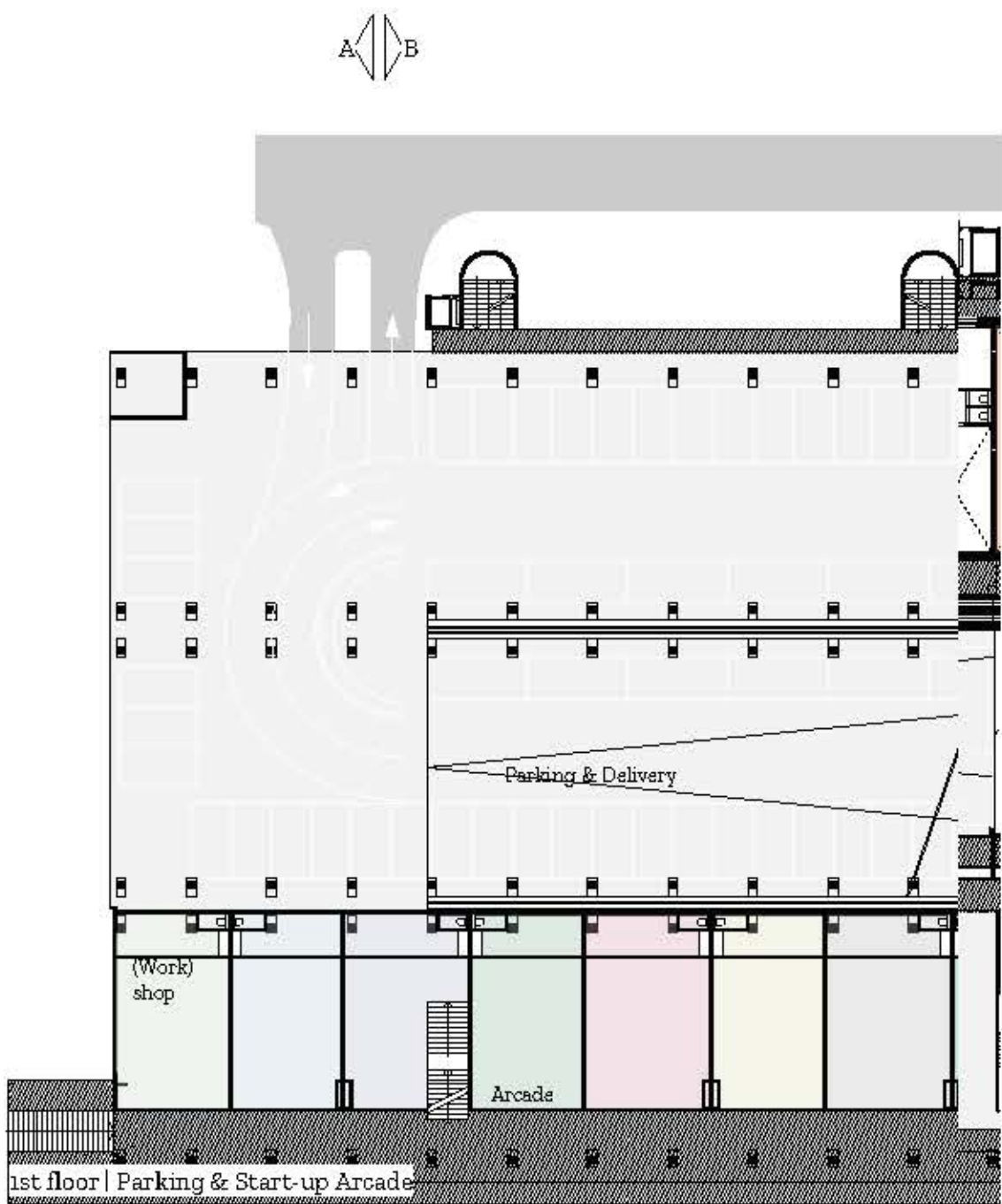
Section | Intervention area | scale 1:1000



Intervention area | scale 1:1000



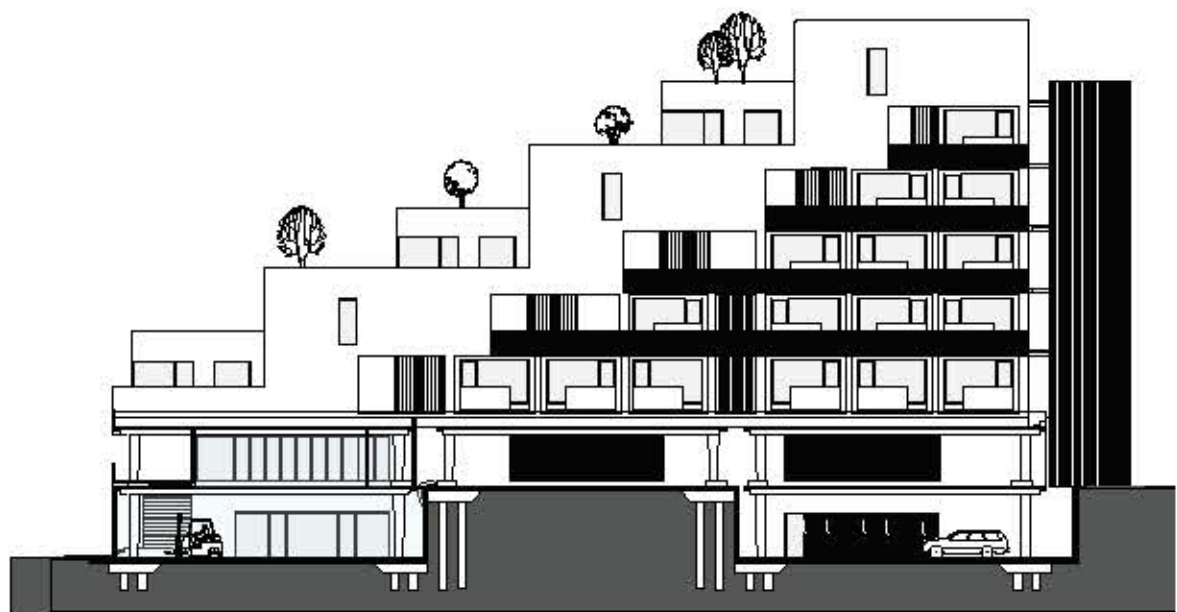
View on satellite proposal 'Fort Hak'



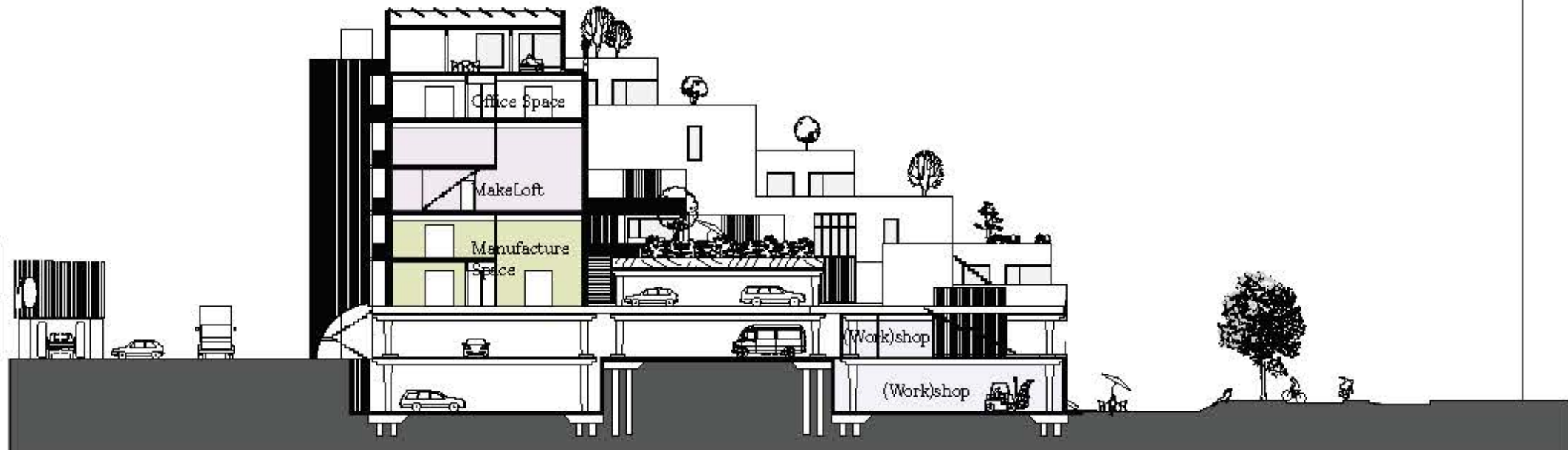
1st floor | Parking & Start-up Arcade



2nd floor



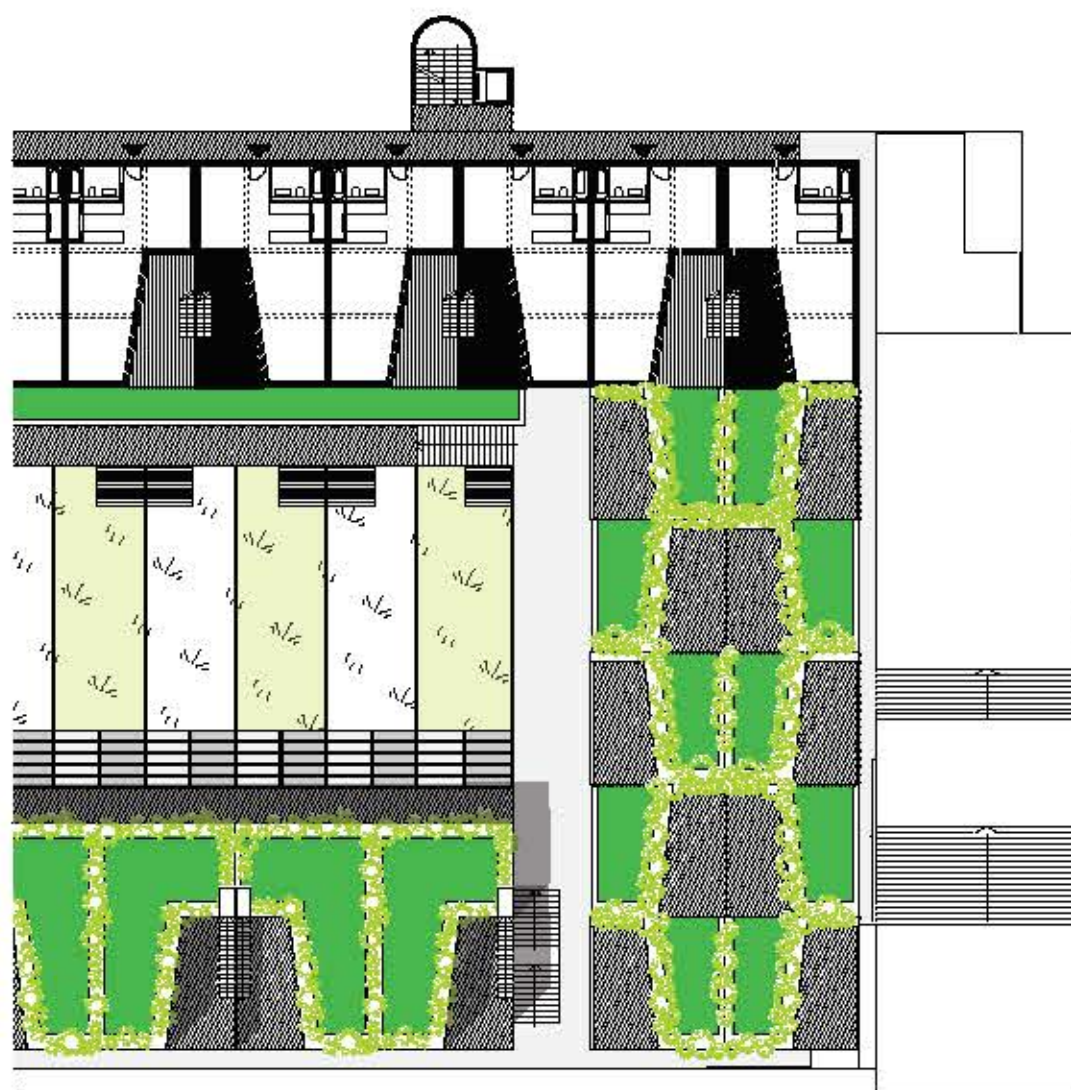
A | Section/elevation | scale 1:400
Western terrace



B | Section through center | scale 1:400



3rd floor
Floor plans 'Fort Hak' Satellite



Top floor



C | Eastern elevation | scale 1:400
View from playground