

Tin Tong

天唐



Abb. 1: Tin Hau Temple

dedicated to my Family, my friends, everybody who supported me during the last year and Sarah, who was always by my side.

Tin Tong
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Buildings in Heaven
Social Housing in Hong Kong

MASTERTHESIS

To graduate as: *MASTER OF SCIENCE (MSc)*

Field of study: Architecture

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submitted to

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Abb. 2: Hong Kong from the Peak

1.1 Introduction

This thesis deals with the social housing in Hong Kong and the research of the living culture goes back until the early 1950s all the way to the present situation.

The design of this argument is concerned with the theme “social housing” in the area around Sham Shui Po in Hong Kong with my concern being the reuse of existing buildings from the 50’s and repurpose the flats in a more useful and efficient manner. Caused by the extreme increase in population during the last 60 years (from nearly 2 million inhabitants to nearly 8 million inhabitants) the main problem facing Hong Kong today is offering affordable and useful flats.

I propose developing individual flats that contain the most essential facilities within the smallest available spaces, specifically that which is offered by the small and tiny flats in the high-rise buildings in Sham Shui Po.

A possible idea is a combining individuality and communality in which private flats would have public meeting points to promote the social connection between the different inhabitants of each complex.

After Hong Kong’s past and also its future, I envision living spaces infused with the influence of Asian and European traditions.

2. *Cultural History*



Abb. 3: Hong Kong during Night

2.1 Hong Kong's History

The name Hong Kong derives from the Cantonese word *héung-gáwng* which loosely translates to “fragrant harbour” or “incense harbour”. Hong Kong exists in proportion to the history of mankind since only one moment. The name was inspired by the smell of the sandalwood incense materials, which was stored in the area at the time which is where Aberdeen currently stands. Furthermore, the first human remains were found in Hong Kong around the late Stone Age. On Lamma and Lantau Island and nearly 20 other sites, the remnants of Bronze Age habitations were found, as well as eight geometric rock carvings, which can still be seen along the coastline of Hong Kong today.¹

It is difficult to say at which time the area that is now Hong Kong became part of the Chinese Empire as evidence is scant, but the first of the mighty ‘Five Clans’, the so called Han-Chinese, occupied the area around the 11th century. These descendants hold political and economic clout to this day and were the ones to eventually colonize the Island. Another very powerful Clan, the first to arrive in Hong Kong, was the Tan. They settled around the small islet of Kat Hing Wai (*wài* means protective wall), which is nowadays one of the most visited traditional walled villages in the New Territories. The Tan were followed by the Hau and then Pang. The Pang eventually spread around the area of Sheung Shui and Fanling and remain to this day. In the 15th century, these three clans were followed by the Liu and a century later by the Man.²

These ‘Five Clans’ called themselves *bún-day* (Punti), which means indigenous or local, but as a matter of fact, they were clearly not. They looked down on the original inhabitants and banished them from their land. The original inhabitants, who are called Tanka, moved on to the sea to live there on boats.³

It is remarkable that the peninsula and the island, that became the territory of Hong Kong, was of minor importance in the Chinese empire. The ‘Five Clans’ flourished until the war, that brought the downfall of the Ming Dynasty.⁴



Abb. 4: Tanka Women

1 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

2 Vgl. Ebda..

3 Vgl. Ebda..

4 Vgl. Ebda..

The victorious Qing Clan was angered by the resistance of the southerners. They were loyal to the ancient regime and so the Qing ordered an evacuation of all the inhabitants of the coastal area, including Hong Kong Island. During these turbulent times the accrument of the Triads took place. These were originally founded as patriotic secret societies for restoring the Ming, but over the centuries they degenerated into Hong Kong's own version of a Mafia. Today the Triads still exist, but their loyalty belongs to the dollar.⁵



Abb. 5: The Xuande Emperor, Ming Dynasty

Four generations passed before the population was able to recover to its level by the influx of the Hakka (Cantonese for guest people). They moved into Hong Kong from the 18th century until the mid- 19th century. Throughout that time a few of their traditions survived, including some vestiges of their language and songs. One of the most eye-catching items is the black-fringed bamboo hat worn by the Hakka women, who live in the New Territories.⁶



Abb. 6: Hakka Women

Nowadays it is hard to say who is an original inhabitant of Hong Kong and who is just an immigrant. With this great mix of inhabitants of different cultures, Hong Kong could become the city it is today.⁷

With this influx of arrivals in Hong Kong, the culture experienced an explosion in diversity, although to Europeans Hong Kong is a rather 'unexotic' town in Eastern Asia when considering its British past.⁸

Nevertheless, this town enchants its visitors immediately: The situation at the waterfront, the high mountains and the narrow linear town with its urge and compulsion to go upwards, have led to the most breathtaking skyline of the world.⁹

During the last few years, Hong Kong has grown upwards with large sky scrapers even as the land area of the harbour was reduced due to repeated land reclamation. The old airport Kai Tak in the city centre is a thing of the past and its inhabitants would rather claim themselves as Hong Kong people rather than Chinese people.¹⁰



Abb. 7: Shek O Country Park

5 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

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10 Vgl. Ebda..

Not only Hong Kong, also the Chinese sister towns in the environs are awakening slowly and are becoming more and more high-powered. Guangzhou is now the capital of the worldwide most productive industrial region. Macau is the worlds' biggest gamble city, even bigger than Las Vegas and Shenzhen an economic successful B-version of Hong Kong. Even Zhuhai has risen out of the Pearl River Delta and developed to a subcenter of that area. All these cities lie along the Pearl River Delta, but especially the east coast of the Pearl River Delta is nowadays an important axis in the new city development of South China.¹¹



Abb. 8: Macau Tower

In spite of the new competition, Hong Kong does not need to fear going the route of its less glamorous sister towns because it has kept its uniqueness: its elegance, ambition, density, as well as the unscrupulousness, seals, and cosmopolitan aura.¹²

As a special administrative region of China, Hong Kong holds a unique position with its own advantages. Every baby born in Hong Kong becomes an inhabitant of Hong Kong and thereby the child gets a residence permit. This is why today from the mainland, expecting mothers attempt to immigrate into the area. Estimates vary but about 10,000 of pregnant women who are pushing over the border. Nevertheless, this flow of immigrants could not harm Hong Kong, just as little as SARS and the Asian economic crisis.¹³

Instead, it has strengthened its role as a finance centre of the Asian world and its nearness to another world centre, Guangdong. This allows more significant advantages. The only danger for Hong Kong exists in own success. For example, the air pollution has drastically increased from the north and even the nicest skyline will not impress any visitors, considering it is perpetually hidden behind a grey humid wall.¹⁴



Abb. 9: Smog in Hong Kong

11 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

12 Vgl. Ebda..

13 Vgl. Ebda..

14 Vgl. Ebda..

The amount of skyscrapers in Hong Kong has increased dramatically over the years. In this town there are more high-rise buildings than in any other city all over the world. All together there are already more than 2,300 buildings, which can extend higher than 100 metres. And the quantity of buildings increase every day due to lack of living space and high demanded.¹⁵

If one goes on a trip with the Star Ferry from Kowloon to Central, it seems as one would move towards a glade in the high-rise building wood. Then again one walks through this high-rise building wood, some narrow towers appear like they were blades of grass in the wind.¹⁶



Abb. 10: Hong Kong Harbour

“The accidental beauty which generates the artificial Stalagmites thicket of the towers generated, is a creature of the contingency” how it once Siegfried Kracauer expressed.¹⁷

Even more improbable becomes this overall impression if one takes a look at the cultivation statistics of Hong Kong. From a total of 1,100 square kilometres of surface, only 25 percent of the area are covered by buildings. The explanation of it is seen on a journey by bus through the New Territories or Victoria Island. There are more than 550 metre high precipitous hills as well as 262 small islands which are mostly part of the urban area. These circumstances, the impassable topography, brought various building contractors to their knees.¹⁸



Abb. 11: Mapping Hong Kong

15 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

16 Vgl. Ebda..

17 Vgl. Ebda..

18 Vgl. Ebda..

By the increase in required living space, there are always searched new ways, by which the natural appearance of the island is being changed more and more into a human creation. Among other things, mountains are simply cut to use the soil to create possible land for development. Thereby, with one measure, new buildings can be created.¹⁹

Despite these drastic methods, today the island's topography looks extensively outbid. Its limitation and nearly all possibilities of the land embankment have been exhausted. Victoria Island almost exists completely off of precipitous hills making it unlikely to be further settled or even built-up. Nevertheless, this difficult area is also a gigantic advantage for Hong Kong, because it is the only reason the building contractors make a curve around the hills. This fact ensures that Hong Kong can keep its verdure vegetation which carpets the island.²⁰



Abb. 12: Sai Kung Beach

The democratic and free-enterprise system of Hong Kong as well as the own currency and the 'One Country, Two Systems' doctrine make sure that Hong Kong does not convey the impression of being the third-biggest city of China. Hong Kong makes aware that it is different to Shanghai or Peking and it always will be.²¹

19 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

20 Vgl. Ebda..

21 Vgl. Ebda..

Although Hong Kong belongs to one of the towns with the highest cost of life in the world, its attractiveness is not eased. Just the opposite is the case, these high costs assure high wages, even for usually low-paid jobs. This is the reason why housemaids from the Philippines and Indonesia immigrate in droves to Hong Kong.²²

Nevertheless, the biggest immigration group were, the Chinese, in 1949, at the end of the Chinese civil war. At that time the first migration waves from China rolled to Hong Kong. Around this time the huge house building programme started in Hong Kong. This caused the try to make affordable a privately owned home for the mostly impecunious newcomers, which had profound impact on the city.²³

Thereby the tiniest flats in high-rise buildings spring up like mushrooms for nearly 2 million people in the a relatively short amount of time. Not only buildings developed on the drawing boards of the planners of the city administration and the residential building companies, they developed whole town quarters.²⁴

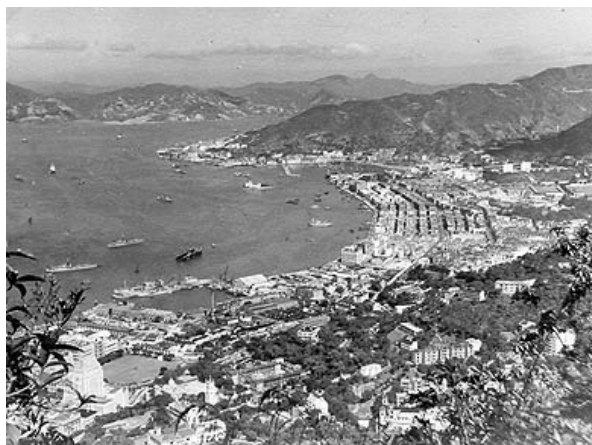


Abb. 13: Hong Kong, 1949

The first change was during the eighty years, when the income of the wide social class slowly stabilised to an acceptable level. At that time, one started to substitute the easiest housing developments with more comfortable buildings or to redevelop extensively causing the rededication of many flats to freehold flats.²⁵



Abb. 14: District Hung Hom

Nowadays Hong Kong counts as one of the most close settled areas of the world, because there lives more than 6,000 inhabitants per square kilometre in this city. Since 1945 his population has increased by more than almost twelve times, from 600,000 to 7 million inhabitants.²⁶

Hong Kong is thereby highly compressed or differently expressed: overcrowded. If one saunters through Hong Kong, one notices a factor relatively fast: there are practically no single-family dwelling houses and almost all inhabitants live in high rise buildings.²⁷

One could call Hong Kong a vertical city par excellence.²⁸

Caused by the rapid deindustrialization of Hong Kong, the city was forced to search for economic stimulus in trade and in financial management, which resulted in great success for Hong Kong.²⁹

22 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

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In this connection, one can look back at the long tradition of the whole Pearl River delta, because by 1557, Portuguese seafarers established a commercial post in Macau. British ships already came in 1683 from the establishments of the East-India-Company on the Indian coast. They founded offices and warehouses in Guangzhou and traded tea, silk and porcelain by around about 1711³⁰

Nevertheless, China did not reply acquiesce to the demand of Europe for more Chinese products, especially tea, and also rejected nearly every foreign import. This changed all of a sudden as the Britons ascertained which product the Chinese wanted mostly: Opium.³¹

Because the Britons owned a huge opium stock, caused by their poppy fields in India, they sped up the trade aggressively. The addiction thereby spread out very fast and the silver reserves of China dwindled. By the end of 1838 the emperor ordered to eradicate the opium trade.³²

However, the successful action against the opium trade led to the first Opium War from 1839 through 1842. In January 1841, a naval landing party hoisted the British flag at Possession Point on Hong Kong Island. About that time, Hong Kong was little bit more than a backwater of about 20 villages and hamlets. By the ensuing contract of Nanking the commercial monopoly was abolished and 5 harbours were opened for British and foreign trade and the Britons were released from all Chinese laws.³³



Abb. 15: First Opium War

The “Everlasting possession right” for Hong Kong Island was transferred to Great Britain. On the 26th of June, 1843 and the island of Hong Kong officially became part of the British empire, even as the island was itself primitive without developed laws.³⁴



Abb. 16: Contract of Nanking

30 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

31 Vgl. Ebda..

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33 Vgl. Ebda..

34 Vgl. Ebda..

By the second opium war, which began in October 1856, the victorious Britons forced the Chinese to sign the Peking convention, which confirmed the contract of Tientsin and with it they gave the peninsula of Kowloon as well as Stonecutters Island to the British. By the end of the 19th century, the British government pressured China to expand the colony up to the New Territories, because their population had leapt from 33,000 in 1850 to 265,000 inhabitants in 1900. China tuned unexpectedly to the application, by which the colony increased about nearly 90%. Since then Hong Kong insisted out of an island (Victoria) and a peninsula (Kowloon and The New Territories).³⁵

With the new gained back country, the basic services with drinking water and food could be guaranteed for Hong Kong. Today it is the same, because Hong Kong Island could not supply itself or nourish, the Island only survives from trade.³⁶

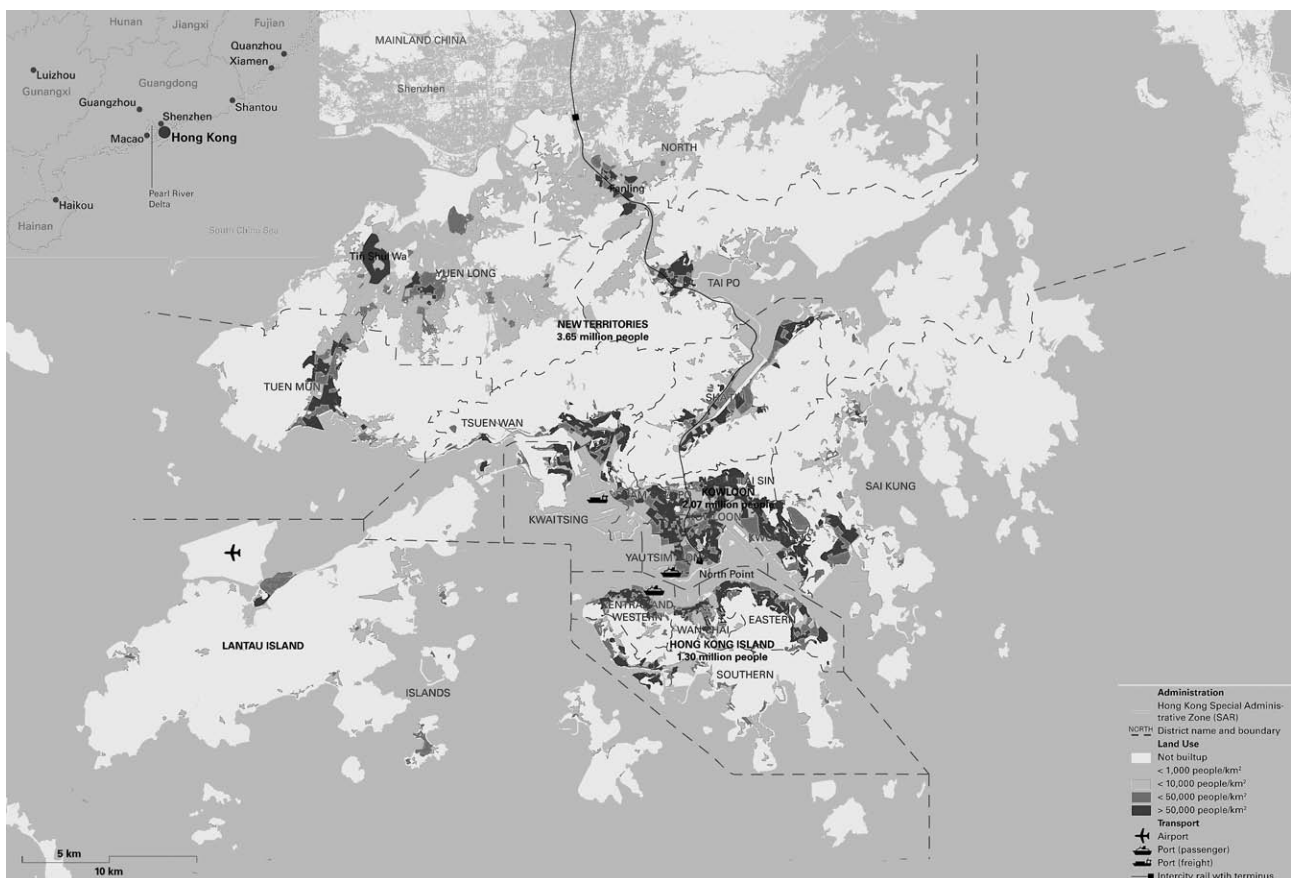


Abb. 17: Mapping Density

Bit by bit this colony developed to a down-to-earth municipality, whose population grew continuously, thanks to the many immigrants, who fled during the Xinhai revolution in 1911 from China, but with the invasion of Japan in China in 1937, the immigration waves became a true flood. In this period the number of inhabitants crossed the million borders. Unfortunately, Hong Kong's status as a British colony offered only a shelter for a short time, because one day after the attack of Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong fell under the Japanese administration during the Second World War.³⁷

35 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

36 Vgl. Ebda..

37 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 18: Japanese Invasion of Hong Kong

The conditions under Japanese rule were harsh, with indiscriminate massacres of mostly Chinese civilians and a lot of western civilians were incarcerated at Stanley Prison on Hong Kong Island. During this time many Hong Kong Chinese fled to Macao, which was administered by neutral Portugal. After Japan retreated from Hong Kong and the capitulation in August, 1945, Hong Kong was ripped out of his hibernation. The Chinese civil war, from 1945 until 1949, produced formally a true flood of rich and poor refugees, who flowed out to Hong Kong. The newcomers brought capital and her manpower, what started terrifically the economy.³⁸

Shanghai's weakness helped Hong Kong to his strength.³⁹

In the end of the 40s years there are living already 2 million people in Hong Kong. With the new building of the central management of the HSBC bank, a new era began for Hong Kong's architecture in 1935. Equipped fully air-condition and with a modern lift, this building would become one of the symbols of the new Hong Kong.⁴⁰

Overnight in 1953, a disastrous fire swept through a slum and caused thousands to become homeless resulting in an emergency product range to help the affected persons as quickly as possible. In the next year the Hong Kong Housing Authority was founded, which began to crop the whole town with big subsidised residential complexes. Though Hong Kong had been cropped predominantly with 4 to 5-storied buildings until the mid-fifties, but this changed rapidly when the buildings grew on and on upwards and Hong Kong rose to its current spot as one of the the world's biggest high rise cities.⁴¹



Abb. 19: HSBC Bank, 1935

From the beginning of the seventies, a total of nine New Towns were founded over the years and thereby it bargained for one of the biggest product range of the world. Today all together live nearly 2.5 millions in this New Towns, which were conceived in that way, that they function as separate towns, with distinct jobs as well as social facilities and infrastructure facilities. Though there is not too much place for parking bays or private gardens, instead they have a good connection to the public traffic system. Every Day, Hong Kong's public traffic system, which is one of the most modern ones in the world, counts about nine million passengers.⁴²

38 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

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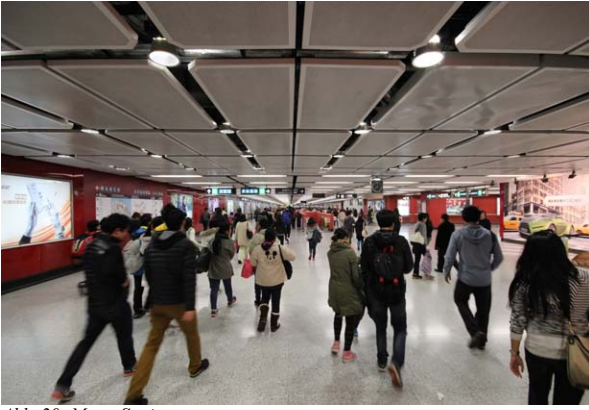


Abb. 20: Metro Station

Hong Kong's meteoric rise as the centre of Eastern Asia started only to falter in the 1980s, as the head of state of China, who organized the economic opening of the country and for this reason Shenzhen became a special economic area. In the shortest time it became a flourishing million metropolis in front of Hong Kong. However, Shenzhen will never take away the rank of Hong Kong, they are rather an unbeatable duplicate, who is complementary mutually.⁴³

During the 80s years, Great Britain slowly organised its retreat from Hong Kong, and many inhabitants turned their backs to the city. With the agreement, signed by Britain and China, which is known as "The Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong". With this document the British agreed that Hong Kong would disappear and would be reborn as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. After this the Hong Kong SAR was permitted to continue with its capitalist system from Britain, while China could continue with their version of socialism. The proper catch phrase for this was "One Country, Two Systems".⁴⁴

In "The Basic Law for Hong Kong" the future constitution of the SAR's system was spelled out in all details for this unorthodox system of government, in 1988. Hong Kong's English common-law judicial system and the right of property and ownership were preserved, in the basic law that was ratified by the National People's Congress in Beijing in 1990. This law also included the rights of assembly, free speech, association, travel and movement, correspondence, choice of occupation, academic research, religious belief and the right to strike. With this system the exception of foreign affairs and matters of defence would enjoy a high degree of autonomy.⁴⁵

China also wrote in their own constitution, the guarantees of individual freedoms and respect for human rights and some of the inhabitants of Hong Kong held much faith in this Basic Law, but most of them saw these guarantees as empty promises provided by Beijing to interfere in Hong Kong's internal affairs to preserve for example the public order, the public morals or the national security. Also the Tian'anmen massacre was decisively, in Peking, in 1989, because after this event, the future of the city as a Special Administrative Region of China (SAR) did not seemed to be very rosy.⁴⁶



Abb. 21: Tian'anmen Massacre

43 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

44 Vgl. Ebda..

45 Vgl. Ebda..

46 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 22: The Walled City

The demolition of the world-famous Walled City in 1992 and the transfer of the airport Kai Tak from the city centre have provided to the fact that it came to a clear revaluation of Kowloon. Nevertheless, at the moment, the renovation of the early substitute settlements is a big subject, because the qualitative defects of the fast built residential silos, become apparent nowadays. When on July 1st of 1997, the People's Republic of China took control of Hong Kong, the world held its breath for a moment. Opinions differ about whether Hong Kong since changed to its advantage or disadvantage. Democratic rights and journalistic freedom must be defended daily in Hong Kong today. In terms of tourism and the economy however there is no doubt that Hong Kong's role as an export machine and engine of growth across the region remains true.⁴⁷

The appeal of the city for Chinese youth from the "mainland" seeking work is unbroken. Hong Kong not only promises good wages and better medical care than many places in China, the city also does not follow the infamous "one-child policy". However, not only poor migrant workers or pregnant women feel magnetized by Hong Kong, affluent home buyers also are flocking to the city, every third property goes to a buyer from mainland, and these numbers are rising. Hong Kong's retail industry also has discovered the high-spending mainlanders and adjusts its range to suit the taste or lack thereof of the Nouveau Riche from China.⁴⁸

Hong Kong is a shopping paradise and popular tourist destination of the western world, with its own Disneyland, 800 kilometres of coastline, and a mega airport whose connections reach into every corner of the world, Hong Kong is the gateway to southern China and the Pearl River Delta region. Ferries and increasingly bridges connect Hong Kong with Macao, Zhuhai, Guangzhou and the countless coastal towns of southern China, which today represent an economic unit. Tens of millions of Chinese in the Pearl River Delta work for outsourced Hong Kong companies, Hong Kong no longer is an ex-colonial island, but the centre of a mega city in the Delta, which has more than 40 million inhabitants.⁴⁹

Hong Kong has a reputation of being a commercial stronghold, but a cultural desert. In fact, Hong Kong has maintained more traditional Chinese culture than many cities in China, because the city has been spared from the Cultural Revolution and served as a refuge for artists from mainland China. Wong Kar-Wai whose internationally acclaimed films gave the city a cinematic reputation is just one example of successful global cultural production "made in Hong Kong".⁵⁰

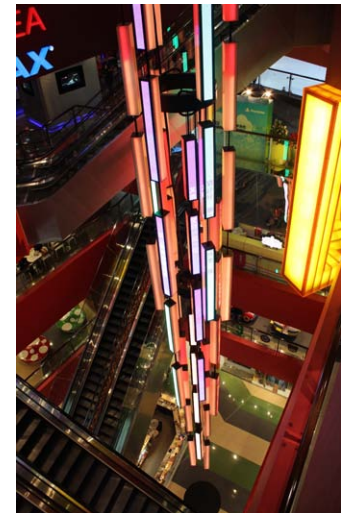


Abb. 23: Shopping Center

47 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

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50 Vgl. Ebda..

In terms of architectural and urban design, however, the city constantly eats itself. The ongoing economic and housing boom in one of the most liberal market economies of the world killed almost all European style pre-war buildings. Only very occasionally a British colonial building still peeks between the high-rise buildings. The remaining colonial buildings existing to this day can be counted now with barely two hands.⁵¹

Architecturally four major offices in Hong Kong ride the tiger: Wong/Ouyang, Dennis Lau, Rocco Yim and P&T have shaped the city with their buildings persistently. In the city, they compete with each other as well as with the development of the Chinese market. At the same time, Hong Kong has proven to be fertile ground for foreign architects.⁵²

Especially European and American architects have contributed to the city and its breathtaking skyline, unrivalled in the world. Famous western architects such as Pei, Rudolph, Foster and Seidlér have shaped the skyline of Victoria with their towers.⁵³



Abb. 24: Police Station, Sham Shui Po

But the foreign influence on Hong Kong's architecture is not always visible. Nearly half of the approximately one thousand architects in Hong Kong are either foreign or from different parts of the world back to Hong Kong.⁵⁴

51 Vgl. The Hong Kong Story, 15.02.2015, Hong Kong.

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3. *Chinese Tradition*



Abb. 25: Lam Tsuen Wishing Tree

3.1 Feng Shui and the Influence at the Design of Buildings

During the last 50 years Hong Kong has grown to one of the most influential finance metropolis in the area of the pearl river delta. In spite of the influence of the west, Hong Kong has always hold on its traditions. The whole city is a concentration of modern and traditional impacts and this is everywhere visible. If one is walking through Hong Kong, it is not very difficult to find buildings which are influenced by Feng Shui. In Hong Kong, the design and plan of a building is not only affected by architects and engineers. There are also the Feng Shui experts, who have a say in this topic. This ancient philosophy of positioning buildings in harmony with the nature is deep-rooted in Hong Kong's culture.⁵⁵

The Dragon Gates

One explanation for Hong Kong's growth in the last years is the good Feng Shui, which flows through the city. The geographical location with the mountains behind the city and the harbour in the front is the perfect harmony. It is said, that dragons are living in the mountains of Hong Kong. These dragons are bearer of positive and powerful energy. This is the energy which is flowing through Hong Kong, caused by the dragons, who make their way from the mountains to the harbour to drink and bathe. This legend is the reason why there are so many buildings in Hong Kong belong the harbour, which have gigantic holes in the middle. With these holes, the dragons have an unobstructed path to the harbour and so the positive energy can continue to flow through the city.⁵⁶



Abb. 26: The Dragon Gates, Victoria Harbour

⁵⁵ Vgl. Kaushik, (09.05.2016):The Feng Shui Skyscrapers of Hong Kong, <http://www.amusingplanet.com/2016/03/the-feng-shui-skyscrapers-of-hong-kong.html>, in:<http://www.amusingplanet.com>, 27.07.2016.

⁵⁶ Vgl. Ebda..

The HSBC Bank

Another example is the HSBC building, which was constructed for around \$700 million in 1985. But not only the construction was cost-intensive even the Feng Shui concepts consumed a big part of the budget. By the time of its completion, it was one of the most expensive projects in the world.⁵⁷

Caused by the Feng Shui Experts the staircase of the building had to be installed in a certain angle to prevent the office of evil spirits, which are flowing straight off the Victoria Harbour. The entrance hall is inspired by the beach, because the water from the Victoria Harbour should wash the money into the building. As well the HSBC made a contract with the government to have on a free view to the Harbour forever.⁵⁸



Abb. 27: The HSBC Bank Building



Abb. 28: The Bank of China Building

Next to the HSBC building is the Bank of China Tower, who neglected Feng Shui experts. Nowadays the tower is considered to bring bad luck, so it is empty most of the year. The tower has many triangles with sharp edges, which are allegedly responsible for leaking negative energy to the surrounding area. The owner of the Lippo Centre, which is next to the tower, went bankrupt and sold the building.⁵⁹

Like the Government House, which has now a peck of trouble. This superstition resulted to two cannon-like structures, which were installed at the top of the HSBC building. The cannons are pointed to the Bank of China Tower to protect the HSBC building of the negative energy and deflecting the energy back to its source.⁶⁰

57 Vgl. Kaushik, (09.05.2016):The Feng Shui Skyscrapers of Hong Kong, <http://www.amusingplanet.com/2016/03/the-feng-shui-skyscrapers-of-hong-kong.html>, in:<http://www.amusingplanet.com>, 27.07.2016.

58 Vgl. Ebda..

59 Vgl. Ebda..

60 Vgl. Ebda..

3.2 Tea as a kind of Living Culture

The tea drinking culture in China is based on a long tradition. Since nearly 3000 years tea was counted as one of the most important drink in the Far Eastern countries, which is also the country of origin of the tea. But even today guest are invited to drink tea because there is no conversation or dinner without tea in China.⁶¹



Abb. 29: Emperor Shen-Nung

The history of the tea in China

Even if it is not exactly possible to say at which period the tea cultivation begun in China, there is a Chinese tradition. It says that around 2737 B.C. the emperor Shen-Nung drank already boiled water for hygienic reasons. One day, when he rested under a tree, some of the leaves flied into his boiling water, caused by the wind.⁶²

Suddenly the water changed the tea's colour and also its flavour—making it delicious. Allegedly this was the birth of the tea, but there are numerous stories about the discovery of the tea in China. The only thing one can be sure about is that there exist first written mentions about tea dating back to the the 3rd century B.C.⁶³

The ritual of the tea drinking

Chinese loves tea and drink preferentially green tea. Especially they also like roses and jasmine teas as well as the region's specialties, like the dragon's tea, red tea, white tea, sky tea and the fine Oolong. Most inhabitants drink their tea pure, but there are also some areas, which have their own tea habits and ceremonies. Like in the province of Hunan, most of the inhabitants drink their tea with pleasure with ginger, sesame, salt, or cooked soy beans.⁶⁴

61 Vgl. History of Tea, <http://www.davudovatea.co.uk/history-of-tea>, in: <http://www.davudovatea.co.uk/index.php?route=common/home>, 27.07.2016.

62 Vgl. Ebda..

63 Vgl. Ebda..

64 Vgl. Ebda..

During a tea ceremony in Hong Kong, one recognizes that the first tea extraction is not used to drink. It is more to spread the smell of the tea in the room. After this the second extraction is drunk. The third extraction is also called the tea of the long friendship. During such a tea ceremony it is common to eat Dim Sum.⁶⁵

Even how to drink a tea in China, has to follow special rules. The tea bowl should be held only with the forefinger and the thumb and just the middle finger supports the other ones from below. To have a conversation during the preparation of the tea is a common thing, but normally everybody is quiet during the drinking. To show how tasty the tea is, it is normal to slurp while sipping the tea.⁶⁶



Abb. 30: Traditional Tea Crockery



Abb. 31: Dim Sum/Dumplings served to tea

If one believes in an ancient Chinese doctrine, one of the biggest pleasures of the life is to drink tea in a garden. So nobody would wonder, that there are some nice tea houses in the parks of Hong Kong. The tea symbolises the pure connection between nature and human. It also helps to strengthen the health, suggestion the digestion and stabilize the internal balance. Tea drinking belongs to the spiritual and cultural life style of the Chinese inhabitants.⁶⁷

During a meal in Hong Kong you always get a green tea to your dish for free. But not only to drink it, also to clean your cutlery with this tea. This normally happens in bigger restaurants, if the visitors are not sure about the hygienic standards there. And tea was always served in small dished plates or cups, only that the tea is not losing its aroma too fast.⁶⁸

65 Vgl. History of Tea, <http://www.davudovatea.co.uk/history-of-tea>, in: <http://www.davudovatea.co.uk/index.php?route=common/home>, 27.07.2016.

66 Vgl. Ebda..

67 Vgl. Ebda..

68 Vgl. Ebda..

3.3 Chinese Furniture

Already several years the Chinese take care of natural attachment and balance with their furniture. The Chinese furniture should be primarily comfortable for the body. During the authority of Ming most of the furniture become proportioned in such a way, that the posture of user could be balanced in all directions. A good posture symbolised a good health and an internal calmness. The Qi could flow undisturbed through the body. The furniture of the Ming dynasty express a kind of weightlessness and pride. The contrast to that is the furniture of the Qing dynasty. These furniture are more likely florid and heavy.⁶⁹



Abb. 33: Wood Carving, Woman in Bed, Ming Dynasty



Abb. 32: Landlady with Guests

The Ming dynasty was also a classic period in the furniture design because they had so many specific features. Even writers, artists or craftsmen ordered this kind furniture, which should contain the different passions of them. Though the furniture and the architecture should bring a little bit of nature in the surrounding of the cities.⁷⁰

Furniture is an important component to the interior. For the production of the furniture, one barely uses nails because they were lighter to transport. It was more likely that the connections were made with miter or tappets. The most important thing was that the house, the furniture, and the residential accessories were always made out of the same wood.⁷¹

69 Vgl. Quinn, Bradley: Wohnstile der Welt CHINA, Tradition, schlichte Eleganz und innovatives Design, München 2003.

70 Vgl. Ebda..

71 Vgl. Ebda..

Armchair



Abb. 34: Chinese Armchair

The idea of the typical armchair, we all know, goes back to Asian nomads. They developed a kind of folding armchair, which they could take with them on the hunt.⁷²

Over the years the armchair of today developed. In the Asian culture the seat height played an important role, because it gave everybody information about the social status of the person. But also there is a big difference between Chinese chairs to Western ones because they differ in height and size of the seating.⁷³

Chinese seats normally have bigger seating, so one could sit with crossed legs. This kind of chair is called Luohan armchair and is named after a Buddhist saint.⁷⁴

The Luohan Chang is one of the most comfortable furniture and is better known as the opium bed. It is an extended chair, where one can sit or lie. The Luohan Chang is the most splendid seat opportunity in the house and normally the seat of the head of the household. In a room the arrangement of the furniture occurred along a north to south axis. The most important seat is always looking in the direction of the south. The rest of the furniture was arranged around this important seat and the major axis in the room⁷⁵

Bed

The bed, which is also a part of the furniture, has a very special meaning. During the night it could be transformed with the help of curtains to an own room. During winter it also helped a little bit against the cold.⁷⁶

The bed with chairs and lower tables were the most important part of the landlady. In this private living area of the house she received her guests. This furniture was also an important part of the dowry. Normally one should not suspend a mirror on the opposite site of bed, because it could disturb the Qi-energy of the sleeping person. Another thing is that the beds are normally framed from three sides. This should protect the sleeping person during night.⁷⁷



Abb. 35: Traditional Bed

72 Vgl. Quinn, Bradley: Wohnstile der Welt CHINA, Tradition, schlichte Eleganz und innovatives Design, München 2003.

73 Vgl. Ebda..

74 Vgl. Ebda..

75 Vgl. Ebda..

76 Vgl. Ebda..

77 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 36: Foldable Table

Table

Another important furniture is the table. The form of the table follows always the purpose of it. For example the upper class had for eating, working and playing always different tables. On the other side the poorer person normally use one table for several activities, if they had enough space for one.⁷⁸

One could find out that most dining tables are normally round and altar tables are narrowly and rectangular. Square tables were often used by officials, artist, scholars or as a gaming table. But the styles of the different tables went from very simple to skilful.⁷⁹

Bathroom

The Bathroom in China, played an important role in connection with the design of the buildings. Not only the buildings developed through the time, even the bathrooms developed. In 1960 it was very usual that the bathroom and the toilets were communal areas. The showers had only cold water supply and the whole bathroom had just a screed floor and cement painted concrete walls. In the 1970s the floor got mosaic tiled and dado height wall tiles. These communal bathrooms were not only used for hygiene from every inhabitant of the floor. It was also used as an area for washing clothes and tableware. Caused by the supply problem with drinking water, many of these bathrooms used sea water. It was an cheap solution but the main problem was the salt, which destroyed slowly the steel pipes.⁸⁰



Abb. 37: Communal Bathroom Model

During 1980s, the first flats were designed with their own bathroom and toilet inside the flat. Most of these bathrooms had pedestal toilet with plastic cistern and a cold water steel supply pipe. Mosaic tiles were at the floor and full height wall tiles. It was an improvement, but the bathroom units were small measured.⁸¹

78 Vgl. Quinn, Bradley: Wohnstile der Welt CHINA, Tradition, schlichte Eleganz und innovatives Design, München 2003.

79 Vgl. Ebda..

80 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

81 Vgl. Ebda..

3.4 Gardens / Parks

The basic components of Chinese garden are wall rock and water. For the perfect environment, the right proportions of the rocks, was very important. They are based on the mountains in the nature and very often there are ways, passages and small caves like in the nature. The visitors should get a feeling, how the old nomads hiked through the mountains. Although the builders wanted to transmit the most important traits of the mountain to the visitor.⁸²

The same meaning was with the water. The mountains should symbolise the strong male Yang and on the other side the was the soft aspect of the water, which symbolised the female Yin.⁸³



Abb. 38: The Hong Kong Park



Abb. 39: Subarea, Kowloon Park

If one looks closer on a Chinese garden, one recognises that they are quite small. The reason for that was that they were built very often in the centre of the town where the place was limited. But builders of these park used different tricks to show the infinite fullness of nature and the universe. One common trick was to arrange the garden in many small subareas. So nobody could see the whole garden at once and the garden seemed to be bigger.⁸⁴

82 Vgl. Der traditionelle Chinesische Gelehrtengarten, <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at/gartentipps/der-traditionelle-chinesische-gelehrtengarten/>, in: <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at>, 29.07.2016.

83 Vgl. Ebda..

84 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 40: View Through A Window, Kowloon Park

A typical Chinese garden was built up of a main area in the middle, which contained the water expanse. Around this centre there were many small subareas, which were separated with white-washed walls. Every subarea had their own subject.⁸⁵



Abb. 41: Different Openings, Kowloon Park

The only connections between these subareas were doors and windows, which created interesting views. To extend the garden optically many gardens arranged these openings one after another. So there was no possibility to set the focus on something. Plants are also an essential part of a Chinese garden. They were not only used so that the garden look more colourful or blooming, but so that the gardens could be identified with the noble qualities of the plants.⁸⁶

85 Vgl. Der traditionelle Chinesische Gelehrten Garten, <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at/gartentipps/der-traditionelle-chinesische-gelehrten-garten/>, in: <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at>, 29.07.2016.

86 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 42: ZigZag Ways, Kowloon Park

For example the bamboo stand for mettle even under extreme conditions. The pine symbolised a long life, with their old but strong limbs. The lotus rises from the dirty water against the sky and produce wonderful flowers.⁸⁷

Stones, ways, water, plants and even buildings were so arranged that positive energy could flow. This will bring luck. On the other hand the builders tried to prevent the visitors from negative luck. For example bridges or ways are running zigzag, because this stop evil spirits. They can only run straight ahead. Every element, building and plant follows an exact plan.⁸⁸



Abb. 43: Waterfall, Hong Kong Park

87 Vgl. Der traditionelle Chinesische Gelehrtengarten, <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at/gartentipps/der-traditionelle-chinesische-gelehrtengarten/>, in: <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at>, 29.07.2016.

88 Vgl. Ebda..

These Garden and Parks in Hong Kong are places where the builders created small universe to have the perfect harmony between earth and sky. Even today many inhabitants use these Parks to come down and flee from the metropolitan jungle. If one enters such an Garden or Park, one suddenly just hear the pure nature, birds singing or the whoosh of the waterfall. It is understandable that a lot of people came to these Parks in the morning hours to train Taichi or during noon to have a meal or on the weekends with the whole family to have a picnic. There are also some tea houses in these parks, where one can enjoy a nice cup of green tea during the day.⁸⁹



Abb. 44: Turtles and Koi carps are in the most artificial lakes

⁸⁹ Vgl. Der traditionelle Chinesische Gelehrtengarten, <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at/gartentipps/der-traditionelle-chinesische-gelehrtengarten/>, in: <http://www.pflanzplan-gartengestaltung.at>, 29.07.2016.

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4. *Social Housing in the last 50 years*



Abb. 45: Social Housing, Sham Shui Po

4.1 Beginning of Social Housing

The development of social housing in Hong Kong was always limited by its special topography. The housing development was concentrated along both sides of the Victoria Harbour. The extreme immigration during the following years, led to an upsurge in demand for dwellings. And also a rise of tenement buildings, where many immigrants were crammed, was the consequence. In 1937, during the Japanese invasion of China more and more immigrants fled to Hong Kong, which worsened extremely the housing problem. This and the civil war years later in China, led to a wave of immigration and at the same time the government of Hong Kong tried to become the master of the situation with the help of fast and cheap built social housing.⁹⁰



Abb. 46: High Density and Less Space, Typical Social Housing

⁹⁰ Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

4.2 Street Sleeping

To sleep on the street is one of the most comfortless human conditions, where personal hygiene, safety human dignity and the basic need, like food and having a shelter are at the stake. Homelessness or Street Sleeping is one of the most common social problems in many cities all around the world. Many cities recognizes that safe and stable housing as a basic human right, but this kind of view is far from the idea of the policy of Hong Kong's government.⁹¹

Most of the pre - war Chinese Tenements had an „arcade“. To shelter from the strong sun and rain, the homeless would set up temporary shelters made of timber, zinc sheets and cardboard under those „arcades“. The number of street sleepers sharply rose after the fire of 1953.⁹²



Abb. 47: Homeless Area, Sham Shui Po

The first time there was a reported count of the Street Sleepers was in 1977. All together there were nearly 1,000 street sleepers reported. During the last decades, the number of Street Sleepers in combination with problems like poverty and unemployment had an acute rise in Hong Kong. Surprisingly more and more Street Sleepers are from a younger generation, who are high school educated and a lot of them even have jobs.⁹³

91 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

92 Vgl. Ebda..

93 Vgl. Ebda..

In a huge industrial city like Hong Kong, with a GDP of over 2,000 billion HK\$ annual, more than the half of the Street Sleepers explained, that cannot afford their rent, is the main reason why they are living on the street. More than 40% of them are not getting any government welfare and have to survive with low-paying jobs and support from non-governmental organizations. Many of them have to survive a month with less than 4000HK\$, which is quite less for paying a rent or even more. If one takes a look at the statistic of the Social Welfare Department, there should be currently about 600 Street Sleepers in Hong Kong, but the Society for Community Organization estimates the number to be around 1,200.⁹⁴



Abb. 48: Homeless Shelter 1

Caused by the highly-nomadic nature of Street Sleepers, it is difficult to provide an exactly statistic, but also the “actual” statistic is more than 10 years old. Caused by these statistical inconsistency and inaccuracy, it is quite difficult to identify appropriate resources and to make a policy changes.⁹⁵

Through the actual policy, Street Sleepers have very less rights. Indeed there are no specific laws in Hong Kong, which would forbid sleeping on the streets, but by the government targets them, by clearing all personal belongings or by using loudspeakers at hourly intervals at night to clear the harbour waterfront at Tsim Sha Tsui. For example even the Leisure and Cultural Services Department adapted their water-sprinklers to target the Street Sleepers. Sometimes the use of corrosive antiseptic powder was sprayed in the area of the Street Sleepers which caused itching. During the last years handles have been installed on benches or uneven stones and decorations have been placed under flyovers, to prevent anyone to sleep there.⁹⁶



Abb. 49: Homeless Shelter 2

Harassment by the police is a quite common thing for the Street sleepers. Various government departments spend more time to implement different tactics to monitor the Street Sleepers, or even cast them out of their places, than to solve the main issue.⁹⁷

94 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

95 Vgl. Ebda..

96 Vgl. Ebda..

97 Vgl. Ebda..

4.3 Cave House

Some people were living in caves or along hillside. They just installed a door and made it a home. When government officials inspected cave houses in Sham Shui Po in the 1950s, they discovered a lot of cave houses scattered along hillside. Nowadays nobody lives anymore in such cave houses, but during the period of the huge immigrant waves from mainland china, it was a common thing.⁹⁸

Wong Cho Chi

He was the person-in-charge of a resettlement block rooftop school in 1959. He had despatched teachers to make home visit and discovered a small portion of their students from extremely poor families living in cave houses. Although those cave houses were messy with no electricity and water supply and no furniture, at least the occupants had a shelter.⁹⁹



Abb. 50: Cave on Lamma Island

98 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

99 Vgl. Ebda..

4.4 Squatter

Squatting is nothing new here in Hong Kong, even in 1844, the Governor of Hong Kong issued a proclamation against Squatters on Hong Kong Island.¹⁰⁰

Before the beginning of the Second World War one could already find urban squatters in the near of shipyards or quarries and were mostly used for residential purposes. On the other side there were the agricultural squatters which one can normally find in more rural areas.¹⁰¹

After the Second World War in 1945 until the early 1950s, a huge number of immigrants squeezed into Hong Kong. A result of this immigration was the rapid growth of the squatter population, caused by a lack of accommodation. Nearly 25% of the whole population of Hong Kong during this period lived in squatters.¹⁰²



Abb. 51: Sai Tau Tsuen Squatter Settlement 1961

So these immigrants started to build squatters. They were unauthorized temporary houses of bad quality and simple materials, such as zinc covering, timber and stones. The squatters were built in rows along the hillside or around street corners or narrow lanes. Without any water supply and toilet facilities, these squatters live in terrible living conditions.¹⁰³

The inhabitants of these accommodations need to purchase water from their neighbours who own their own wells. The majority of these squatters were simple-storey huts, sometimes beyond two meter in height. Some earlier squatters were bigger and were well constructed, but the main structure was normally constructed out of stone, brick, or reinforced concrete.¹⁰⁴

100 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

101 Vgl. Ebda..

102 Vgl. Ebda..

103 Vgl. Ebda..

104 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 52: Squatter, Lamma Island

Their lives were often threatened by floods, fire caused by unauthorized electrical connections or cooking, industrial accidents or broken kerosene lamps and many other incidents. After a new Building Ordinances came into effect in 1956, a huge number of households were displaced caused by the redevelopment of old tenements. With the pre-1964 resettlement policy, there was no possibility for a provision for the rehousing of tenants, which got displaced by the redevelopment. So the new residential units which were built were often not to reach for the lower-income households, caused by the higher rents.¹⁰⁵

One of the results was the expansion of the whole squatter areas. In 1961, the number of the squatter inhabitants reached the 360.000 persons boarder. Caused by this huge number and the large area where they lived, there were large areas of land which cannot be used for permanent development. Over all Hong Kong, there were 130 squatter villages, which were ranging in population size from 29 persons in Tai Tam Village to 40.000 persons in Hok Lo or Sai Tau Village. One of the biggest squatter areas were the Shau Kei Wan foothills, were a population of nearly 50.000 persons lived.¹⁰⁶

A high concentration of the squatter villages were normally found in areas of Hong Kong were one can find a high density of residential, commercial and industrial use, but there were also some agricultural squatters, which were more in rural settings.¹⁰⁷

Between the 1950s and 1960s, the squatter villages were located mainly in:¹⁰⁸

Hong Kong Island:

- *The Tai Hang, Causeway Bay and North Point foothills*
- *The Shau Kei Wan foothills*
- *Chai Wan*
- *Aberdeen*
- *Stanley*

Kowloon:

- *The Shek Kip Mei, Tai Hang Sai and Kowloon Tsai foothills*
- *Kowloon City and Tung Tau Village*
- *Diamond Hill*
- *Hung Hom*



Abb. 53: Squatter Village, Stanley

105 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

106 Vgl. Ebda..

107 Vgl. Ebda..

108 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 54: Squatter House, Lamma Island

During the 1960s, more than 65% of all squatter structures on Hong Kong Island were residential squatters. The other 35% were normally used for economic activities, like factories, vegetable farms, pig and chicken farms and much more.¹⁰⁹

Some of the bigger squatter villages were contributing substantially towards the economy of Hong Kong, but on the other hand most of the urban areas became step by step the marketplace, where inhabitants of the huge squatters could create a business. The dwellers became hawkers and started to sell goods and offered services in the near of their squatter areas.¹¹⁰

The squatter areas were a thorn in the government's side, so they started the policy which aimed at the eradications of squatters. The government tried not to provide the squatters with any facilities and utility services which inhabitants of other types of housing normally would provide.¹¹¹

Caused by these act, the result was that only some of the squatter villages had just a level of services that the inhabitants would need for health and sanitary needs. Not to mention the comfort of the inhabitants, but the only exception were the standpipes. These pipes were provided by the government and with a rate of 1 for 500 inhabitants, it was a quit reliable source of water supply.¹¹²

Just a small group of inhabitants had proper electricity supply, which they organized illegal by tapping of electricity from nearby buildings or transmission cables. One could get the electricity supply from the Triad Society members, for a fee for the "service".¹¹³

In the beginning of the 1980s, Hong Kong's government began to regularize the remaining settlements by registering each squatter.¹¹⁴

This gave the inhabitants the possibility to legally connect their squatters to the local power grid and sewerage system, but on the other hand it also imposed restrictions on any other modification to informally-built squatters. It was not possible to renovate or expand them or even buy and sell them. So many inhabitants could keep their squatters and prevent the uncontrolled expansion of these shantytowns.¹¹⁵



Abb. 55: Squatter Settlement., Lamma Island

109 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

110 Vgl. Ebda..

111 Vgl. Ebda..

112 Vgl. Ebda..

113 Vgl. Ebda..

114 Vgl. Ebda..

115 Vgl. Ebda..

Au Tiung Yim

He and his family arrived in Hong Kong in 1947. His father was unemployed for years and all the money was used up. They managed to build a 2-storey squatter on the side street in Shek Kip Mei where they utilized the front yard for keeping livestock and farming and the ground floor for rental. Their squatter was burned down in the fire of 1953 and his family of six members had slept on streets for 4 years before moving into Block D of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area.¹¹⁶

Wong Sui Ching

She fled from the huge Shek Kip Mei Fire with her two-month daughter, an old blanket and luggage bags. Her family then moved to her bosom friend's roof house on the Chinese Tenement in Fuk Wah Street for temporary stay and were arranged to move to a resettlement block two years later.¹¹⁷

Mak Yiu Sang

He, who lived in a bed of a tenement unit in 1950 to 1953, was not allowed to cook there. He would spend ten cents for two newspapers and twenty cents for 3 loaves after a day's work. He read the newspapers and fed himself with the loaves at home. At night of the fire in 1953, he took all his properties, a canvas bed and a small luggage bag and carried a neighbour housewife on his back and fled from the fire.¹¹⁸



Abb. 56: Begging Children in Shek Kip Mei

¹¹⁶ Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

¹¹⁷ Vgl. Ebda..

¹¹⁸ Vgl. Ebda..

4.5 Chinese Tenement or Tong Lau

Since the mid-19th century Chinese Tenement or Tong Lau (唐樓) were developed in Hong Kong. The style of the buildings was unique. The ground floor of the building was designed for a shop while the mezzanine and the upper storeys were for living.¹¹⁹

During this time it was quit usual that multiple tenants shared one flat due, caused by the less living space in Hong Kong. The Chinese Tenement is one of the most common building types in South china, Southeast Asia and Hong Kong and can be found also today in many older districts of the city, like Sham Shui Po. The Chinese Tenement also has some particular stylistic flourishes in each different city. After 1842, when Hong Kong became a British colony, a huge number of Chinese immigrants from China's coastal cities settled to this politically stable colonial city, to search for a better live, causing a serious shortage of housing. On the other hand, the development of Victoria City (維多利亞城), the district around Central today, caused cheap work, which could be backed by the influx of the new Chinese inhabitants.¹²⁰

Most of the Chinese workers began to settle in Sheung Wan, a district of Victoria City. Trying to copy the architectural style from South China, the Chinese Tenements were developed and they were a quick and convenient answer to the housing problem.¹²¹



Abb. 57: Tong Lau, Sham Shui Po, 2016

There are two different kinds of Chinese Tenements; on the one hand one has the pre-war Tong Laus, which were built before 1945. Those Tenements were normally 3 to 4 story high. On the other hand, there are the Tenements, which were built after the 1950s and were mostly 8 to 9 stories high¹²²

119 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

120 Vgl. Ebda..

121 Vgl. Ebda..

122 Vgl. Ebda..

The older Tong Laus were long and narrow from the design and had a long and dark staircase in the centre, without any natural lighting or ventilation. Because of the less space, there were no elevators or toilets in these buildings. This explains the need for the collection of night soil (倒夜香) in the past.¹²³



Abb. 58: Tong Lau, Shek Kip Mei

Although Hong Kong Tenements were like the other Tenements in South China, they were unique in their details, where one can see the great mix of Chinese and Western styles. Many of the Chinese Tenements had balconies or verandas, which project over the pedestrian sidewalk. Kee Lau (騎樓) type Tenements had columns to support the projecting floors and formed a continuous arcade on the street level.¹²⁴

One of the first Chinese Tenements were built with bricks or stone load-bearing walls and beams. For the walls they used the blue-grey Canton bricks, which were much cheaper than the stronger red bricks. For the ground floor, there were used Canton tiles, but for the upper floors Chinese timber floor planks were used which were supported by timber rafters. And for the pitched roof there were used unglazed clay tiles. After 1935 this kind of construction changed and the whole building was built with reinforced concrete.¹²⁵

Although the living conditions and the design of the earliest Chinese Tenements were not the best, they were built to respond to the climate, by using high ceiling, mostly between 4 to 5 metres high, large windows, balconies and verandas.¹²⁶

These features helped to create a well-lit and well-ventilated interior, as a solution to the hot and humid climate of Hong Kong. One of the most typical things for Tong Lau's was the accommodation of different families, caused by the huge number of immigrant workers. So each flat was divided into the front room, middle room and end room, or even smaller cubicles, but if there was still too less space, the roof and the attic above the kitchen would be rented out too. The first room was the only room, which had access to fresh air and natural light. Normally this room was occupied by the landlord, because he was the only person who could afford the high rent.¹²⁷



Abb. 59: Tong Lau, 9 Storeys

123 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

124 Vgl. Ebda..

125 Vgl. Ebda..

126 Vgl. Ebda..

127 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 60: Tong Lau, Mongkok

All other rooms were separated by partitions, which were built lower than the ceiling height, so there was a possibility to leave a gap for ventilation, because there was no window in the whole flat except at the front room of the building. If one lived in one of these partitions privacy was a critical issue, because the partitions were thin and without any soundproofing. It was quite normal that in one Tenement unit of 37 square metres were 6 families, with 32 people accommodated. The hygiene conditions were also poor, because all unit inhabitants had to share one toilet, bathroom and kitchen.¹²⁸

In the first years since the Chinese Tenements developed in Hong Kong, there was no regulation on its design. All of the buildings were tightly packed, built side to side and back to back, without any free space for natural ventilation and even the light could not reach into the interior, because the building blocks were long and narrow.¹²⁹

After the outbreak of bubonic plague in the overcrowded Tong Lau block quarters around Tai Ping Shan Street in Sheung Wan around 1894, the government finally introduced the first building regulations under the Public Health and Buildings Ordinance in 1903. Since then, the Public Health and Building Ordinance tried to regulate the design of Tong Lau's to create a better quality of construction and living space.¹³⁰

To develop a better design of the Tong Lau's, a black lane and an open space had to be provided. That meant that there had to be more space between the buildings. Additionally, the building height was restricted to the width of the street it was facing to ensure that enough daylight came into the rooms and also the building depth was limited to 12 metres to improve the natural lighting condition of the interior.¹³¹

After a new law got in force by the Building Ordinance in 1935, the regulation over the design of Tong Lau's was further tightened. The allowable building depth was reduced to 11 metres. A new type of Ting Lau's was developed with a new light and ventilation system, which would be provide at every storey on every staircase. Since then all Tong Lau's had natural light and a ventilated common staircase.¹³²

The post-war tenement house typology can still be found in older districts in Hong Kong. A characteristic feature in plan and form are the location of lavatories, kitchen and a staircase to the rear of the building, facing in to a scavenging lane and pocket spaces for fresh air. Additional features include stairway windows running from the first to the top floor and balconies. In order to comply with statutory day lighting requirement, top floors gradually stepped back within a prescribed lighting plane.¹³³



Abb. 61: Post-War Tenement, Sham Shui Po

128 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

129 Vgl. Ebda..

130 Vgl. Ebda..

131 Vgl. Ebda..

132 Vgl. Ebda..

133 Vgl. Ebda..

4.6 Roof House

The Roof Houses or Penthouse Slums generally refers unauthorized and illegal housing on the rooftops of the Chinese Tenements. You can find them everywhere in Hong Kong, usually on pre-1980s buildings, which have a larger rooftops than others. Most of these huts were without electricity and water supply. The inhabitants of such roof houses were extremely poor people, who were unable to afford Chinese Tenements or normal apartments caused by the high rental fees. So these people were forced to look for alternatives, like for example living in illegal houses on the top of the buildings.¹³⁴

During the typhoon seasons in Hong Kong, most of the roof houses were vulnerable to destruction, because some of the roofs flew off and that poses danger. In 2006, there were already 3,982 rooftop dwellers living in Hong Kong according to the population census and nowadays this number rose to 10.000 rooftop dwellers. Today most of these Roof Houses could be found in the older districts of Kowloon, like Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong and Tai Kok Tsui.¹³⁵

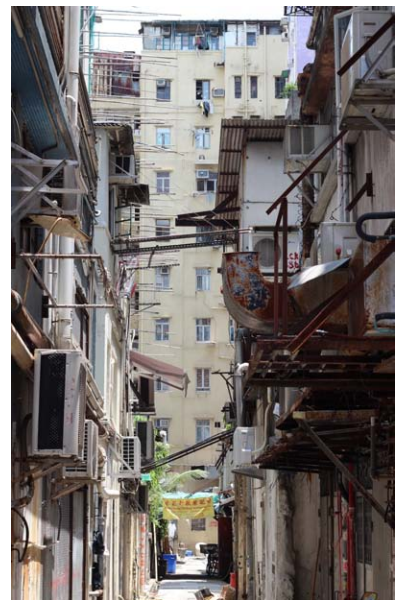


Abb. 62: Roof Houses, Sham Shui Po



Abb. 63: Furniture Roof House

In a city like Hong Kong, where 18% of the inhabitants live in poverty and a family can normally wait for over 3 years for a flat in a public housing estate, the rooftop houses represent one of the few affordable forms of housing in the city. During the 1950s until the 1960s a housing crisis developed, caused by the large number of immigrants who left mainland China because of famine, poverty and political persecution. These immigrants tried to search for affordable housing options here in Hong Kong.¹³⁶

134 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

135 Vgl. Ebda..

136 Vgl. Ebda..

In the beginning of the early 1970s, Blockhouses and Roof Houses, which were very cheap but offered very poor living conditions, became more prevalent. During the 1970s until the 1980s, after significant economic development, the housing costs started to increase more and more.¹³⁷



Abb. 64: Roof Slums, Sham Shui Po

The government tried to stop these illegal Roof Houses because these buildings were a thorn in their flesh and so the government created more pressure for poor people to find some other low rent options. However, with rising rental costs every year, the problem with too less affordable housing and the too long time period to get into public housing, people continued to live in the Roof Houses.¹³⁸

During the 1950s until the 1960s, the cubicle Roof Houses were generally built at the top of the Chinese tenements, out of concrete, brick walls, wood and tins and their size ranged from 9 to 28 square metres. Between those buildings were narrow passageways and even some of them had a small areas for growing some plants or vegetables and drying their laundry. Some of the bigger houses had also some kind of air condition.¹³⁹



Abb. 65: Roof Houses, Tai Kok Tsui

For example, the Hoi On Building in Tai Kok Tsui had more than 100 inhabitants living on the rooftop before the whole building was demolished for new development, caused by a new policy, that allowed new construction of buildings and shopping centres on the building slots of old Chinese Tenements, made the redevelopment projects quite easier.¹⁴⁰

With this policy it was possible to displace the inhabitants of the Roof Houses and a lot of them ended up having to live in an industrial building, in a tiny room.¹⁴¹

137 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

138 Vgl. Ebda..

139 Vgl. Ebda..

140 Vgl. Ebda..

141 Vgl. Ebda..

Normally in Hong Kong, the legal apartments were sold for more than a million HK\$, while the Roof Houses generally were sold on the Black Market for a little bit less than 50,000HK\$, tacitly by the government. One have the big contrast between the cheap and easy built Roof Houses and the legal apartments of Hong Kong, one of the world's most expensive luxury cities.¹⁴²

A huge number of the inhabitants have lived for more than 30 years in these houses. The newer inhabitants are mainly from Asian countries, like Nepal or Pakistan and also from mainland China. One of the biggest problems for these Roof Slums is the poor hygiene, caused by the bad fresh water supply and also the rainwater that leaks inside the buildings. The main huts were built out of non-water resistant materials like wood and even the roofs of the Chinese Tenements had no drainage systems for the rainwater. Another main problem which complicated the hygiene, were the presence of mosquito, flies, cockroaches and rats on the overcrowded dirty roofs, which spread diseases and contaminated the food.¹⁴³



Abb. 66: Roof House, New Territories

The bigger slums become a breeding place for all different kinds of viruses and bacteria and also the inhabitants were susceptible to many infections and illnesses. Another problem was the temperature of the slums, which was higher than anywhere else due to the non-existent air condition system and the energy-absorbing metal.¹⁴⁴



Abb. 67: Illegal Corrugated Metal Roof Houses

As there were no elevators in the old Chinese Tenements, the inhabitants of the Roof Houses had to walk the stairs up to the 8 or 9 floor to reach their homes. It was very difficult for the elderly, especially if they had some injuries or health problems. It was not so easy to bring all building materials up to the roof, so the inhabitants used lightweight material, but these were not made to withstand heavy storms or typhoons. Especially for buildings with only one exit at the roof, the biggest problem was fire. Nowadays buildings with just one fire exit are going to be tagged for top priority for demolition, caused by their danger.¹⁴⁵

To escape from the rooftop was quit a challenge, caused by the narrow passageways, which were encumbered by possessions. A least one should not forget that the Chinese Tenements were not designed to endure the high weight of the Roof Slums and also metal becomes quite easily rusty under the high temperature and humidity.¹⁴⁶

142 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

143 Vgl. Ebda..

144 Vgl. Ebda..

145 Vgl. Ebda..

146 Vgl. Ebda..

The Roof Slums were a series of highly overcrowded dwellings. In some areas of Hong Kong, more than 100 people lived on only one rooftop in their easy built huts, which could accommodate a few pieces of furniture and sometimes electrical appliances. The overcrowded conditions on these rooftops in combination with the limited facilities, made these residential areas to one of the worst one. Many of the Roof Houses inhabitants usually had low self-esteem and quality of life. They had often the kind of feeling that other people would look down on them, caused by the way they lived. The inhabitants were unhappy to have no other choice than to live in these old and broken huts. They were also scared all the time that their homes would probably get demolished, because they were all unauthorized buildings. Sometimes they even claimed that they would be rather dead, than to leave their homes and get relocated to a new place.¹⁴⁷



Abb. 68: Furniture Roof House

The dire straits of the nearly 10,000 people, who are living in rooftop slums, attracted slowly more media attention, but the main problem is, that there is still to fewer guaranties, that these people get access to affordable housing options. So just removing people from their Roof Houses is not a viable option, on the other hand the Hong Kong government has very few options in the short term to solve this problem. One of the social workers, Sze Lai-Shan, who works for the Society for Community Organization has urged the government to provide more rental housing. He states, “The government doesn't know much about this and they don't bother to know because they don't have a rehousing policy for these people...they don't want to make [the rooftop dwellers] homeless, so they let them stay.”¹⁴⁸



Abb. 69: View from a Roof House, Sham Shui Po

The main problem is that there is insufficient public housing to meet the demand. Every year, there are just about 15,000 new apartment units built, but there are quite more than 300,000 people, who are on the waiting list for public housing. Maybe one solution would be to use some available housing on the outlying islands, which surround Hong Kong, but even if the inhabitants of the Roof slums would get access to an apartment, the cost of transportation to work and their children to school, such as a school in Kowloon, which started a program, which was designed to help ethnic minorities and new immigrants to learn Cantonese, most of the inhabitants just wish to stay in their illegal huts because of the easy access to the city and the beautiful view.¹⁴⁹

147 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

148 Vgl. Ebda..

149 Vgl. Ebda..

4.7 Boat House

In the gulfs along Sham Shui Po and Cheung Sha Wan, boat houses were the homes of fishermen. The boat houses were lack of water, electricity and hygiene facilities. Drinking water was collected at public fresh water pipes on shore. The number of boat houses in Sham Shui Po dropped since the 1950s and were nearly extinct by the 1970s. There is still one floating village existing in Hong Kong. The Aberdeen floating village, in Chinese: 香港仔水上人家 is located in the South District of Hong Kong Island. The harbour contains nearly 600 junks, which house almost 6.000 inhabitants. During the 14th to 17th centuries Aberdeen's role was a port for sandalwood, which arrived in junks from Sha Tin and Lantau Island.¹⁵⁰

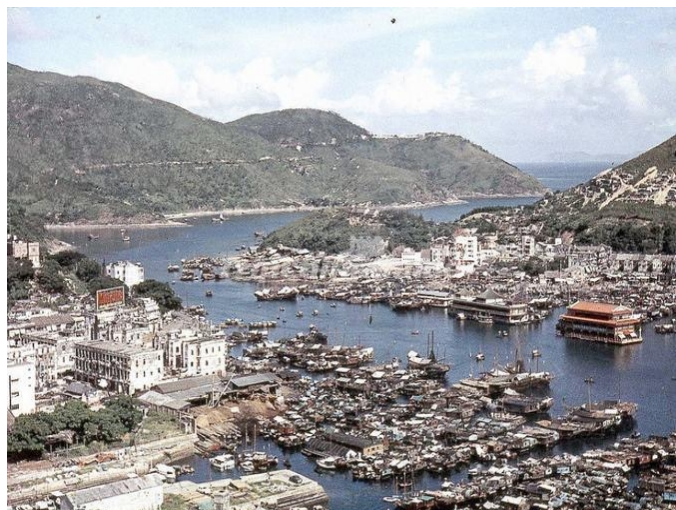


Abb. 70: Floating Village, Aberdeen

From there the sandalwood was dispatched into large boats to the major cities in China. Since the 19th century Aberdeen has emerged as one of the most important fishing villages, after the British set foot on Aberdeen's harbour. After the second century, junk boats have been used as an important vessel for the fishing industry by the Japanese. After some time the fishing industry grew more and more and the small village grew in population from 2.000 in 1841 to 150.000 in 1963.¹⁵¹

But in the last two decades, the population of the Floating Village has decreased first to 40.000 in 1982 and then to 6.000, caused by the rapid fisheries development in the Guangdong Province and the high operating costs. Step by step the boat people use their boats only for fishing during the day, instead of living on the boat permanently. Aberdeen has been affected to the modernization, but it never was enough to destroy its beautiful history and culture.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

¹⁵¹ Vgl. Ebda..

¹⁵² Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 71: Boat House

The inhabitants of the Floating Village are mainly Tanka, they are a group of people who have settled here in Hong Kong between the 7th to 9th centuries. The inhabitants are also referred to as “boat people”, but they are more boat dwellers and should not be confused with the Vietnamese refugee boat people, who arrived with their boats in the 1970s.¹⁵³

During the first visit of Aberdeen one could see and feel the history of this once busy place. One can see the big mix between the traditional boats and the modern yachts, which are floating in the harbour. Here one can see the perfect example of harmonic coexistence. The Floating Village is one of the most famous tourist attractions caused by the beautiful sceneries and the delicious seafood, which you can get at every restaurant. So nowadays the tourism and catering industries has an important influence on this part of Hong Kong Island.¹⁵⁴

153 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

154 Vgl. Ebda..

4.8 Stilt House

In the fishing villages of Tai O and Ma Wan are stilt houses quite common. These buildings are a type of housing where the whole building got elevated above the water on stilts. The inhabitants of those buildings are Tanka, who are a group of people who have lived in South China provinces including Guangdong and Fujian for centuries and they were also one of the earliest inhabitants of Hong Kong.¹⁵⁵

The building typology has developed through the time and has changed the habits and the lifestyle of its creators.¹⁵⁶



Abb. 72: Stilt Houses, Tai O

Centuries ago, the Tanka lived on boats and relied mainly on fishing and salt production for their living. There is no exactly definition of what ethnicity the Tankas were. Most people believe, that they were a mix of Han and some other southern races and those they had fled to the sea caused by war or exile. Nevertheless, nearly 200 years ago the stilt house typology in Tai O was developed, when the Tai O Tanka inhabitants moved into their houses, as their family sizes became too big to be accommodated by the traditional boathouses.¹⁵⁷

One of the first designs of the stilt houses was a building in a barrel-shape. It could be resembled a boat with wooden planks, stone stilts and palm leaves. Years later the buildings were made out of metal sheeting, wooden planks and stilts. The barrel form was taken over by the pitched roof and so the houses started to expand from one-storey to two-storey high. The inhabitants found that the earliest structures were too weak, even the stone pillars collapse easily and the whole structure could be shift away during serious floods.¹⁵⁸

155 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

156 Vgl. Ebda..

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Abb. 73: Stilt Village, Sok Kwu Wan

So the inhabitants of Tai O began to take the wood from disused fishing boats for the construction of the stilt houses in the 50s. These boats were made out of reddish brown ironwood from South China, because it was extremely strong and also resistant to water erosion. The locals found it to be the right and perfect material for their environment, but after a devastating fire in 2000, there was a new type of stilt house developed. New materials like plaster and aluminum sheets were used to make the village more fire-resisting.¹⁵⁹

Spatial arrangement

Buildings, which belong to different families often cluster along a common wooden walkway, which stretches from land to sea. Along this axis, there were often placed the kitchens and the shared bathrooms. The houses, which were built at the end of this walkway and above the water, had a wooden deck. The fishing boats of the inhabitants were tied right underneath and were easily accessible with a ladder, which stretched from the deck to the water.¹⁶⁰

Constructional improvement

The old barrel-shaped buildings were divided into two rooms, but the newer houses nowadays have 3 compartments on the ground floor and the bedrooms on the upper floor. Cross bracing was also used to improve structural stability to support the stilts.¹⁶¹



Abb. 74: Bridge, Tai O

Reconstruction of the vernacular village

After a devastating fire in 2000, all affected inhabitants were allowed to rebuild their homes. Nevertheless, the inhabitants needed to apply for reconstruction licenses and compile with fire safety requirements, but the reconstruction process was organic and flexible as typical in vernacular architecture. The inhabitants had the possibility to communicate closely with the builders, so the resulting new buildings were all customised to the owners needs.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

¹⁶⁰ Vgl. Ebda..

¹⁶¹ Vgl. Ebda..

¹⁶² Vgl. Ebda..

Evolution of stilt house: 4 generations

The Architecture and the design of the buildings will always change in response to the need of the people. This kind of intense integration with the people's live is particularly evidenced in vernacular buildings like the stilt houses of Tai O. Maybe vernacular architecture appear one as unprofessional and not as the most aesthetically pleasant, but this kind of architecture evolves through the time and starts to fit into the people's life and so it is a very good solution for the users.¹⁶³



Abb. 75: Stilt House, Tai O

First generation

- Bamboo arch roof
- Wooded structural framework
- Circular stone plinth
- Single storey rectangular compartment

Third generation

- Wooden frame roof
- Wooden structural framework
- Wood pillar as base support
- Multi-storey compartment with semi-open deck

Second generation

- Wooden truss roof
- Wooden structural framework
- Slender stone plinth
- Single storey rectangular compartment

Fourth generation

- Wooden frame roof
- Wooden structural framework
- Further division of space
- Balcony over front deck
- Wood pillar protected with concrete plinth

The front side of the stilt house is normally the terrace side, which is facing to the water. In the past these villages had insufficient electricity supply, so they put a lot of the activities like drying the salted fish, net knitting or cooking outside under the sun and so these outdoor spaces became important. After the fishing industry diminished, most of the families and the younger generation still use these terrace to enjoy a nice barbecue on the deck while older inhabitants still dry their salted fish, salted egg yolks and shrimps in the sun. After the reconstruction of the houses, which were lost in the fire of 2000, most of the inhabitants worked very closely with the builders to make sure that their new houses are going to be designed by their individual needs. So for example, Mr. Wong wanted to explore new methods of construction, and so he used red roof tiles instead of the traditional metal sheeting. Mr. Fan, who owned a salted fish shop, was allowed to build a larger platform for producing salted fish. Another Mr. Wong, who was a painter, decided to incorporate a double-volume space with a skylight to be his studio. All these examples show how dynamic architecture could be. Such flexibility, adaptation according to needs, interaction, environmental condition and resources are all essential elements in the vernacular architecture, where normally modern and professionally designed architecture often lacks..¹⁶⁴

163 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

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5. *Shek Kip Mei / Sham Shui Po*



Abb. 76: Resettlement Building, Sham Shui Po

5.1 Shek Kip Mei / Sham Shui Po

Shek Kip Mei was formell named as Ching Shui Po with the meaning of clear sea pier and it was later renamed as Sham Shui Po. It included four villages, Kau Wa Keng, Cheung Sha Wan, Sham Shui Po and Kowloon Tong. The whole area was named Sham Shui Po, which was the largest village among the four. Before the World War 2 (1941 - 1945), overseas Chinese and businessmen from mainland established their factories in Sham Shui Po, which promoted light industry and family business, such as textile, button and ribbon manufacture, shoe making and toy industry.¹⁶⁵

From the 1950s onwards, Sham Shui Po had changed through a series of huge reclamation; the deep water and pier gradually disappeared. Its area increased from 500 to 900 square kilometres.¹⁶⁶

Shek Kip Mei situates at the northeast of Sham Shui Po. It was formerly named Shek Kap Mei or Shek Hap Mei, but nobody knew why. Old residents still use the old names.¹⁶⁷



Abb. 77: Shek Kip Mei, 1958

165 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

166 Vgl. Ebda..

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The Convention between Great Britain and China respecting an extension of Hong Kong Territory was signed in Peking; Sham Shui Po and the New Territories were included in Hong Kong.

Sham Shui Po Police Station, the largest police station in Kowloon with jurisdiction including Tsuen Wan, was built.

New Asia College was established at 61-65 Kweilin Street.

1898

1911

1925

1927

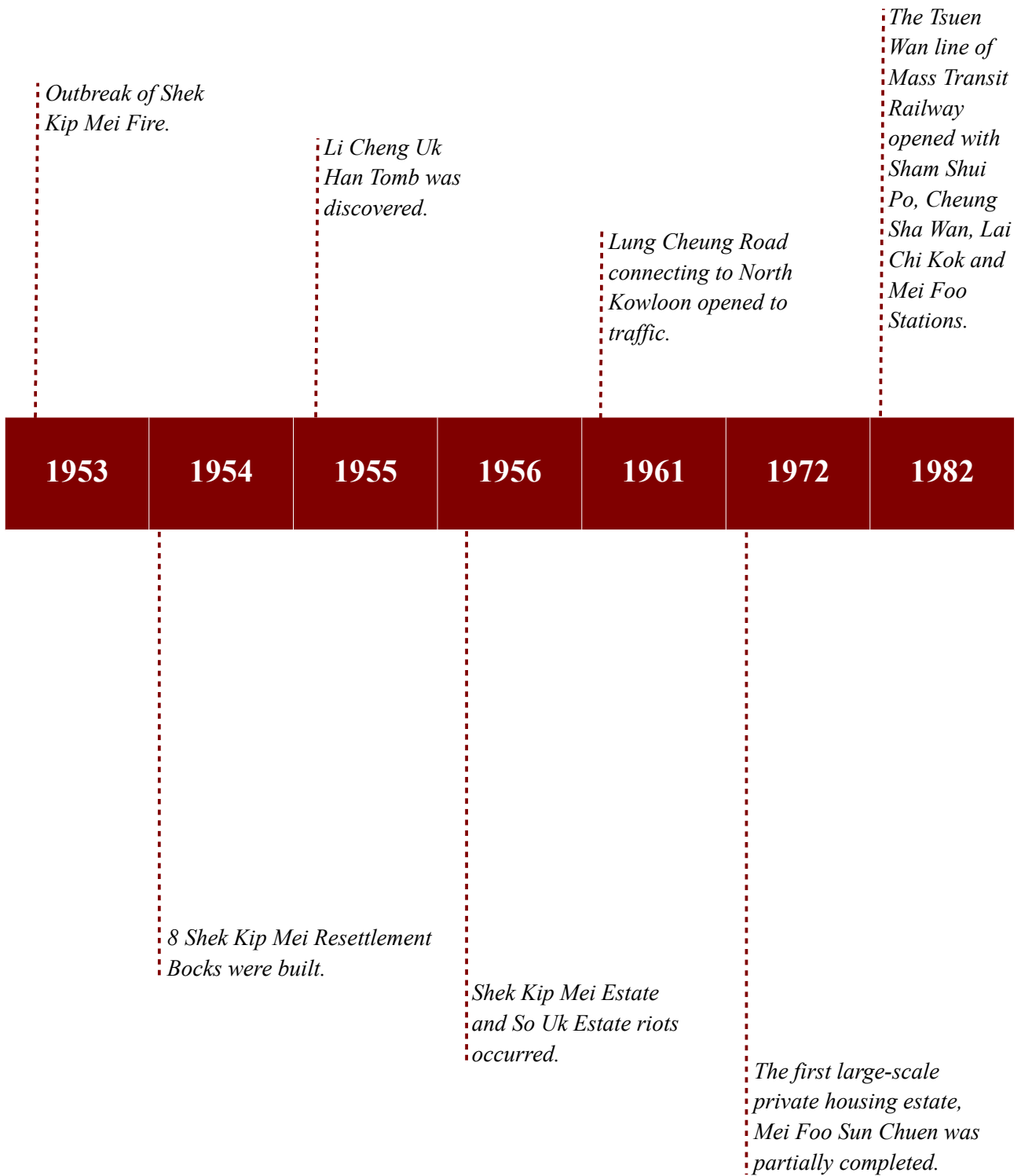
1950

1952

Construction of Sham Shui Po Public Dispensary was completed.

Sham Shui Po Barrack was built. It was operated and taken as Concentration Camp during World War 2.

The Upper Li Cheng Uk new blocks were built.



5.2 Shek Kip Mei Fire

In the history of Hong Kong, there is only one event, which is crucial for the beginning of the Hong Kong Public Housing Policy and triggered the establishment of Hong Kong's first resettlement estate, the Shek Kip Mei Estate: The Shek Kip Mei Fire¹⁶⁸

On Christmas night in 1953 at 9:30 p.m. the disaster took its course. Caused by a carelessly broken kerosene lamp, a fierce fire was triggered in the Shek Kip Mei squatter area. Including a strong wind, the fire burned down six villages in nearly 10 minutes.¹⁶⁹



Abb. 78: Squatter Area, Shek Kip Mei



Abb. 79: Shek Kip Mei Fire

The whole area was engulfed by the fire and the noises of collapsing houses and you could hear the residents were endless crying and screaming. Indeed there were two fire engines sent by the government from Hong Kong Island and over a hundred hoses were used to rescue residents from the fire, but it took nearly 6 hours until the fire was extinguished.¹⁷⁰

The results of this night were 40 people dead and injured and over 50,000 people homeless. On the next day, the Government set up a Shek Kip Mei Six Villages Fire Relief Committee.¹⁷¹

168 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

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Abb. 80: Hillside on Fire

The Social Welfare Officer, the Governor and the Commissioner of Police commanded at the fire site to set up the register for temporary shelters. The Government tried to help the victims and distributed over 80,000 portions of meal every day and household necessities like bowls, dishes and blankets. Each day they spent up to HK\$ 50,000 to help all concerned persons. Most of the fire victims searched for their properties in the rubble, others formed endless rows for emergency supplies. Another big problem was the residence. Everybody was looking for a temporary stay. Some of the victims moved to tenement buildings and others of them went to their relatives and friends, but more than 20,000 people had nowhere to go, they persisted homeless and had to sleep in the streets.¹⁷²

For the Fire Brigade this night was a night they would never forget because this fire was quite impressive and the miserable victims were left with nothing. The economy was not yet developed in those years and the people did not know what Christmas was, not to mention celebrating it.¹⁷³

The extensiveness of the fire, the huge number of squatters and victims involved were unprecedented. During this night the fire was heightened by the wind and the burning squatters generated extremely high temperature and huge amount of smoke. They exerted immense courage and spared no energy in putting off the fire. During this period, it was a tough life for everybody and the daily routine was a struggle for life. All the squatters were burned to ashes and the victims looked for their property in the rubble. It was very cold weather with string winds. Only a tiny portion of victims had thick clothes and some of them set up temporary shelters to protect themselves against the cold weather.¹⁷⁴



Abb. 81: Fire Brigade tries to extinguish fire

172 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

173 Vgl. Ebda..

174 Vgl. Ebda..

Like the story of Wu Wai Ming and his family, who got through the Shek Kip Mei Fire.¹⁷⁵

Their only properties, Fung Keung Sports Shoes, which was a famous brand in the past and coconut shell bowl, were all destroyed. The only thing left was a tiny bag of rice his mother clutched in her arms. She made that tiny bag of rice her pillow to save it from theft, and her fingers were nearly bitten off by rats when they tried to eat the rice. His father picked up the dead pigs in the fire as food for the starving family.¹⁷⁶



Abb. 82: Ruins after the Fire

During the period of sleeping on streets, his family often queued for rice at the Barracks sports field on Boundary Street. Foreign ladies' oversized one-piece dresses were distributed to them free, which were surely better than none to them. They went through that fort two more years. A unit of Block V in Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area was allocated to them in 1958. They turned over a new leaf in their life.¹⁷⁷



Abb. 83: Victims of the Shek Kip Mei Fire

But they weren't the only victims, like Mrs. Wong Yuk Chun. She was pregnant for eight months at the time of the fire. Her timber squatter was not affected by the Shek Kip Mei fire, but her life was. Her second son was born in February the following year, with a name of Yee-Tai. She delivered Yee-Tai before arriving at a maternity home, and had to cut the umbilical cord with a knife. The birth of Yee-Tai did bring joy in the days of disaster, but his navel was left with a special mark.¹⁷⁸

Sometimes these occurrences changed people's life in a better way. For example the life of John Woo: his family planned to go to Taiwan through Hong Kong. They got all their belongings destroyed in the fire and that changed his life; he stayed in Hong Kong and became a famous movie director.¹⁷⁹

175 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

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<i>Time Period:</i>	<i>25. – 31.12.1953</i>	<i>01. - 16.01.1954</i>	<i>17. – 31.01.1954</i>
<i>Registered victims:</i>	58,245	59,553	56,4
<i>Provisional shelters:</i>	Temporary accommodation and mobile medical stations were set up for the elderly, pregnant women, children and patients.	159 pregnant women stayed at provisional shelters; 6 babies were born, 26 children went to voluntary organizations for special care, 7 patients were admitted to hospital.	87 pregnant women moved to provisional shelters; 29 babies were born. 149 children stayed at the vacation camp for one week; they gained an average of two pounds after the camp.
<i>Emergency supplies:</i>	42,000 to 88,000 received meal vouchers per day	Each victim received 9 catty of rice	40,000 victims received clothing, blankets and cooking utensils.
<i>Relief Funds:</i>	-	Each victim received HK\$ 5,5	Each victim received HK\$ 20 for the Chinese New Year

Not only the Government tried to help the victims of the Shek Kip Mei Fire, there were also enterprises, commerce associations, the community, China and foreign governments, who donated more than HK\$ 150,000 and emergency supplies such as rice, meals, clothing and medicine. Like for example the Aw's brothers, who donated 10,000 medicine oil packs and 100 stone houses to victims. They organized a lottery for the persons concerned.¹⁸⁰

Or the charity campaign of the Cantonese Opera at the Astor Theatre on January 03, 1954. The Cantonese Opera decided to increase the ticket price from HK\$ 5 to HK\$ 100. In exchange for that the plays were performed by famous artists including Ma Sze Tsang, Hung Sin Lui, Mak Bing Wing and Fong Yim Fun. After the performances the Astor Theatre collected a total fund of HK\$ 100,000.¹⁸¹

Only two weeks later, on January 17, 1954, famous Cantonese martial masters Wu Kung-I and Chen Ke Fu held a martial art contest for fundraising in Macao, watched by thousands of Chinese from Hong Kong, Macao and Southeast Asia. 37-year-old Chen had an edge of great strength while Wu used suppleness to overcome strength. The contest judge, Ho Yin, the father of Ho Hau Wah, ex-Chief Executive Officer of Macao Special Administrative Region, announced the contest ended in a tie and raised a fund of HK\$ 270,000.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

¹⁸¹ Vgl. Ebda..

¹⁸² Vgl. Ebda..

5.3 Resettlement Area – Shek Kip Mei

Caused by the increase in population to the new record of 2.36 million inhabitants and the bad economy of Hong Kong in the 1950's, housing demand exceeded supply. Thus the Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area was developed and it was the first generation of public housing in Hong Kong.¹⁸³

High priority was given to the quantity rather than the quality of public housing. After the fire of Shek Kip Mei, the government had to provide more urgent residence for victims. A prototype development was needed to simplify the construction process. A new high-rise development was needed to provide more living space. Therefore, simple prototype design with small individual units was adopted.¹⁸⁴



Abb. 84: Shek Kip Mei Estates, around 1960

To create a fast solution for all the victims of the Shek Kip Mei Fire, and to rehouse the area, the Government directed by the Public Works Department started to construct immediate shelter homes as a first aid. Concurrently, the Urban Council asked to set up an emergency committee to explore long term and methodical solutions to the squatter problem in the territory.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

¹⁸⁴ Vgl. Ebda..

¹⁸⁵ Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 85: Mei Ho House, around 1960

Only two months after the fire, the government completed the first phase of bungalows to rehouse the victims near the scene of the fire in Shek Kip Mei. Named after the Director of Public Works Department, Bowring, these Bowring bungalows accommodated ten percent (5,000 persons) of the victims.¹⁸⁶

In order to solve the long-term housing issue, the government planned to build resettlement blocks.¹⁸⁷

One year after the Shek Kip Mei Fire, at the end of 1954, the first eight H-shaped resettlement blocks including Mei Ho House were built at Shek Kip Mei by the contractor Wan Hin & Co. Each of the eight permanent six-storey resettlement blocks, accommodating over 2.000 people, were constructed by reinforced concrete frame and floors with concrete block walls and partitions.¹⁸⁸

During the following years, the Bowring bungalows were all demolished and 21 new resettlement blocks were built at the Shek Kip Mei. These new blocks consisted of seven stories and were different from the eight blocks in the first phase. They used the rooms at the ground floor from each block as shops and workshops. Others were used as private welfare organizations, such as clinics and nurseries.¹⁸⁹

Most of the rooftops were allocated to welfare organizations and voluntary agencies. These organizations operated schools and children's clubs on the rooftops. After the completion of the 21 resettlement blocks, the housing blocks in Shek Kip Mei Estate were re-ordered by numbers. In total there were twenty-nine resettlement blocks, which were constructed between 1954 and 1963.¹⁹⁰

In 1972 the population of Hong Kong reached 4 million, thereby a Ten-Year Housing Programme was launched and the development of new towns, caused by the great demands for public housing.¹⁹¹



Abb. 86: New Blocks with Ground Floor Shops

186 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

187 Vgl. Ebda..

188 Vgl. Ebda..

189 Vgl. Ebda..

190 Vgl. Ebda..

191 Vgl. Ebda..

Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area had been completed for 19 years at that time and the population of that area reached 62.000 inhabitants. In this Area were a total of 520 shops and workshops. The residents needed more living space.¹⁹²

The government then took Shek Kip Mei as the pilot scheme for the reconstruction of public housing and implemented Shek Kip Mei housing programme in October 1972. The implementation was carried out in 5 phases during the next 12 years. That radically improved the living environment in the area, the resettlement area was renamed B-type Housing Estate.¹⁹³

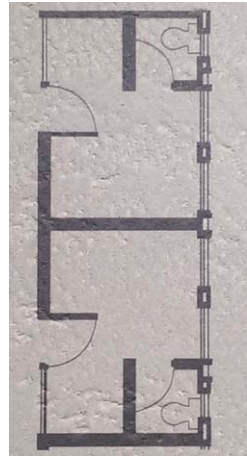


Abb. 87: Unit Type 1



Abb. 88: Unit Type 2

There were only small residential units when Shek Kip Mei resettlement blocks were first built. They were changed to four different types of units after reconstruction. The alteration was done by merging one unit with the back unit and reconstructing the public veranda into kitchen and balcony. Those merged units could be further merged with the next unit to form an even larger unit. The bearing wall between the unit and the next one could not be demolished and the access to the room was through the rear balcony. This redevelopment was carried out between 1972 and 1984. Beside the resettlement blocks, the Government Low Cost Housing was completed in 1964 in Shek Kip Mei.¹⁹⁴

During the reconstruction of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area, the government renamed the Government Low Cost Housing to Upper Shek Kip Mei Estate and the reconstructed resettlement area to Lower Shek Kip Mei Estate. The upper and lower estates were jointly named Shek Kip Mei Estate in 1984. Six new buildings were developed during the reconstruction of the Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area, eleven resettlement blocks were demolished, instead large commercial and social centre with community facilities developed.¹⁹⁵

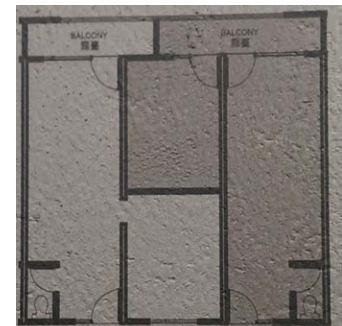


Abb. 89: Unit Type 3

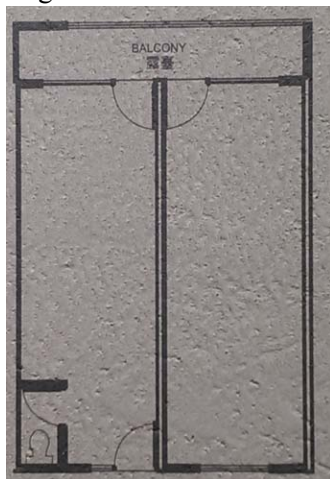


Abb. 90: Units Type 4

The units of the other 18 blocks were rebuilt as individual residential units with larger areas, providing individual kitchen and bathroom for each unit.¹⁹⁶

The former public bathrooms, toilets and washing areas in the central connection block were changed into residential units. In addition to the provision of individual bathrooms and kitchens, more basic equipment were provided such as iron doors, stove counters, anti-burglar window net and hanging hooks.¹⁹⁷

192 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

193 Vgl. Ebda..

194 Vgl. Ebda..

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In 2000, there started another redevelopment scheme of the Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area where all of the six to seven-storey resettlement blocks were vacated in stages. During the first stage, which was actualized in 2000, Blocks 1 to 13 were demolished and redeveloped into two high-rise public rental housing blocks. Caused by a landslide in 1999, the Blocks 35, 36 and 38 were demolished in 2000.¹⁹⁸

In the subsequent stage in 2004, the Blocks 37, 39 and 40 were vacated. During the last stage in 2006, the Blocks 14 to 18 and 25 to 34 were vacated.¹⁹⁹



Abb. 91: Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area, 1980



Abb. 92: Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area, Nowadays

Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area plays a remarkable role in the public housing history as it is the first one built in Hong Kong. As most of the resettlement blocks were demolished, Mei Ho House will be the only Mark I H-shaped resettlement block remaining in Hong Kong. It was designated as a Grade I Historic Building in 2005. The Mei Ho House survived the doom of demolition and it was closed in 2004 and became the only existing first generation public housing in Hong Kong in 2010. It was later assessed as a Grade 2 Historic Building.²⁰⁰

Live in Shek Kip Mei:

Shek Kip Mei was a community of historical significance. From the 1950s to 1970s, it was an era of poverty in Hong Kong. Right here, pillars of society were bred from generation to generation in Shek Kip Mei, including movie director, football player and newspaper founder. With the aid of stories of families in Shek Kip Mei, exhibits various aspects of life in those days such as basic daily necessities, child labour, personal growth and society in miniature.²⁰¹

198 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

199 Vgl. Ebda..

200 Vgl. Ebda..

201 Vgl. Ebda..

Inhabitant Stories

Culturati Mak Wah Cheung

Mak Wah Cheung had been living with his parents and three siblings in the squatter area of Shek Kip Mei. Mak's home survived the fire in 1953. Their house was 18.5 square metres. Their home was on one side where a bed and a desk were placed. His father's workshop was on the other side of the room, where he welded door hinges and parts and sold them to hardware shop as the only source of income. Mak did the household chores, took care of his brothers and sisters, and helped his father with his work.²⁰²



Abb. 93: Mak Wah Cheung

One hot summer, the sparkles of the fire from welding flew off and left a lot of scars on his chest. He chooses to work for the newspaper *Wen Wei Po* after graduation, with a monthly salary of HK\$350 which was much less than working for the government or overseas companies. However, he insisted on working in the media. He founded the *Hong Kong Economic Times* in 1987 with friends. He is currently Publisher of the newspaper.²⁰³

A man is not born to greatness, he achieves it by his own efforts



Abb. 94: Warren Chan

Warren Chan was criticized for his lack of seriousness in study during his childhood. He failed the admission examination to secondary school, so he attended a number of secondary schools but he was not motivated in his study.²⁰⁴

He met a girl when he changed school for the Fourth Form. Because of her, he started to think of his future and realized that studying hard was the only way out. Then he studied very hard and was admitted for the Sixth form at the Shek Kip Mei Ming Yin Secondary School.²⁰⁵

He was admitted to The Chinese University of Hong Kong but he knew that the course he was studying would not bring him wealth. He then studied English on his own and entered the Law Department of the University of Hong Kong. Because of financial constraints, he had to teach in evening schools to make a living. At last he graduated with first class honours. He became a barrister afterward and is now Senior Counsel. With diligence and a serious attitude at work one can strive to achieve success, no matter where they are born. His message to today's young is: You can do it!²⁰⁶

202 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

203 Vgl. Ebda..

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205 Vgl. Ebda..

206 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 95: Chan Fat Che

Hong Kong Footballer of the Year Chan Fat Che

His parents operated a fish stall at a street corner in Shek Kip Mei in the 1950s. A unit of Shek Kip Mei resettlement blocks was allocated to them. The open space in the housing estate became his football ground. In 1972, he was invited to join the Youth Programme of South China Football Club. He helped his parents with the stall at the market in Shek Kip Mei during holidays.²⁰⁷

Though there was a lack of necessities in public housing, opportunities came from everywhere. He is still active in the football field and was the coach of the Sun Hei Football Team. With the old hard time in mind, he supported, encouraged and helped the young generations to keep the sport shining²⁰⁸

Traffic Story

Visiting her son

Public transportation was not well established in the 1950-60s. Every Sunday morning, in order to bring snacks and crackers to her son Fung Chi Hung, who was boarding in Aberdeen. Fung's mother walked from her Chinese Tenement unit at Yee Kuk Street to Sham Shui Po Ferry Pier where she took a ferry to Central. She then went to Western District by bus and changed for another bus to Aberdeen. After such a long trip, she came back home at dusk.²⁰⁹



Abb. 97: Public Traffic, 1960



Abb. 96: Ferry Pier, 1960

Bus No. 11

Chung Wah worked as a child labour, a delivery boy at a restaurant in Mongkok. Everyday he went back and forth between Mongkok and Shek Kip Mei. It was 1 a.m., when his duty was off and bus was out of service, so he went home on foot. When he was attending senior primary school, he would take his brother and walk with his neighbours from Shek Kip Mei all the way to Mei Foo Sun Chuen swimming shed to swim. Because he could not afford the bus fare, he went to Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park also by taking this Bus No. 11, what means by foot.²¹⁰

207 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

208 Vgl. Ebda..

209 Vgl. Ebda..

210 Vgl. Ebda..

Sprinter

Lai Wai Lun had no allowance for traffic, so he had to walk back and forth between home and school. Sometimes he would run to school to avoid being late. His brother also studied at La Salle College and he was a track and field athlete in school. The Lai brothers were both trained under poverty to be good sprinters.²¹¹

Food Story

Larded Rice

Lai Wai Lun's mother often bought cheap pork fat to feed her group of children, who were all at their growth period. It was not easy to feed them well. Having taken too much larded rice, Lai had problems with his subcutaneous fat and became weak.²¹²



Abb. 99: Street Restaurant, Shek Kip Mei

Scrumptious Food in Childhood

During the time of poverty, to work was referred to as search for food. Starving was a universal phenomenon and the obese could hardly be seen on streets. People ate to live and ate up everything including even the sauces left on the plates. Scrumptious foods in those years included crust sweet soup, maltose cracker, and blue brick pear and liquorice fruit.²¹³



Abb. 98: Food Stand, Shek Kip Mei

Clothing Story

Pyjamas and Plastic Shoes

Pyjamas were the most gorgeous clothing in Lam Wai Ling's childhood and she wore them on various occasions. At home, in the housing estate or even when going out. Every Chinese New Year, her mother sewed new pyjamas for her and her sister. Plastic shoes were another memory of Lam's kids. Whenever people collecting second-hand plastic products visited them, they would damage their plastic shoes in order to trade them for sweets. That left their mother no choice but buying new shoes for them.²¹⁴



Abb. 100: Clothes Market, Temple Street

211 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

212 Vgl. Ebda..

213 Vgl. Ebda..

214 Vgl. Ebda..

Dacron

Choy Suk Fun Rosanna's mother spent all her housekeeping money on buying a sewing machine to satisfy the need of her daughter's domestic science class. Two yards of Dacron came with sewing machine for free. She sewed a dress for Choy. Choy really treasured it and had worn it for almost 10 years. The warmth brought by the Dacron dress was unforgettable.²¹⁵



Abb. 101: Electronic Night Market, Shek Kip Mei

Resettlement Story

Cockloft

Chan Yun Heung and her parents moved to a resettlement block in 1956. A half unit was allocated to them. Their half unit was close to the door. They needed to build a cockloft to obtain extra space underneath it for storage of household items and cooking utensils. They had no furniture or electrical appliances. They could not even use an electrical fan because their roommates refused to share the electricity. Her family lived with their roommates; quarrels often happened due to language barriers and overcrowding condition.²¹⁶



Abb. 102: Small Cockloft

Canvas Bed and Grass Mat

A unit on 7th floor of the resettlement Block V was allocated to Wu Wai Ming and his family, a total of nine members. They slept on streets in the past. They had a residential unit then, though it was much better, the unit space could not accommodate the whole family. They would sleep on canvas beds at the doors, corners around staircases and corridors in summer. They would sleep on grass mats on the roof floor in good weather. It was a pleasure to sleep under a starry sky during a cool night²¹⁷



Abb. 103: Canvas Bed

215 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

216 Vgl. Ebda..

217 Vgl. Ebda..

Sketches of Life in Public Housing

<i>Population and Family Structure</i>		
<i>Total population in the districts</i>	120,000 Persons	
<i>No. of Persons in Family</i>	Minimum: 1 Person	
	Maximum: 11 Persons	
<i>Members of Family and Tenant</i>	Husband, Wife, Children, Parents	
	Father and Mother-in-law, Relatives, Employees	
<i>Type of Family</i>	Whole family, Single family, Widow family	
<i>Place of Birth</i>	38% Born in Hong Kong (mainly children)	
	62% Born in Guangdong Province and neighbouring districts (17% arrived in Hong Kong in 1949 - 50)	
<i>Age</i>	44% below 14	56% above 14
<i>Language</i>	11% dialect apart from Cantonese such as Chaozhou, Taishan and Mandarin	

(Resource: A social survey on public estates of Shek Kip Mei, Li Cheng Uk and Tai Hang Tung with a population of 120,000 conducted by the University of Hong Kong in 1957.)

<i>Employment</i>		<i>Leisure and Entertainment</i>
<i>Working Age</i>	<i>14 or above</i>	<i>Leisure and entertainment in the past week</i>
<i>Occupation</i>		
<i>Skilled or semi-skilled worker</i>	21%	Chatting, visiting friends and relatives, playing with children
<i>Unskilled worker</i>	7%	Watching a movie
<i>Service provider (such as hairdresser, waiter and maid)</i>	16%	Listening to radio, reading newspaper
		No leisure and entertainment activities
<i>Store assistant</i>	10%	Others
<i>Non-licensed hawker</i>	6%	(card games, mah-jong, swimming, playing football)
<i>Licensed hawker</i>	2%	
<i>Construction worker</i>	8%	
<i>Others (shopkeeper, clerk, technician, traffic worker... etc.)</i>	26%	
<i>Unemployed</i>	4%	

<i>Price Index (in HK \$)</i>	<i>Price Index in 1960</i>	<i>Price Index (in HK \$)</i>	<i>Price Index in 1976</i>
<i>Newspaper</i>	\$0,1	Harbour crossing ferry fare (second class)	\$0,2
<i>The New Evening Post advertisement</i>	\$0,3	Tain fare (Kowloon to Shatin, second class)	\$0,3
<i>Shark fin set dinner (for 12 persons)</i>	\$80 – 90	Public swimming pool admission fee	\$0,4
<i>Tuition fee for private secondary school</i>	\$33	Soft ice-cream	\$0,3 – 0,5
<i>Germany piano</i>	\$2,000	Minibus fare (Central to North Point)	\$0,5
		Cinema ticket (front seat)	\$3,5
		Barber service for gentlemen	\$6
		Egg yolk moon cake (1 box)	\$23,2
		A return air ticket from Hong Kong to Kuala Lumpur	\$1,981
		Taxi with taxi license	\$20,000

Public space in Shek Kip Mei

There were many passageways throughout the resettlement blocks in Shek Kip Mei. They had been used for a wide range of public purposes. These passageways were sometimes be traffic alleys, places for hawking and for temporary assembly. There was one playground and two football courts in the area.²¹⁸

Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area was a rectangular site covering an area of 93,200 square meters. Resettlement buildings were arrayed in three rows between the north of Wo Chai Street and south of Berwick Street. From the northwest hill to the southeast plan and across Pak Tin Street and Nam Cheong Street.²¹⁹



Abb. 104: Map of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area



Abb. 105: Food Hall, Shek Kip Mei

Famous Shops in Shek Kip Mei

The market was located at the junction of Who Chai Street and Kweilin Street. Some small stores located at street corners selling firewood, charcoal, oil, rice and cigarettes. The large shops were located in Berwick Street and Pei Ho Street. Among the famous shops in Shek Kip Mei were United Restaurant, Chuen Cheung Kui Restaurant, the Great Phoenix Restaurant and many more.²²⁰

Shek Kip Mei Schools and Clinics

SKH St. Thomas Primary School and St. Francis of Assisi's English Primary School were the only subsidized schools in the district at that time. A number of small private schools and kindergartens, such as Ming Chi, Han Tung, Han Nam, Sai Nam, and Shek Kip Mei Government Primary School were located at the tenements in Nam Cheong Street and Kweilin Street. St. Thomas Clinic and Precious Blood Hospital were very expensive private clinics while Yee Kuk Street Clinic was economical and they only charged a dollar as a consultation fee.²²¹



Abb. 106: St. Thomas Primary School

218 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

219 Vgl. Ebda..

220 Vgl. Ebda..

221 Vgl. Ebda..

Rooftop Primary School

Wong Cho Chi was born in Xiamen and arrived in Hong Kong in 1949. He studied at New Asia College in 1952 and learned from Qian Mu and Tang Junyi, master scholars of Chinese culture. He designed the emblem for New Asia College and he was the author of “New Asia College in Kweilin Street”. He took charge of a rooftop primary school in resettlement block S in Shek Kip Mei. The number of students increased from 100 to over 300. The primary school provided all the six levels of primary education and it was a complete primary school. The monthly salary of a teacher increased from 100 to 240 HK\$.²²²



Abb. 107: Rooftop Primary School

He paid from his own pocket to buy school supplies, slides and swings. To prevent students from wearing untidy and dirty clothes to school, he designed the school uniforms, bought cloth, and got a rooftop garment factory operated by a church on the next resettlement block to sew them. The four years of teaching in that rooftop school was the happiest time in his life.²²³

Three brothers in Rooftop Primary School



Abb. 108: Class on the Rooftop

The three brothers Tam Chuo Ying, Tam Chuo Kit and Tam Chuo Hung once studied at the rooftop school in resettlement block S. They were poor and the eldest brother, Tam Chuo Ying, had to drop out after primary education. Another brother, Tam Chuo Kit managed to complete his tertiary education at a university. The youngest brother, Tam Chuo Hung studied at a teacher training college and became a teacher and a school principal. When Tam Chuo Hung was a teacher, he lived with his students in the same district. As both their teacher and neighbour, he formed a harmonious whole with his students and their parents. Chuo Kit recalls that poor children were studying hard in rooftop school striving for better life. The rooftop schools played an important role and contributed to student success.²²⁴

²²² Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

²²³ Vgl. Ebda..

²²⁴ Vgl. Ebda..

Memory of Corporal Punishment

All the secondary and primary school students in those days had their unforgettable experiences of corporal punishment. Some were punished because of left-handed writing, misspelling in dictations, truancy or noise making in class. The severity and reasons of corporal punishment in those days were far beyond the imagination of children today. Slapping was just a minimal punishment. A primary school student was punished and not allowed to have lunch. He could not stand hunger and fled from school for having lunch at home. The next day he went home after further punishment and his mother did not complain but shed tears after she saw him beaten black and blue.²²⁵

Street Corners

Hawkers peddled all day and night on the streets in Shek Kip Mei. They sold Chinese donuts, congee and rice rolls in the morning, cakes, sweet soups and snacks in the afternoon and late night meals, dumplings and occasionally cat and dog meats at night.²²⁶

Memoir of John Woo

Right Here by John Woo



Abb. 110: John Woo

Right here, our family once slept on the streets, waited for emergency relief and waited for moving into the resettlement area. Right here, I had fought with the rogues and gone home bleeding. My mother did not want us to move elsewhere. My father kept calm as usual and taught me that a man should have strength of character, commitment, love for others and no hatred. Among my friends were youngsters who often made trouble for the police, and also respectful students who studied theology. Right here, our family once slept on the streets, waited for emergency relief and waited for moving into the resettlement area. Right here, I had fought with the rogues and gone home bleeding. My mother did not want us to move elsewhere. My father kept calm as usual and taught me that a man should have strength of character, commitment, love for others and no hatred. Among my friends were youngsters who often made trouble for the police, and also respectful students who studied theology.²²⁷

Right here, I had worked as a delivery boy for restaurants and grocery stores, carrying rice up to the 7th floor and I had worked for extras. I had sold dried grapes under a staircase but I had eaten most of them out of my hunger. Right here, I slept on a canvas bed in the corridor to look at the stars and daydream about the film industry. I looked forward to hearing the nearby church bell. Right here, I had a lot of life experiences that made me deeply feel the joys and sorrows of the world. The sky was sometimes dark gray, the weather muggy and I could still feel the warmth of life though. Right here, I began peeking at the Cantonese movies at the Palace Theatre, watching movies at the Paramount Theatre in Mongkok and at college, finally seeing films of La Nouvelle Vague, Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa and Mizoguchi in Studio One of City Hall. Right here, I wrote my first prose and first poem, shot my first experimental film and performed for the first time on stage. Until I became a movie director at the age of 26, shooting my first commercial movie, “The Young Dragons”, my correspondence address was still Room 42, 2nd Floor, Block 4, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Kowloon.²²⁸



Abb. 109: Hawker Stand, Shek Kip Mei

225 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

226 Vgl. Ebda..

227 Vgl. Ebda..

228 Vgl. Ebda..

5.4 Development of Resettlement Blocks

Resettlement Blocks were the most dominant type of public housing, caused by the large number of units, which were built and the number of inhabitants, who were housed in these buildings, between the 1950s until 1970s. During the different stages of development, the facilities in this type of housing also changed and they were differentiated by various Marks. The Resettlement Blocks were directly financed by the government and were first developed to take care for the nearly 50,000 squatter inhabitants, who became homeless after the Shek Kip Mei Fire in 1953. These buildings were also used to rebuild squatter cleared districts. A main factor for constructing the early Resettlement Blocks was the financial consideration. In an annual Report of the Resettlement Department from 1954-55, they explained, that a permanent six-story building, which could house over 2,000 people, could be built for the amount, which was used to supply free food for the victims of the Shek Kip Mei Fire every two weeks.²²⁹



Abb. 111: Resettlement Blocks, Shek Kip Mei

In 1964, the government published a White Paper, with the title: Review of Policies for Squatter Control, Resettlement and Government Low-Cost Housing, which had rules for the resettlement and a list of priorities.²³⁰

- Former domestic tenants of buildings, which were demolished because of danger
- Special compassionate cases and certain victims of natural disasters
- The resent inhabitants of squatter areas or areas which were needed for transit centres or permanent development
- People who are occupying tolerated buildings, which were required for development
- The inhabitants of overcrowded resettlement rooms
- Street Sleepers who are occupying tolerated buildings²³¹

²²⁹ Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

²³⁰ Vgl. Ebda..

²³¹ Vgl. Ebda..

Mark I

One of the first public housing in Hong Kong, were the resettlement blocks. Altogether there were six different types of them. The Mark I was the first generation of these resettlement blocks and they were constructed in the period between 1954 until 1960. The architectural design of the Mark I resettlement blocks were just like the letter H, but sometimes if there were problems, the H-shape was modified to I-shape to fit better into the topography of the different sites. Like for example the public housing in Lok Fu, which was I-shaped. The buildings were 6 to 7 storeys high and had 60 to 72 units on each floor.²³²

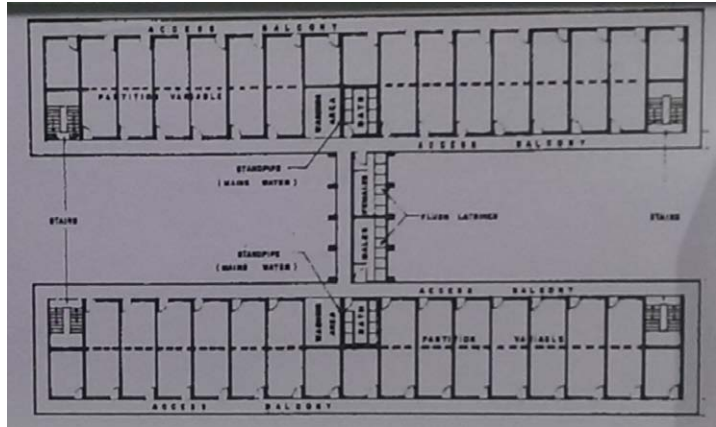


Abb. 112: Ground Plan Mark I



Abb. 113: Mei Ho House, Shek Kip Mei

During this period, living space was quite less, so one changed the space allocation to 2,4 square metres per person, although the legal minimum of living space in Hong Kong at that time was 3,2 square metres. So the Mark I had a standard-size unit of 11, 2 square metres, which accommodate 4 to 5 people, without any hygienic facilities inside. The public bathrooms and toilets were all located in the central block, which connected the two wing-blocks. The inhabitants were requested to cook inside their flats, but later it became forbidden, so they had to cook along the corridors, which were originally the main access into the flats. A main problem of these flats was the honeycomb grilles on the partition wall, which were used for the ventilation system. Caused by the noise and the smell transmission through these grilles, many of the inhabitants tried to block them.²³³

As all the free spaces within the flats had to be occupied, it was quite normal if a four members-family were in a five person flat, that they had to accept another person into their flat. This kind of policy brought the early resettlements into serious disrepute. In the mid-1970s, the Housing Authority started a programme to modernize the old Mark I blocks. Certain blocks had been redesigned by the conversion of back-to-back units into larger and self-contained flats. Similarly to these redesign schemes; wholesale demolition and rebuilding were also undertaken.²³⁴

232 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

233 Vgl. Ebda..

234 Vgl. Ebda..

Mark II

During the hasty construction of the first resettlement buildings in 1954, the government tried to improve the design and the facilities of the blocks. One of the first Mark II blocks, were built in Tung Tau Tsuen in the early 1961. In the 1960s at the beginning of the public housing, most of the resettlement blocks were 7 to 8 stories high, but they developed later to 16 stories high, like the Mark III, VI and V. For example the UK Estate was built in that period and most of the inhabitants had a relatively higher income than other residents.²³⁵

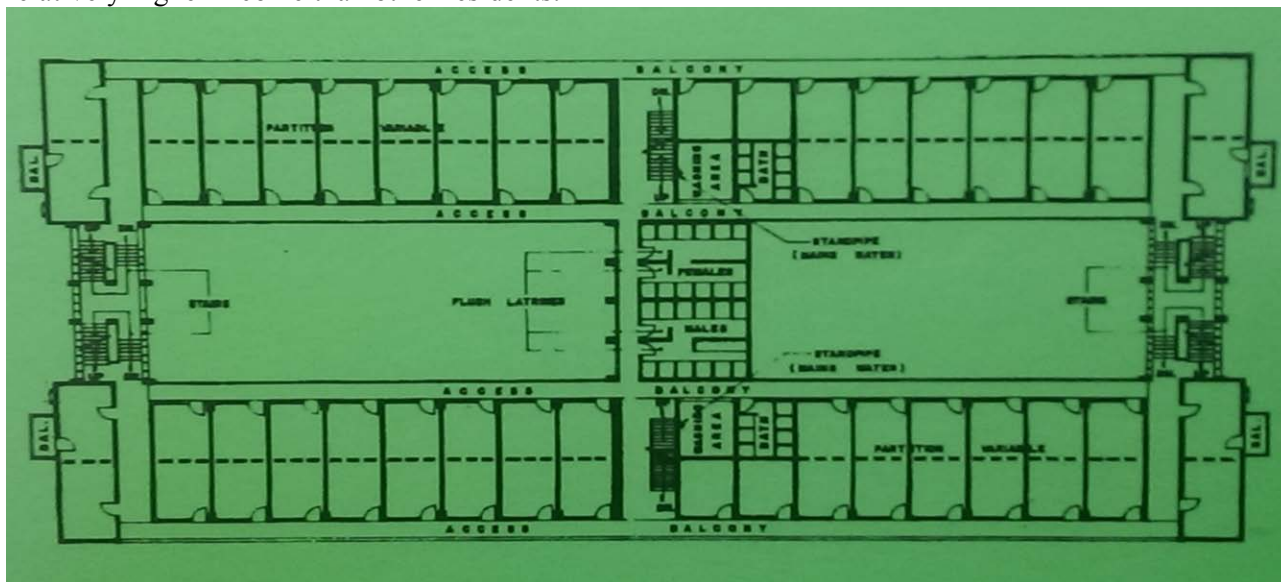


Abb. 114: Ground Plan Mark II

The architectural design of the Mark II resettlement block was quite similar to the Mark I design. The only difference were the unique feature of 4 more residential units of 28,7 square metres at the end of the wings, which had a kitchen, water taps and a balcony located on each floor at the end of the two wings. These flats were intended to accommodate land-owning inhabitants, whose building had been demolished for the development of the resettlement blocks. The other residents of the normal flats had to rely on water standpipes, communal bathrooms and flush latrines which were located in the central corridor.²³⁶

The inhabitants were faced with a room bare of services and unfinished. They had to whitewash the interior and erect any partitions they probably would need on their own. In the most cases the residents built a small cockloft to accommodate an extra sleeping place. The living conditions in these resettlement blocks could not be described as ideal, but they amounted to be a safe sleeping space. In contrast to the previous squatter areas, these resettlement blocks provided their inhabitants with a fire-proof, typhoon-proof and relatively hygienic shelter.²³⁷



Abb. 115: Wang Tau Hom Estates

235 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

236 Vgl. Ebda..

237 Vgl. Ebda..

The two wings of the Mark II building were filled in with perforated concrete block screen walls, which housed two end staircases. These supplements changed the design from the H-shaped form to the Chinese character 日 (sun) and closed the courtyards. In 1972, with 240 Mark I and II blocks in total, the authorized population in these blocks were 532,475 out of a total population of over 4 millions in Hong Kong.²³⁸

Mark III

In 1964, the first Mark III began to appear and they presented an entirely different concept than the Mark I and II. With this design, the flats were all entered from an internal corridor and all of them had their own private balcony. Most of the Mark III blocks were 8 stories high. The new design was taken from existing government low-rent housing and the whole architectural design was mainly categorized as the I-shaped and the L-shaped design.²³⁹

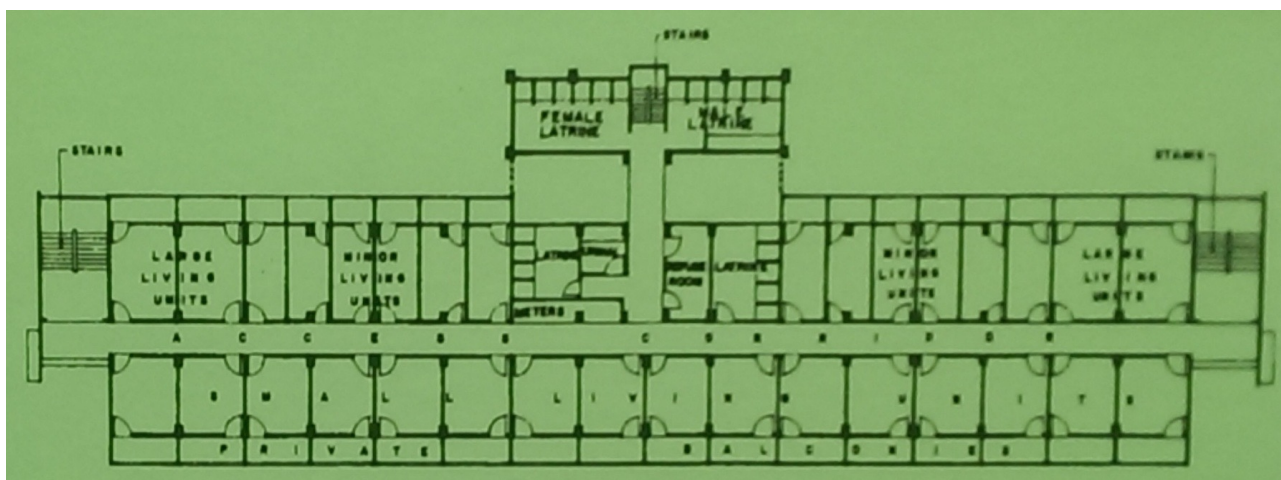


Abb. 116: Ground Plan Mark III

Each room was 11.9 square metres and for the first time services were provided in these resettlement blocks. In each unit there was a water tap, built-in electrical fittings and one toilet was shared between adjacent flats and a refuse chutes were installed in each block. With the central corridor layout, the all-weather access become much better, but the noise development was not attenuated to any extent and sometimes it appeared to be much worse, but the main design had changed into a new policy. These resettlement blocks were not anymore just an answer to an emergency situation because it became a more fully-fledged housing policy of firm commitments. The Government continued to improve their design of the Resettlement Blocks. The Kwai Chung Estate, which was completed in the early 1964, was the first Mark III block.²⁴⁰



Abb. 117: Tsz Wan Shan Resettlement Blocks

238 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

239 Vgl. Ebda..

240 Vgl. Ebda..

Mark IV

In 1964, when the Review for Squatter Control, Resettlement and Government Low-cost Housing was released, this document had a significant influence on the development of the design of public housing and its facilities. This strong policy can be seen in the Mark IV blocks, which were constructed between 1965 until 1969. These blocks had a similar layout like the Mark III blocks, but they were the first resettlement blocks with 16 stories and elevators. In each building was provided with two elevators. The architectural design was I-shaped or sometimes an E-shaped design.²⁴¹

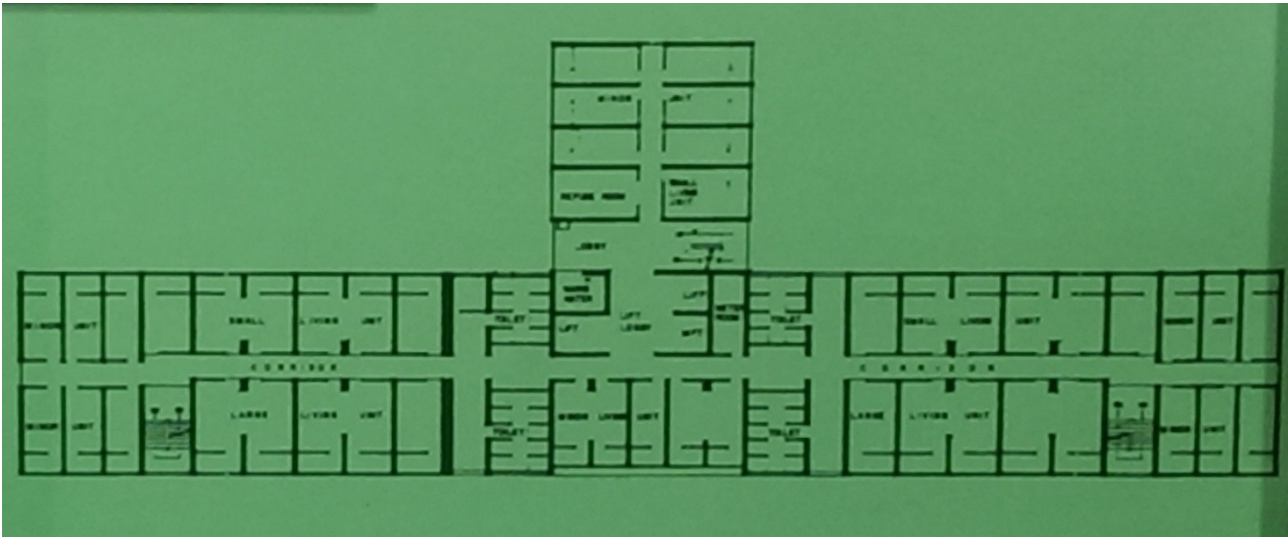


Abb. 118: Ground Plan Mark IV

The standard rooms were quite similar to those of the Mark III blocks, with 11.1 square metres. The only difference was that these units were the first resettlement block flats that had private lavatories instead of the previously shared facilities. The lavatories were located on the balcony of each flat. From 1965 to 1966 sixty-five Mark IV blocks were completed and so the self-contained accommodation, which was the aim of the government housing policy was first achieved in resettlement housing in 1965.²⁴²



Abb. 119: Tung Tau Estate

241 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

242 Vgl. Ebda..

Mark V

The Mark V blocks were a modified version of the Mark IV and were built between 1966 until 1971. They were 16 stories high. Each unit had private kitchen and toilet. The only design change was the unit size, which allowed the accommodation of different family sizes.²⁴³



Abb. 120: Ground Plan Mark V

In 1969 all the resettlement blocks had a living space standard of 2.2 square meters per person, but in that year an approval was given, which changed the standard for Mark IV and V to 2.5 square metres per person. The only main problem was that most of the units were overcrowded, caused by the natural family increase, which meant that most of the inhabitants of these blocks lived in a smaller space than the originally allocated 2.2 square metres per person.²⁴⁴



Abb. 121: Sau Mau Ping Estate

²⁴³ Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

²⁴⁴ Vgl. Ebda..

Mark VI

The Mark VI blocks, which were built in the 1970s, were the last type of resettlement blocks. They were 8 to 16 stories high, but mostly 16. Compared with the Mark I to Mark V blocks, the Mark VI blocks had much more space for the residents. The size per person increased from 2.23 square metres to 3.25 square metres, which meant a standard room size for 4 persons was 13 square metres. These residents had enjoyed a more generous living environment.²⁴⁵

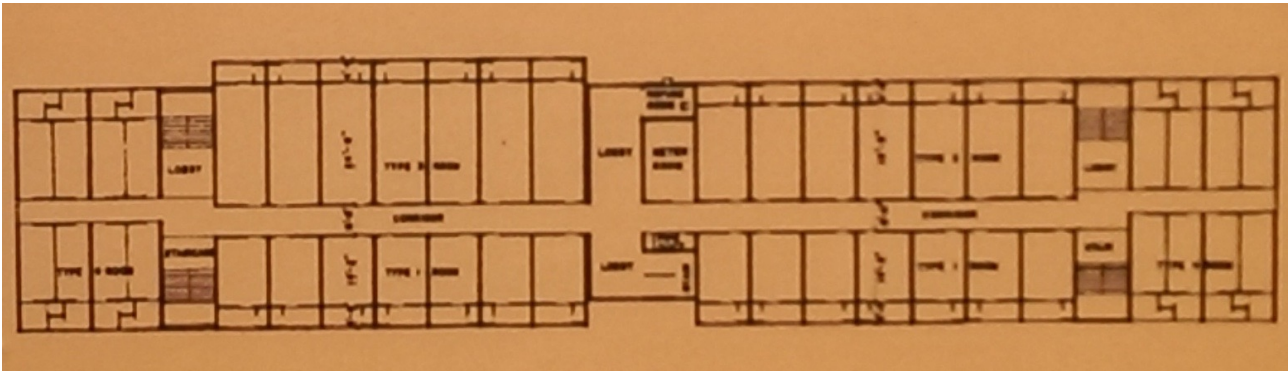


Abb. 122: Ground Plan Mark VI

At that period the public housing included twin-tower design, H-shaped and double H-shaped designs. They were about 30 stories high and some of them included installed air-condition.²⁴⁶

Problems & Difficulties

One of the main problems during the construction of the resettlement block was the open space, which was designed at the unbelievably low figure of only 0.008 ha per person. Caused by the minimal attention to the different requirements from the sites, there were huge problems with the orientation, prevailing breezes and micro-climatic peculiarities. In many cases, the standardized plans and layouts were the result for some extremely unpleasant environments in the early housing estates.²⁴⁷



Abb. 123: Lam Tin Estate

245 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

246 Vgl. Ebda..

247 Vgl. Ebda..

Over the years, more and more residents brought their possessions to their rooms, until most of the rooms were overcrowded with furniture and general household items. Many of the residents also installed their own electrical circuits to supply their TV sets, refrigerators, lights, etc. which led to many safety problems in the blocks.²⁴⁸

Sometimes it was not something new, that informal structures, which were erected in the exterior of the blocks, had become a permanent spaces. In 1972 after the legislation, which dictated that community TV aerials could not be used anymore, the normal antennae became much more and a characteristic of the Hong Kong skyline. The waste disposal was another problem, because many of the residents just simply threw their waste over their balconies and this in turn built up on the roofs of the squatters at the ground floor, which were mostly illegal. The small leftover open spaces had open waste collection container and in combination with the over-usage of bitumen, these areas produced extremely unpleasant environments.²⁴⁹



Abb. 124: Life in the Resettlement Blocks



Abb. 125: Public Playground

From Mark I until Mark VI, there were quite less improvements, which were made in the interior design of these resettlement blocks. Normally the residents provided the main improvements by themselves. They tried to provide visual and audio separation between the individual members of a family group in their rooms and also to their adjacent neighbours, but quite little could be done. As the resettlement blocks grew in size and number, so did the very large number of illegal services which were demanded by the residents. Illegal hawking had become one of the most notable activities in any resettlement block. Street hawkers sold a wide range of local and imported products and commodities and also restricted or prohibited goods like for example herb tea, non-bottled drinks, soft ice cream, cooked food, meat and raw fish.²⁵⁰

Since the early 1958 street hawker bazaars were constructed to accommodate most of the illegal street hawkers, who overcrowded the spare open spaces of the resettlement blocks. But this attempt did not eliminate the street hawkers who still erected their makeshift structures wherever they found a free spot. Another contributing factor to the illegal hawking in the resettlement blocks was the extremely loose attitude towards the management who were employed by the staff of the Resettlement Department.²⁵¹



Abb. 126: Kitchen on the Access Balcony

248 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

249 Vgl. Ebda..

250 Vgl. Ebda..

251 Vgl. Ebda..

Y-shaped, Cascade-shaped, T-shaped site specific design and Harmony design

In 1980s, the design of the resettlement blocks changed in many ways so the buildings could better fit different terrains. One of these designs was the Y-shaped design and the connected block design, which allowed every unit with multiple rooms instead of a single room. The Y-shaped blocks were mostly built on sites with less height restrictions in new towns, because most of them were up to 34 stories high with broad outdoor views. Relatively speaking, the connected blocks of the Y-shaped blocks were mostly built on hillsides with a smaller site area. The units were provided with multiple rooms, but the residents could install internal partitions for their needs, so every resident could design his own flat.²⁵²

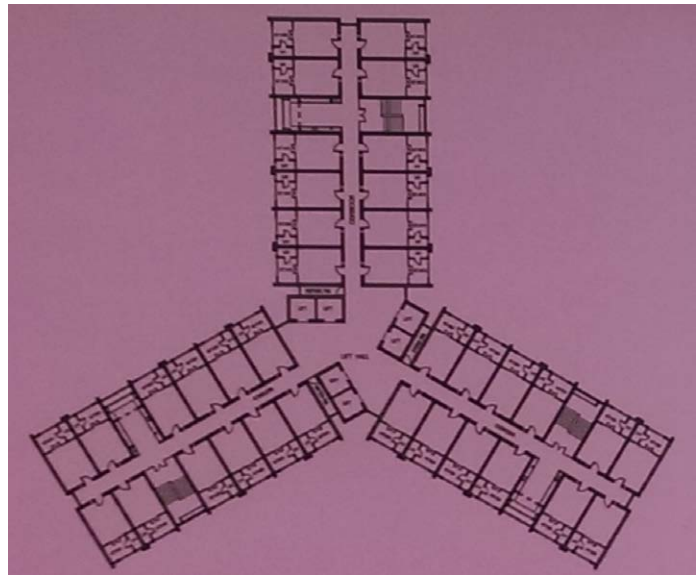


Abb. 127: Ground Plan Y-shaped



Abb. 128: Tsui Ping Estate

Another design for public housing was buildings with a cascade-like outlook, for example the Butterfly Estate in Tuen Mun, which was occupied in 1983. In the 1990s a new design was representative for the public housing, the Harmony design. At that time, the cross-shaped design and the harmony design were classy, but they were not so often used in rental public housing. The Harmony design was then a breakthrough, because with this design, the blocks were of unified height and the constructed design with prefabricated components such as staircases, kitchens and exterior wall panels. These new design blocks were built very fast and with lower cost than any other resettlement block before.²⁵³

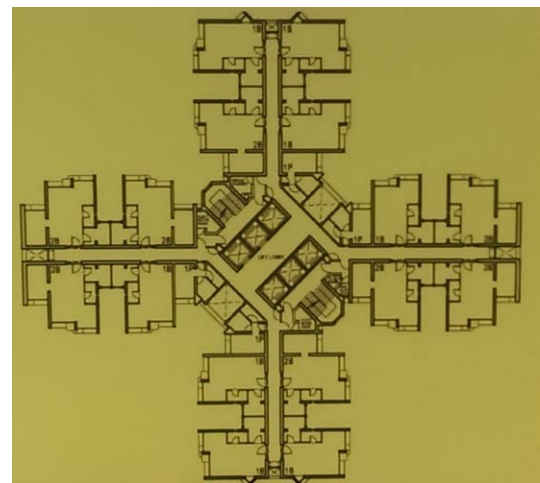


Abb. 129: Ground Plan Harmony Design

With the first of its kind completed in 1992, the development of the Harmony series was a technological breakthrough, with its extensive use of precast building components such as facades, staircases, drywall panels and semi-finished slabs. As the allocation standard has increased to 7 square metres per person by the 90s, most Harmony Blocks feature one- to three-bedroom layouts. The spacious and flexible design allows residents to put partitions in their flats to suit their own need. There are windows in every room to let in more daylight and air.²⁵⁴

252 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

253 Vgl. Ebda..

254 Vgl. Ebda..

The long corridors common in older public housing estates have been shortened to a minimum, according to appropriate scales.²⁵⁵



Abb. 130: Tivoli Garden, Tsing Yi

Since 2000, the main focus had been put on the characteristics of individual construction sites, where one tried to create site specific designs and with this new concept the natural ventilation and lighting of the residential units and the public spaces should get improved. The flats have now two different designs, a small type and a family type and a modular system was introduced, so the environment and facilities of the resettlement blocks could accommodate residents of different physical strengths.²⁵⁶

255 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

256 Vgl. Ebda..

5.5 Mei Ho House

Due to the ever-increasing population in Hong Kong, the government implemented a series of measures to relieve the housing shortage of the grassroots in 1970s. Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area was the first of its kind and naturally became the first area of reconstruction. A 12-year reconstruction plan started in 1972. Block 15 was renamed as Block 41 after its reconstruction and named Mei Ho House.²⁵⁷

Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area was renamed the Lower Shek Kip Mei Estate in the 1970s after reconstruction and later combined with the Upper Shek Kip Mei Estate and renamed Shek Kip Mei Estate.²⁵⁸



Abb. 131: Mei Ho House, Block 41

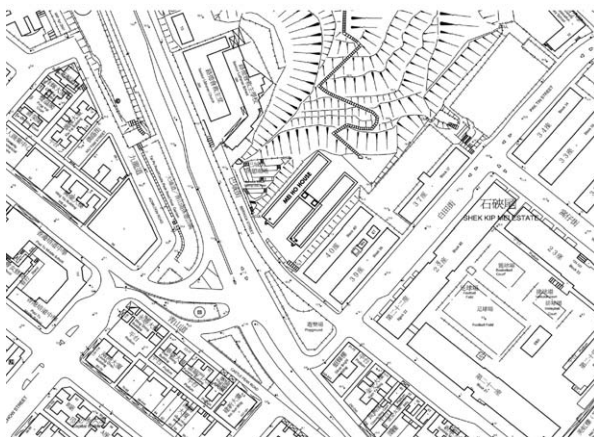


Abb. 132: Site Map, Shek Kip Mei

Since the opening of the Mei Ho House in 1954 until now, this building has gone through many changes. Nearly over a thousand families and over ten thousand residents had moved in and out of it during this period.²⁵⁹

Most of the residents were couples of age 30 to 40 and toddlers, who were learning how to speak. Living in one of the flats of the Mei Ho House was an unforgettable life experience in those years.²⁶⁰

257 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

258 Vgl. Ebda..

259 Vgl. Ebda..

260 Vgl. Ebda..

Historical Background

Mei Ho House was one of the first eight blocks built in 1954 by the Hong Kong Government in the Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area. It was also the only public housing of the first generation preserved in Hong Kong. It contained a lot of local social history and its H-shaped outlook and simple, down-to-earth architectural design were world renowned. The Mei Ho House was located at the westernmost corner of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area on a slope about 16 meters above principal datum. Berwick Street Sitting-out Area, a tiny park situated in the northwest, former North Kowloon Magistracy was located nearby, which had been revitalised as the Savannah College of Art and Design. Located in the north, the former Shek Kip Mei factory building had become the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre.²⁶¹

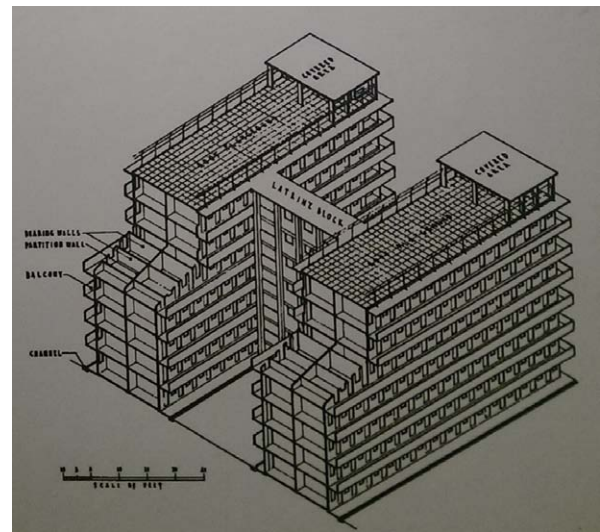


Abb. 133: 3D Section

The Mei Ho House had been called Block H, Block 15 and Block 41. The Mei Ho House was the last completed in the first batch of eight resettlement blocks and it was then called Block H, in 1954. After all the resettlement buildings were completed in the area, it was renamed Block 15.²⁶²

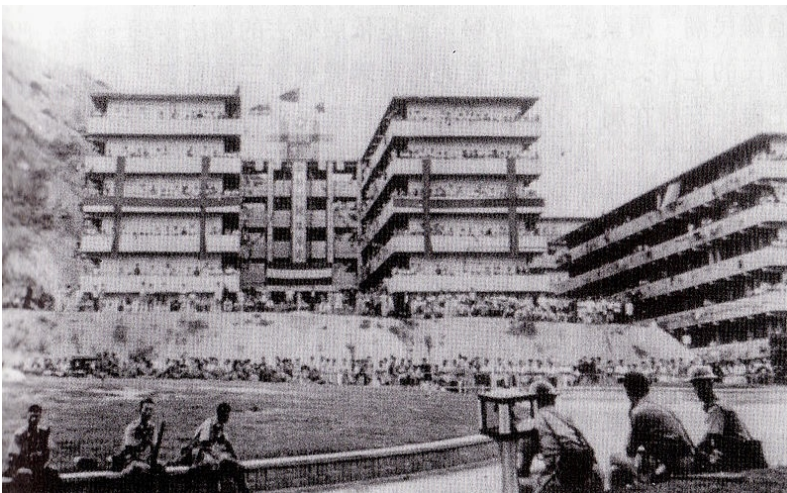


Abb. 134: Mei Ho House around 1955

Some years later, six new blocks had been constructed and eighteen original resettlement blocks, including the Mei Ho House, were converted to self-contained flats by joining two units into one with its own toilet, shower and kitchen space. Mei Ho House was re-numbered as Block 41 after the redevelopment and conversion works. In 1972, the government reconstructed Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area and like other resettlement buildings, Mei Ho House was reconstructed into a building with individual units furnished with private toilet and kitchen. It was then re-sorted as Block 41 and named Mei Ho House.²⁶³

In 2000, Shek Kip Mei Estate commenced another redevelopment plan, so the Mei Ho House was not demolished, and was vacant in 2004. In 2008, Mei Ho House was included in one of the projects for the first batch of Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme. The Hong Kong Youth Hostels Association applied and succeeded to be a partner to revitalise Mei Ho House as a youth hostel. In 2010, Mei Ho House was accorded as a Grade 2 historic building.²⁶⁴

261 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

262 Vgl. Ebda..

263 Vgl. Ebda..

264 Vgl. Ebda..

Design of H-shaped Resettlement Blocks

The building was designed as a resettlement with basic and simple features. It is a six-story building characterized by two identical wings (or linear blocks) linked up by a cross piece forming the H-shaped plan. Each block consisted of dwelling units arranged in a back-to-back manner between the two linear blocks are two open courtyards. The access balcony ran around the perimeter of each floor. The building was converted in the 1970s with partition walls at the rear of units removed forming new flats of larger sizes. Balconies facing the courtyard were preserved, while those facing outwards were enclosed by windows forming the cooking areas.²⁶⁵

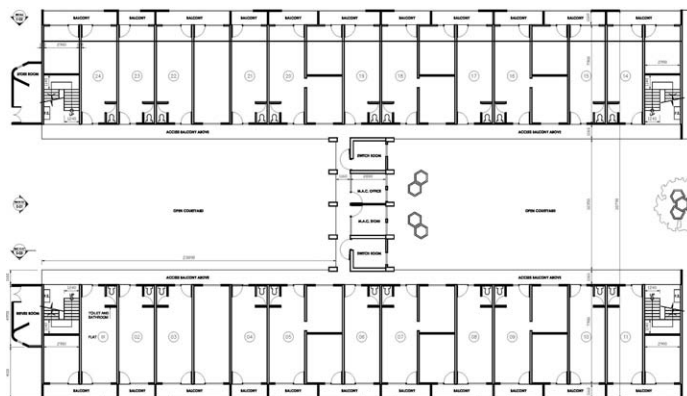


Abb. 135: Ground Floor Plan

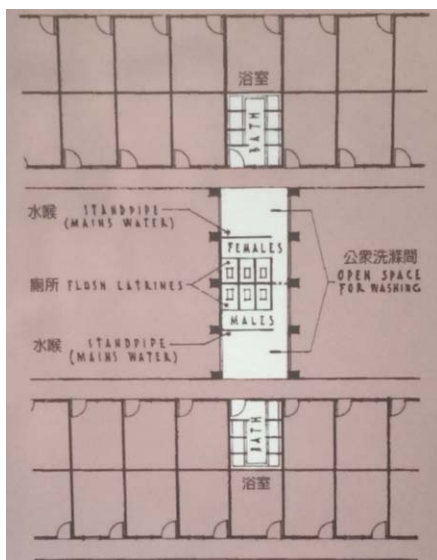


Abb. 136: Central Public Bathrooms

These resettlement blocks had an H-shaped layout and were referred as Mark I, H-shaped, while the later on were I-shaped. The majority were H-shaped. Each H-shaped resettlement block consisted of two “wings” and a “central connection block”. The residential units were located in the two “wings”. At the central junction between the two “wings” of the resettlement block, there were two water supply points and six toilets at each floor. So the residents had not any private toilets, bathrooms or kitchens inside their flats. Especially for women, going to the toilet or using the bathroom was not very secure. An “internal” courtyard was formed on the ground floor on each side of the connection block, which was used as an open space for enjoying cool air. Through such an architectural layout, neighbours could often see and chat with one another. Through this design, harmony and mutual help were promoted, so were conflicts.²⁶⁶

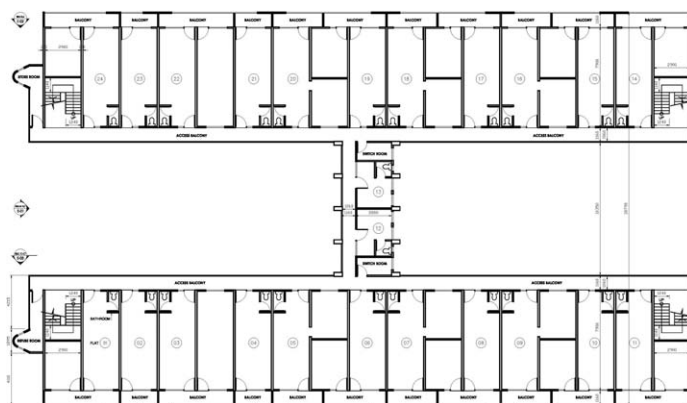


Abb. 137: First to Fifth Ground Plan

All flats were facing a long open corridor. For cooking everybody of the building had to go outside and cook their meals at the corridors. Each residential unit measured about 35 square metres and most of the walls and floors were made of concrete and without any decoration. Each building contained 384 units and at least five adults lived in each unit. Only children under the age of 10 would be counted as half an adult. Households with less than five adults needed to share a unit with another household.²⁶⁷

265 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

266 Vgl. Ebda..

267 Vgl. Ebda..

The monthly rent was HK\$10 plus HK\$ 1 for water supply. The first batch of residents would feel like winning a sweepstakes. (Sweepstakes was a popular lottery in the 1950s). The establishment of resettlement blocks brought a new life to the victims and signified the commencement of Hong Kong public housing development. There was no elevator in the resettlement block. The four staircases were located at the ends of the ‘wings’. The two rows of residential units were aligned in the ‘wings’ back to back. Each unit was like a rectangle of 3,1 metres wide and about 3,6 metres long. The design was simple, without any internal partition. The front and back units were separated with partition wall. Each unit faced the veranda. The doors and windows were located in the front while the other three sides were walls.²⁶⁸



Abb. 138: Unit Plan before revitalization



Abb. 139: Layout plan of residential units

Tiny holes were made on the upper portion of the back partition wall for ventilation. Both ventilation and lighting were insufficient. Such a tiny unit of 120 square feet could accommodate five adults (based on the 24-square-feet-per-person standard). The six-story Mei Ho House consisted of 384 units when it was first built. Nowadays Mei Ho House is the only Mark I H-shaped resettlement block remained in Hong Kong. It was designated as a Grade I Historic Building by the Antiquities Advisory Board in May 2005. Grade I Historic Building is defined as a Building of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible.²⁶⁹

H-shaped Rooftop

The resettlement blocks had solved both housing and education issues at the same time. A rooftop school had 6 to 8 classrooms. Each of them accommodated over 40 students. It had both morning and afternoon school, which could accommodate over 500 students. To make the most use of time and space, some rooftop schools even opened evening classes. The classrooms of rooftop schools were described as utterly destitute. For some of the rooftop school, blackboards were set on long wooden benches. Students followed a teacher to recite the texts in hot summers and cold winters. Classrooms were located in the two wings on the roof floor; the central space was taken as a place to recess or classes of physical education. Teachers and students had to use the resident public toilets. There was no music room, crafts room, medical room, auditorium and other facilities.²⁷⁰

268 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

269 Vgl. Ebda..

270 Vgl. Ebda..

Schedule of Accommodation The schedule of accommodation and the respective floor areas are summarized in the following table. Floor	Accommodation	Approximate Floor Areas
Two linear blocks		
G/F	Residential flat,	543 sq.m / linear block

1/F-5/F	Residential flats	540 sq.m / floor / linear block
1/F-5/F	Typical one single flat	22 sq.m (internal area of flat) 3 sq.m (rear balcony) (the internal area of the flat excludes wall thickness)
R/F	Only accessible by cat ladder for maintenance	N/A
Central connecting block		
G/F	E&M rooms, office	45 sq.m
1/F-5/F	2 residential units with E&M rooms	45 sq.m / floor
R/F	Only accessible by cat ladder for maintenance	N/A
“H” Block (including the two linear blocks and the central connecting block)		
G/F	Residential Flats	1,131 sq.m
1/F-5/F	Residential Flats	5,625 sq.m
Total Gross floor area	6,756 sq.m	

Materials of Construction Finishes			
Roof	Wall	Floor	Exterior
Reinforced concrete	Reinforced concrete Parapet of open corridor – concrete block (~100mm thick)	Reinforced concrete	Wall painted white with parapet wall at open corridor painted pale orange

Architectural Design

The architectural design of Mei Ho House was uniformly planned, simple and straightforward, focusing on functional aspects. Mei Ho House was made up of two wings and a central block. The length of its wing was approximately 52 meters, width 10 meters. The depth of the central block was about 5,28 meters, width 10,55 meters. It connected the two wings. The layout looked like the English letter H.²⁷¹



Abb. 140: Front Elevation

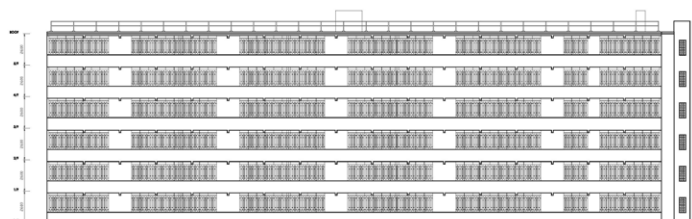


Abb. 141: Side Elevation

The recessed areas of the H formed two internal courtyards. The building footprint occupied about 2,765 square meters and the construction area about 6,755 square meters. It was a six storey building without elevator. The residential units were located on the ground to the fifth floor.²⁷²

Access through staircases could only be allowed from ground to the fifth floor. A separate vertical ladder was installed for the access to the roof on the sixth floor. The only possibility of a barrier free access was the ground floor, because there was no connected access from the ground floor to the upper floors.²⁷³

Mei Ho House was built of reinforced concrete, a sturdy, fire resistant and wind-proof material in order to protect against the threats from fire in dry winter and typhoons in summer. Compared with the squatters built of iron, timber and canvas, without a doubt, it was a great improvement.²⁷⁴

During the reconstruction of Mei Ho House in 1981, the main works included:²⁷⁵

- The partition wall between the front and back residential units were demolished and small units were merged into a unit of 3 metre by 7,5 metre.
- The verandas facing street were converted into kitchens and private balconies. Residential units were provided with independent toilets.
- The public toilets and washing areas of the central block and the central portion of the wings were converted into residential units.
- The old cooking spots along the open corridor were relocated inside the flat caused by blocking the circulation in the corridors.
- The rear walls of each unit were provided with windows to improve lighting and natural ventilation in each unit.²⁷⁶

271 Vgl. Mei Ho House-Resource Kit, https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/doc/Resource%20kit_Mei_Ho_House.pdf, 13.09.2015.

272 Vgl. Ebda..

273 Vgl. Ebda..

274 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

275 Vgl. Ebda..

276 Vgl. Ebda..

“The structural system of the Mei Ho House consists a reinforced concrete shallow pad foundations supporting reinforced concrete walls, beams and slabs as the superstructure. The two wings were used as residential units. Based on the record drawings retrieved from Housing Department, the shallow pad foundations are approximately 2,7m wide and 7,8m long on each side. Each foundation supports a reinforced concrete wall from ground floor to roof floor, which was also used for partitioning the flats. The balconies are supported by reinforced concrete cantilever beams.”²⁷⁷



Abb. 142: Section

“For the central connecting block, as indicated in the record drawings, the shallow pad foundations contain two configurations: 1,8m wide and 3m long and 2,1m wide and 6,9m long. Each foundation supports either a reinforced concrete column or a reinforced concrete wall from ground floor to roof floor, which is connected by reinforced concrete beams. During the site visit, it was noted that there were five deteriorated reinforced concrete columns at both sides of the central connecting block. It seems that they were constructed as the strengthening works to the building at an intermediate date of its history.”²⁷⁸



Abb. 143: Section

Architectural Characteristics

Residents safety and public security are very important for densely populated public housing. The architectural characteristics of Mei Ho House are not only expressed through its outlook, external wall, patio as well as the doors, windows, verandas and staircases of the residential units, but also the safety and security devices installed everywhere. Those designs reflected the real living situations in those years and became its architectural characteristics.²⁷⁹

277 Mei Ho House-Resource Kit, https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/doc/Resource%20kit_Mei_Ho_House.pdf, 13.09.2015.

278 Ebda..

279 Vgl. Ebda..

Central Block

The central block was the main component in the H-shaped layout of Mei Ho House. The H-shape must be preserved during reconstruction. The central block was the passage to the two wings where fire escape staircases and elevators were located. The two storey high function room was located at the rear side of the central block. An additional weather proof barrier-free access connecting the reception to the lift lobby was also installed. The reconstructed central block was built of reinforced concrete using the same materials as when it was first built, while the new function room was built of steel and light glass. This function room is structurally independent from the central block which would not be affected the latter if restoration is required.²⁸⁰



Abb. 144: Washing Areas and Public Bathroom in the Central Block

Veranda



Abb. 145: Veranda

One of the most important architectural characteristics of Mei Ho House was the veranda. During the reconstruction in 1981, only the portion of veranda facing the internal courtyard (internal veranda) was kept, while the portion facing streets (external veranda) was converted into private kitchen and balcony. The revitalisation planning was to reconstruct the internal veranda and to install windows along the external veranda to increase the area of guest rooms. The height of concrete balustrade for internal veranda was only 0,8 meter when it was first built. An additional iron handrail of 0,4 meter high was built on top of the balustrade during reconstruction in 1981.²⁸¹

The new internal veranda simulated the past outlook. The balustrade was built of reinforced concrete. The new building service pipes and ducts were concealed in the ceiling of the new veranda. After revitalisation, the balustrade of the new internal veranda was built of concrete. The width of the new veranda was increased from 1,1 meter to 1,2 meter.²⁸²

280 Vgl. Mei Ho House-Resource Kit, https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/doc/Resource%20kit_Mei_Ho_House.pdf, 13.09.2015.

281 Vgl. Ebda..

282 Vgl. Ebda..

The external veranda facing street in Mei Ho House was renovated into indoor kitchens and balconies during reconstruction in 1981. Kitchens were converted as part of the guest room during revitalisation in 2012. A recess of 100mm from external wall had been made, where new large double-glazed windows were installed. That not only lowered the indoor temperature, but also saved energy for air-conditioning. The transparent window panes seem to have recaptured the mood of the old verandas in those days.²⁸³

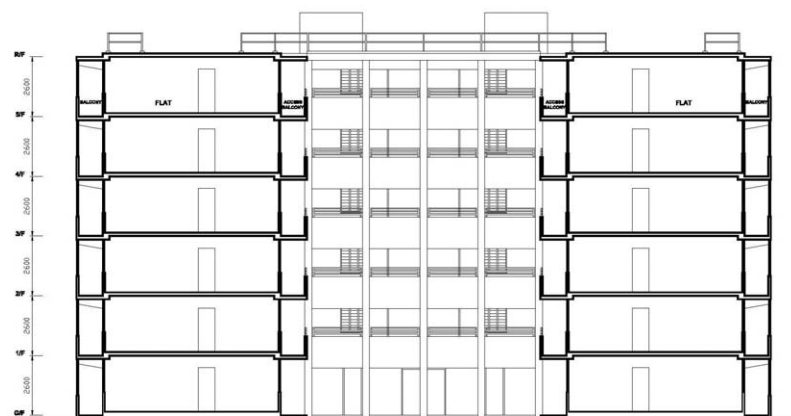


Abb. 146: Section Veranda



Abb. 147: View of Corridor

Internal Veranda

Former residents gazed afar at verandas. The balustrade was formerly built of 100mm-thick concrete. The metal railing was added later. Since the veranda had been damaged, it had to be reinforced. New balustrades were built and the veranda was kept fully accessible after revitalisation.²⁸⁴

External Wall

The external walls paint finish was pale green pale pink before revitalisation; paint of new colours were adopted during revitalisation; the paint is restoreable. The original block number 41 was signage in Chinese '四十一' and English 'Mei Ho House' on both the right and left side of the external wall were repainted in the original colour and scripts after revitalisation.²⁸⁵

Window Grilles

Anti-burglar window grilles were installed at the balconies facing street for the whole building during reconstruction in 1981. A portion of balconies and anti-burglar window in Heritage of Mei Ho House were kept for exhibition purpose. The remaining balconies were installed with large double-glazed window to cater to the new needs of hostel rooms.²⁸⁶

Staircase

The original staircases at the two ends of the wings of Mei Ho House were all preserved. Fire escape staircases were added to the central block and Heritage of Mei Ho House. The staircases in Mei Ho House were renovated using materials similar to the original during revitalisation.²⁸⁷



Abb. 148: Staircase

283 Vgl. Mei Ho House-Resource Kit, https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/doc/Resource%20kit_Mei_Ho_House.pdf, 13.09.2015.

284 Vgl. Ebda..

285 Vgl. Ebda..

286 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

287 Vgl. Ebda..

Refuse Chute

Refuse chutes had been added to the external side of staircases of Mei Ho House in 1970. The refuse chutes were preserved after revitalisation. Metal gates and fan-shaped anti-burglar spikes were installed at the front of the refuse chutes on every floor to prevent unauthorized access.²⁸⁸

Our room our home

The living environment in resettlement blocks was overcrowded. Indoor furniture was primitive. Sundries were piled up right outside the units. The residents went out to work in the day time and only needed a bed at night there. Almost every family had bunk beds and cocklofts. They would set up the folded canvas beds to sleep in the veranda during summertime enjoying the cool air. Most of the residents in Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area were grassroot and many of them were former resident squatters. They lived a thrifty life. They survived the fire, got a place for settlement and cultivated the next generation of Hong Kong.²⁸⁹

Through their primitive living style, one could understand that what they had was not easy to obtain at the time hardship in Hong Kong and they treasured it very much. Living style changed as the residents moved from squatters into resettlement blocks. Kerosene instead of firewood was used in cooking, and they lived in multi-storeyed building instead of squatters. Since the living units were tiny, they expanded their living area to the public veranda, where residents dried their clothes, cooked and hanged odds and ends.²⁹⁰



Abb. 149: View from the Courtyard



Abb. 150: Standard Unit

The verandas connected all the units on the same floor. They served as a multi-functional space and they were playgrounds for children and also the necessary passage where neighbours met day and night and kept close relationships. There was no indoor kitchen in a resettlement block, the early residents could only cook inside their units. They were later allowed to cook in the public veranda to relieve the overcrowding living conditions. Residents hanged bathtubs on the outside wall and put water tank and the odds and ends in the veranda. That caused a blockage of passage and posed a huge danger in case of accidents.²⁹¹

288 Vgl. Mei Ho House-Resource Kit, https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/doc/Resource%20kit_Mei_Ho_House.pdf, 13.09.2015.

289 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

290 Vgl. Ebda..

291 Vgl. Ebda..

Oral History

There was one public water tap on each floor. Every family had to queue up for water supply. We had to get water from a water well of the nearby resettlement block during water rationing.

We were accustomed to carry water by carrying poles and iron buckets. Fights often happened among residents from different floors in the queue for water. The bathroom facilities were primitive. We had different living habits; conflicts often happened. That was the common daily issue.

*Wong Sui Ching, Block F of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area.*²⁹²



Abb. 151: Public Toilet

There was no other furniture except a bed and a desk in our home, and that desk was the workshop of our family. My father went to paper factory to purchase paper and borrowed a paper folding machine from a factory to cut paper for making envelopes. The whole family then got on folding envelopes. After completing the second year of secondary education, I had worked as a laborer for a couple of months and finally returned to Shek Kip Mei assist my father to operate the factory. The business got better and better. We moved our factory to a shop on ground floor of 240 square feet at Block 18 in 1965 and later to Shek Kip Mei Factory Estate in 1970. Now we set up our factory in Weizhou (in Mainland China) and our warehouse at an industrial building in Lai Chi Kok.

*Lam Hai Man, Block 15 (Mei Ho House) of Shek Kip Mei Estate*²⁹³

The family living on the upper floor set up a cockloft and they pull all the odds and ends and furniture in it. They installed a radio and a TV of Re-diffusion Hong Kong underneath it. Their home was filled with small stools. The neighbours paid ten cents for listening to the radio and twenty cents for watching TV.

*Au Tung Yim, Block D of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area*²⁹⁴

My father left early for work and came back late. Our store was mainly operated by my mother. When I was a kid, I often helped my mother with the store after school. I could only watch the snacks and could not taste them. Wafer was very expensive in those days. I hurt my hand once and blood shed onto a piece of wafer, which could not be sold, my mother then let me taste a little piece. Sometimes, customers did not pay for their goods. I would grab their clothes and not let them go until they paid.

*Kwok Chun Wah, Block P of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area*²⁹⁵



Abb. 152: Veranda at the Upper Floors

292 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

293 Vgl. Ebda..

294 Vgl. Ebda..

295 Vgl. Ebda..

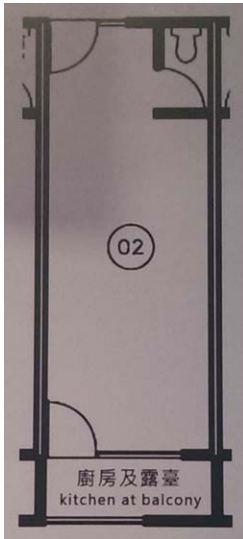


Abb. 153: Standard Unit

The Fan family of six members lived in Unit 271, Block 15 (Mei Ho House) from 1950s to 1979. They set up a cockloft where odds and ends were stored on one side, while four sons and daughters slept on the other. The cockloft was just high enough for a child to sit on it in a reclining posture. The Fan family unit was separated from the back unit by a portion wall. The brick-size holes on the upper portion of that wall allowed air flow for ventilation and allowed rats and cockroaches to shuttle through them.²⁹⁶

Water supplies, toilets and bathrooms in a resettlement block were all public facilities. To allow easy access, all the fresh water and sewage pipes were designed to be located in the middle portion of a resettlement block. There were two washing areas and two bathrooms on each floor. There were originally a male and a female toilet with three cubicles each in a resettlement block.²⁹⁷

There was no water supply in the public bathrooms. The residents had to carry water for washing. The cubicles had no doors, female residents would take showers together for safeties sake. Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area was a self-contained place where residents could find all the daily necessities. Shops were located on the ground floor of resettlement blocks. There were grocery stores, pharmacies, barber shops, café, tea houses, restaurants, clinics, electrical shops, etc.²⁹⁸

Those shops were mainly family businesses. In addition, some residents would operate small business selling dried fruits and groceries at their residential units. Residents of resettlement blocks mainly came from squatter area. They used to operate family business such as rattan weaving and embroidery at home.²⁹⁹



Abb. 154: Two reverted L-shaped Units



Abb. 155: Furniture of a Standard Unit

They kept doing their business after moving into the resettlement blocks. Some of the shops on the ground floor of the resettlement blocks were allowed to be workshops of small-scale industry; those workshops could be regarded as the pioneer of resettlement factory.³⁰⁰

296 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

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299 Vgl. Ebda..

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Cultural History

Mei Ho House was rated as a Grade 2 historic building, from its completion in 1954 to being vacant in 2004. Over half a century, it embodied great architectural, social and cultural significance. It also reflected the history of the living environment, education and economy of the grass-roots of Hong Kong.³⁰¹

Revitalisation Scheme: Project

Being built over half a century ago, Mei Ho House suffered concrete spalling and damage much more serious than expected, and had created many structural problems. The main scope of project for the revitalisation of Mei Ho House includes reconstruction of the central block and verandas, conversion of residential units into guest rooms and an exhibition gallery. During reconstruction, architectural features such as H-shaped layout, iron window grill, old style lettering were deliberately preserved.³⁰²

Heritage of Mei Ho House

Heritage of Mei Ho House is situated at the units on the ground and first floor of the front half of the east wing. It occupies an area of 412 square meters.³⁰³

It exhibits the history and living environment of Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area in those days. Partition walls between units were the load-bearing walls, they had to be kept for load-bearing purposes during revitalisation. To facilitate visitor access, openings had been made in the central portion of those partition walls.³⁰⁴



Abb. 156: Heritage of Mei Ho House

Environmentally Friendly



Abb. 157: Mei Ho House Nowadays

The 6,5 meter high Chinese Banyan Tree on the west side of Mei Ho House and the 8 meter high Candlenut Tree on its east side had been preserved. Mei Ho House was built on a tiny slope. The sloped space on its east side was levelled; the underground space was utilized as storage for electrical and mechanical equipment. The space above ground was used as a sitting-out area and garden. Solar panels were installed on the rooftop to generate electricity for boiling water indoors to save energy while not affecting the overall appearance. The cooling equipment was located in the middle of the rooftop to supply air-conditioning.³⁰⁵

301 Vgl. Heritage of the Mei Ho House, 11.03.2015, Hong Kong.

302 Vgl. Ebda..

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5.6 Housing Authority

The first Housing Authority was formed in 1954 for the specific purpose of providing every resident with accommodation at the legal minimum standards of 3,2 square metres per person and that the rentals could be afforded by families with low- to middle-income.³⁰⁶

In 1954 the Hong Kong government started to construct public housing. It signified the prelude of the public housing programme of Hong Kong to solve the housing problem of the low-income inhabitants. Although the government inspired this department, it was run separately from the main government departments.³⁰⁷



Abb. 158: North Point Estate, First Low-Cost Housing Estate, 1957



Abb. 159: Government announced a 10 year Housing Programme, 1972

The Housing Authority financed their first projects with a government loan of 50 million HK\$. The loan had low interest rates and the sites were allocated at one third person, who assessed the market value of the land. The Housing Authority had a semi-independent status and so they had the flexibility in staff organization and in planning of the estates, which was normally denied by the government controlled Resettlement Department. Although the Housing Authority had their own Architect Department and they employed professional management right from the beginning. They clearly duplicated the management style of the Resettlement Department.³⁰⁸

306 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

307 Vgl. Ebda..

308 Vgl. Ebda..

The main criteria set for the design of this kind of housing was: a self-contained flat. Each flat should have its own kitchen, lavatory and balcony. The site layouts were planned so that the buildings occupied 25% to 27% of the site area a density of nearly 5,000 residents per hectare and the rent levels should be related to the monthly incomes of the residents.³⁰⁹



Abb. 160: A New Hong Kong Housing Authority was established, 1973

In 1958, the North Point Estate was completed and was one of the first scheme, that was ambitious attempt at low cost housing. One main problem was that over the years the economy was much more important than the design quality and so the standard of the accommodation in the North Point Estate had never been the repeated. The North Point Estate was located along the waterfront on a 2,6 hectare site and nearly half of the site was given to playgrounds and gardens. Most of the ground floor blocks had a design to cover the playgrounds for using them in wet weather. One of the most important design changes of these low-cost buildings were that these units had permanent partitions, which subdivided the units in separate rooms.³¹⁰

Caused by the increase of privacy and the ability to separate function, the required standard space had to be increased to 3,7 square metres per person. The prime importance was considered to the light and the ventilation in this design. After over 40 years of use, these resettlement blocks were still one of the best low-cost buildings, which were constructed in Hong Kong until their demolition in 2003. During the years the Housing Authority was responsible for the construction of ten estates like the small Sai Wan Estate or the huge Wah Fu Estate. The other estates were So Uk, Choi Hung, Ma Tau Wai, Wo Lok, Fuk Loi, Ping Shek and Oi Man Estates.³¹¹

The So Uk Estate was completed in 1963 and was a kind of experiment with a huge number of different units with various designs and also their rentals depended on the service, location and the size of the unit. The North Point Estate had the same services but the finishes were of a slightly lower standard. In 1964 the Choi Hung Estate was completed and marked the minimum standard of the Housing Authority development. The Ma Tau Wai, Wo Lok and Fuk Loi Estates were built in the same way but with minor plan variations, otherwise the Ping Shek Estate was designed as five 28 story high towers with associated shops, schools, library and bus terminus, after amendments in the plans.³¹²



Abb. 161: Street Barber registered by The Housing Department, 1979

309 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

310 Vgl. Ebda..

311 Vgl. Ebda..

312 Vgl. Ebda..



Abb. 162: First Series of Harmony Blocks were finished, 1992

The Wah Fu Estate was the show piece of the Housing Authority. It had a town centre including marketing and shopping facilities, a large restaurant, community hall, an own post office, library, multi-storey car parks, a department store, four primary schools and even a secondary school.³¹³

This Estate was also the first comprehensively designed neighbourhood estate, which was relatively successful except the location in respect to employment opportunities. The Oi Man Estates was designed and built in similar ways like the Wah Fu Estate.³¹⁴

In the 1970s there was the turning point in the history of Hong Kong public housing, when Hong Kong's economy was taking off. The resettlement blocks, which were constructed in the 1950s, had become dilapidated and the children of the residents of the first generation had been grown up and the living conditions in the blocks were overcrowded. After the government planned to reconstruct the resettlement blocks, Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area was the first to be reconstructed in 1972.³¹⁵

The housing management of Hong Kong government underwent a major change, caused by the opinion that all the different housing sections of the government would work more efficiently and give a better service to Hong Kong if they would be combined to one department. So in 1973 the new Hong Kong Housing Authority was established after the Resettlement Department, the Housing Authority and the Government Low Cost Housing Schemes were merged together into the new Housing Department. So the management of all public housing estates except the Housing Society estates and the new development were aimed at the administration of an integrated housing programme in Hong Kong. With this union, the resettlement estates had the same standards of accommodation and meanwhile the old Housing Authority and the Government Low Cost Housing estates continued with slightly higher quality developments.³¹⁶



Abb. 163: "Domain", in Yau Tong, Kowloon, 2012

313 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

314 Vgl. Ebda..

315 Vgl. Ebda..

316 Vgl. Ebda..

After the government released the rental housing, the resettlement areas were renamed as second-grade Housing Estate and then resettlement blocks were replaced. Afterwards, the government gradually changed its emphasis from the quantity of public housing units to the quality of living environment. The public housing was developed into a tiny self-contained community, where a shopping centre, school, bus terminals and other community facilities were accommodated. In a regional perspective, the development of public housing was spread to new towns remote from the urban areas, which became the driving force for urban population to move to the new towns.³¹⁷



Abb. 164: Tin Lee House was converted into a Home Ownership Scheme, 2014

For more than half a century, the government had launched different housing schemes to provide the low-income and middle-income families with different choices, which were based on their affordability. Like for example the Low-rent Housing Programme in the 1960s, the Home Ownership Scheme in the 1970s, the Long term Housing Strategy in the 1980s and the Sandwich Class Housing Scheme in the 1990s. There existed a huge difference in the quality of those public housing schemes and that of the Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area.³¹⁸

Typical Rents As at 31.03.2014					
	Block Type/ Estate (Year of completion)	Stock of flats	Typical size of flats (including Service Area) in m ²	Number of flats	Average monthly rents (HK\$)
Former Housing Authority Estates	Old Type (1958 - 1965)	14765	24.1	2381	1059
			30.6	3733	1343
			41.2	1298	1809
	New Type (1966 - 1973)	12739	28.3	2698	1150
Housing Authority Estates	Post (1973)	32977 (Urban)	30.6	3767	1349
			33.1	2058	1457
			36.5	1256	1504
			16.3	6973	1058
			23.5	4889	1018
		216545 (Extended Urban)	34.4	14997	2218
			43.3	12101	2788
			53.6	1238	3796
		169851 (New Territories)	17.8	2440	1108
			22.0	3295	1362
			34.4	5314	2147
			43.3	5723	2696
			51.8	2240	2594
			12.0	2607	487
			24.9	3537	843
			34.4	4202	1474
			43.3	3764	1861
			51.8	3200	2442

317 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

318 Vgl. Ebda..

Income and Total Net Asset Limits for Families

Effective from 01.04.2015

Family Size	Maximum Income Limit per Month
1 Person	\$10100
2 Person	\$16140
3 Person	\$21050
4 Person	\$25250
5 Person	\$29050
6 Person	\$32540
7 Person	\$36130
8 Person	\$38580
9 Person	\$43330
10 or More Persons	\$45450

Government Low Cost Housing

In 1962 the first Government Low Cost housing were built to support families with a low income, less than 500 HK\$ per month and subsequently raised to 600 HK\$ in 1970. These families did not qualify for any resettlement unit and lived in overcrowded and substandard accommodations. Some years later some of these residents were allocated for lower ranking civil servants.³¹⁹

These Estates were built by the Public Works Department but were handed over to the Housing Authority after they were finished. The Housing Authority made the selection of the tenants and managed the estates. The standard units in these estates were the same like the Mark III or the Mark VI resettlement blocks with 3,2 square metres per person. However, if one compares the Government Low Cost Housing with the Housing Authority, one will notice that the Housing Authority buildings was better quality. They also had more children's playgrounds and equipment, community rooms and kindergartens on these estates.³²⁰



Abb. 165: High Density, Quarry Bay

³¹⁹ Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

³²⁰ Vgl. Ebda..

New Towns Development

The beginning of the new towns or also called satellite cities can be traced back to the cities which were developed in Kwun Tong and Tsuen Wan in the mid 1950s and early 1960s. During this period, there was a severe shortage of building sites for the fast growing industry in Hong Kong. In 1953 the government reclaimed some inner coast area along Ngau Tau Kok and the area around Kwun Tong to develop an industrial satellite city with more than 12,000 inhabitants. In the beginning of 1960, the government made the decision to develop a new town in the area of Tsuen Wan. Tsuen Wan was mainly developed to be a self-contained community with a balanced land-use pattern design. This design allowed the inhabitants to live within a reasonable distance of their working place and with adequate public services, communications and community facilities. This design had become the development framework for all new future towns, which were built in Hong Kong.³²¹



Abb. 166: Satellite City Sha Tin

In 1965 the government decided to develop two further new towns in the New Territories. The first one was Castle Peak or later called Tuen Mun and some years later Sha Tin. This was the beginning of a long-term program of new towns that were developed in Hong Kong. The only problem was that the impetus for full-scale implementation did not come until the Housing Authority launched their 10-year housing program in 1973. Until this moment the government was mainly committed to the development of the new towns, so they could guarantee high density in the urban areas and to help provide an increasing population with better accommodation.³²²

321 Vgl. Hong Kong's Public Housing, 25.04.2015, Hong Kong.

322 Vgl. Ebda..

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6. *The Walled City*



Abb. 167: The Walled City during Night

6.1 History

Beginning as a Chinese military enclave, in the 17th century AD the City's wall was added in 1847, possibly as a precautionary measure against the British who had recently taken possession of Hong Kong. After the New Territories were leased to Britain, in 1898, Kowloon Walled City was excluded from the lease, its condition remaining ambiguous for many years. After the departure of the Chinese officials from the City in 1899, the former Yamen Headquarters was repaired, renovated and used as an almshouse and was established in 1902 by the Anglican Church. After gradually falling into decay, its walls gone and its interior reduced to slums, Kowloon Walled City Park, by agreement with China was cleared in 1990-1995 and converted into a public park, with many of its historic features skilfully restored.³²³

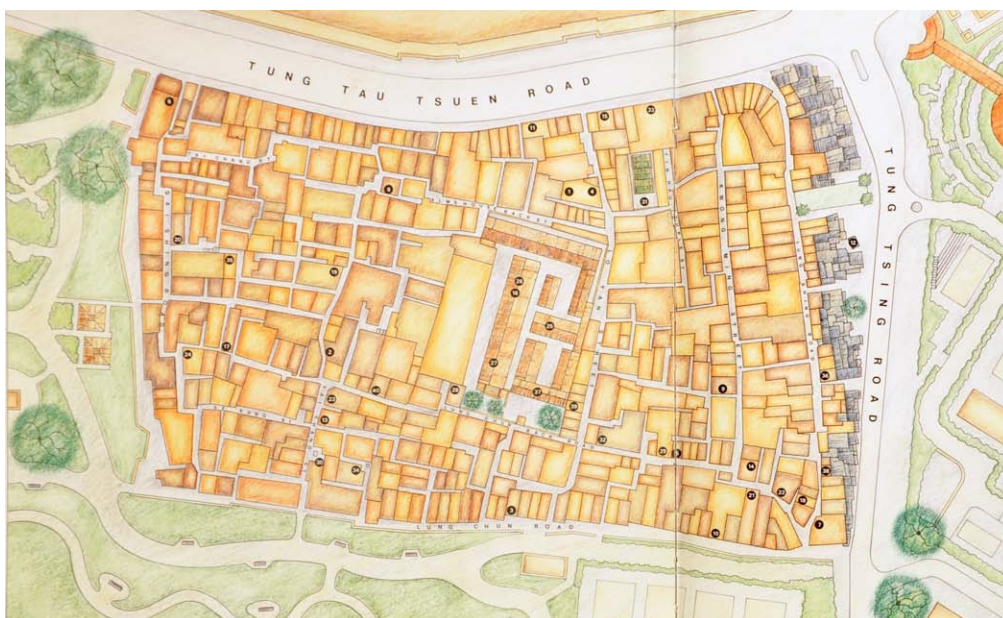


Abb. 168: Ground-Plan Walled City

323 Vgl. A City of Thousand Faces, 14.07.2015, Hong Kong.

During the Song Dynasty only the government was allowed to produce salt, Guangfu Salt Field and the Office of Salt were set up in Kowloon and were administered by officials and soldiers. From the Yuan Dynasty onwards, salt production declined and consequently led to the closure of the field. The Office of Salt was then transformed into the Assistant Magistracy of Guangfu and was responsible for public security in the region. At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the government enacted its migration order to quash anti-Qing activities emanating from Taiwan. The Assistant Magistracy was withdrawn and the Kowloon Beacon Tower was built. As the problem of the piracy worsened, the Kowloon Battery was established in 1810 but the greatest value of the battery was to counter British attacks in the First Opium War.³²⁴

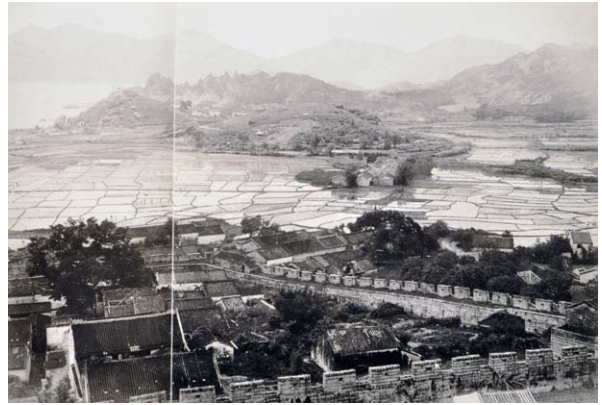


Abb. 169: The Walled City, 1865

After the war, Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain. In order to strengthen the defense of the Kowloon Peninsula, the Assistant Magistracy of Guangfu was renamed as Assistant Magistracy of Kowloon and the quarter returned to the Kowloon battery. As the Kowloon Peninsula was gaining its importance in the aspect of military and administration, the Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi Qi Ying proposed the construction of the Kowloon Walled City. The construction commenced in September 1846 and it was completed in May 1847.³²⁵



Abb. 170: View from the Pier to the Walled City, around 1875

The Convention Respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory was signed between China and Britain on 9th June 1898, in which the New Territories were leased to Britain for 99 years. According to the Convention, Chinese officials had the right to exercise their jurisdiction in the City. However, after taken over the New Territories, the British Government requested all Chinese officials and troops to withdraw from the City. In December 1899, the Order in Council was issued proclaiming that the City was under British sole governance. The Qing Government vigorously protested against Britain's arbitrary declaration but China was too preoccupied with civil strife and commotion and could not dedicate time to the issue of the Kowloon Walled City, which resulted in the City entering a non-governed status. The British Government eventually gave up the actual governance of the City. As time went by the buildings in the City were gradually abandoned and the City became deserted.³²⁶

324 Vgl. A City of Thousand Faces, 14.07.2015, Hong Kong.

325 Vgl. Ebda..

326 Vgl. Ebda..

During the Japanese occupation in World War II, the walls of the Kowloon Walled City were torn down and the stones were used to extend the Kai Tak Airport. In 1948 the Hong Kong Government's attempt to occupy the city with armed force had led to widespread student demonstrations in China, culminating in the burning of the British Consulate and many British business premises in Guangzhou. This event was known as the "Kowloon Walled Incident", following this incident, the British opted a hands-off policy. From the 1950s, a large quantity of drugs like heroin, were processed in the City and exported throughout the world. Flourishing strip clubs, brothels, casinos, opium dens and dog meat stalls transformed the Kowloon Walled City into a notorious city of darkness in the 1950s and the 1960s. Since the land price was low, various types of factories were established in the west side of the City. The opening of unlicensed dental clinics also boomed in the City to provide economic services for the public.³²⁷



Abb. 171: Rise of the Walled City

The 6,5 acre land in Kowloon City was commonly known as the Kowloon Walled City. However, there was a controversy over the Chinese name of the City. Since the Republic of China, people often called this place the Walled City or the City of Stockade, but the use of the latter term was rare in later times. This issue was finally resolved after a granite plaque was unearthed during the process of demolition, which proved that the original meaning of the City's name was "City of Kowloon Fortress" instead of "Fortress in Kowloon City". The population in the City grew rapidly from the 1960s to 1970s. To cope with housing demand, illegal constructions mushroomed throughout the City. In the 1980s, buildings had reached 16 storeys with some 500 illegal buildings occupying 2,7 hectare of land. The population had reached 40.000 by the time of its demolition.³²⁸



Abb. 172: Cooking at the Balconies

Following the Sino-British Joint Declaration, Britain and China embarked on discussions to solve the Kowloon Walled City issue. The Hong Kong Government announced the demolition of the City on the 14th January 1987. Only the Yamen Building was to be conserved and a park would be built on the site. Hong Kong law would also be enforced in the City from that day onwards. On the same day, the Chinese Government declared that they fully supported the British decision, taking into account the stability and development of Hong Kong. The fate of the Kowloon walled City was thus sealed. The demolition began in November 1991 and was completed in 1993. The park was officially opened in December 1995 by the Governor, Mr. Christopher Patten.³²⁹

327 Vgl. A City of Thousand Faces, 14.07.2015, Hong Kong.

328 Vgl. Ebda..

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The remains of Longjin Bridge were uncovered at the former Kai Tak Airport Northern Apron during an archaeological investigation conducted by the Civil Engineering and Development in April 2008. The Longjin Bridge constructed in the period of Qing Tongzhi (1873) was a tax levying station and the only gate to admit official staff via water. The bridge was buried when the Japanese extended Kai Tak Airport during the World War II and was eventually unearthed in 2008.³³⁰

During the demolition of the modern buildings within the Kowloon Walled City, the Antiquities and Monuments Office conducted archaeological investigations to confirm whether any remnants of the original Walled City still survived. The investigations, which were assisted by the Architectural Services Department and many local scholars, proved to be most fruitful. Foundations of the original city wall, a drainage ditch running along the foot of the inner wall as well as a flagstone path parallel to it were uncovered. Foundations of the original East and South Gates were also discovered. Both gateways still survive in a good condition. The most important discovery is the two stone plaques bearing the characters “Kowloon Walled City” and “South Gate” which were mounted at the original South Gate. At the advice of the Antiquities Advisory Board, the Government decided to preserve the remnants of the South Gate in-situ for display to the public.³³¹



Abb. 173: Concrete Foundation of the Walled City

Located in the centre of the Park, the Yamen is a declared monument and serves as the Park’s office. In 1847, when the walled garrison city was finished, its interior was dominated by the offices of the Commodore of the Dapeng Brigade and the Kowloon Assistant Military Inspectorate, commonly known as the Yamen or headquarters. Two cannons made in 1802 during reign of Qing Dynasty Emperor Jiaqing are positioned at either end of the Yamen’s front yard. Inside the Yamen, one can find stone tables relating to the Walled City.³³²



Abb. 174: The Yamen, Kowloon Walled City Park

The Yamen is the only building that remains of the Walled City. It was designed in the architectural style of southern China, with three rows or four wings of houses. Its walls and column bases are built of brick and granite, while the roof is a traditional structure crafted of China fir and covered with cylindrical and flat tiles. The word Almshouse was engraved over the front door of the Yamen. CNEC provided its services in the Kowloon Walled City in the 1960s. They rented the Yamen building in 1971 to run a school, a chapel and a clinic. The school was closed in 1978 and later was converted to the Aged People Centre until its demolition. Upon restoration, Yamen becomes one of the eight scenes of the Park.³³³

330 Vgl. A City of Thousand Faces, 14.07.2015, Hong Kong.

331 Vgl. Ebda..

332 Vgl. Ebda..

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6.2 Everyday Life

The Kowloon Walled City, also known as the City of Darkness, may seem to be that for outsiders. But for the thousands of inhabitants it was their home, which had a friendly and tight-knit community. Apartments in the City were about 18 to 45 square metres, with larger units usually shared by several families and with a monthly rent of 25 to 35 HK\$ it was the cheapest place in the whole of Hong Kong.³³⁴

All together there were nearly 500 buildings constructed into 2,7 hectares. Density in the City was extremely high. With some 20 to 30 alleys occupying 2,7 hectares with hundreds of through routes between buildings, the City was a big maze. Even so only three elevators were found in the City.³³⁵



Abb. 176: One of the less water supplies

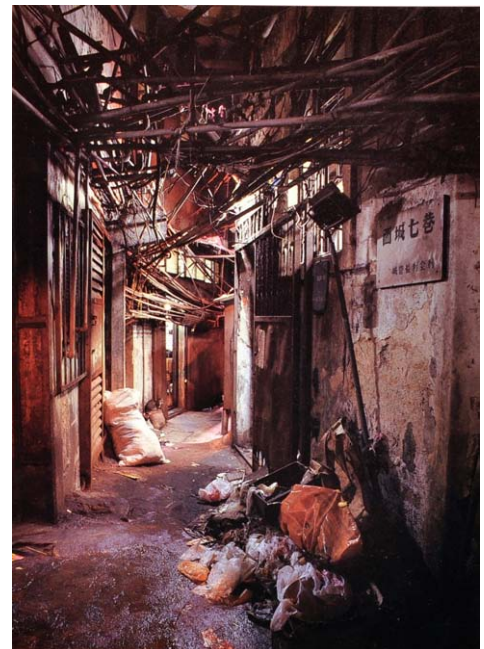


Abb. 175: Alley in the Walled City

Since there was not really an official water supply in the City, residents had to resort to private water suppliers. One example was a cyan spot, where water was pumped from underground. They connected pipes to nearby buildings with water tanks or individual units paid a monthly charge, but this water was unhygienic and unsafe for drinking. Also inhabitants used an umbrella for walking home to their flats, caused by the always dripping water pipes above the dusky alleys.³³⁶

334 Vgl. A City of Thousand Faces, 14.07.2015, Hong Kong.

335 Vgl. Ebda..

336 Vgl. Ebda..

Many of the rooftops were used to store old televisions, destroyed furniture or mattresses, because the city did not have any rubbish collection. On the other hand some other rooftops were used for morning exercise, as a playground and for pigeon racing.³³⁷

Registration and taxpaying was not required in the city, which in turn attracted hundreds of factories. It was said that more than 80 percent of the territory's fish balls were made in the city. Hap Lei Food Factory reputedly owned the tallest chimney in the City. Built in 1964, the chimney rose from the ground floor some 13 storeys high. Although the Tung Tau Tseun Road was known as Dentist Street because it supported over a hundred mostly unlicensed dental clinics.³³⁸



Abb. 177: Children playing at the Rooftop



Abb. 178: Bakery in the Heart of the Walled City

The Kwong Ming Street embraced the darker side of the Kowloon Walled City. The name Kwong Ming means bright and clear. It was originated from the fact that the street was brightly lit late at night as addicts congregated to consume drugs. At a later stage, the drug factory moved out from the Kowloon Walled City and the same place were occupied with numerous factories.³³⁹

A Patrol Team started patrolling the City three times a day from November 1980. The Post Office, Home Affairs Department and Urban Services Department also served the City in all sorts of daily capacity.³⁴⁰

The Kowloon Walled City is maybe not the best example of great living conditions in Hong Kong, but it shows that just the point of view is important. For many inhabitants this kind of housing was working and it just shows that humans can adapt to any kind of housing situation.³⁴¹



Abb. 179: Relaxing at the Rooftop

337 Vgl. A City of Thousand Faces, 14.07.2015, Hong Kong.

338 Vgl. Ebda..

339 Vgl. Ebda..

340 Vgl. Ebda..

341 Vgl. Ebda..

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7. Comparison of Social Housing Now and in the Past



Abb. 180: Traditional Chinese Tenement



Abb. 181: Modern Resettlement Block

7.1 More than seven months

For a better comprehension of the daily routine in a Resettlement Block, I travelled to Hong Kong and stayed for over 7 months in one of them. I chose to stay in the area of Sham Shui Po or also known as Shek Kip Mei, because this district is one of the oldest in Hong Kong. Sham Shui Po is especially known to have many old buildings from the 50s and 60s, which are still inhabited. This was an essential point for me when choosing an apartment in this area.

The impressions inside my apartment but also in the surrounding area of it were an interesting experience for a better understanding of the Chinese culture and the living conditions in Hong Kong. But for a better understanding and comparison of the buildings, I often went to Hong Kong Island. On Hong Kong Island the influence of Europe is clearly felt, but it is more of a combination of Europe and Asian styles and traditions.

During my residence I looked at private, semipublic and public areas in my district to understand the habits of the residents. But I also compared differences between Hong Kong and Europe to find not only positive but also negative qualities, which I wanted to integrate into my design concept.



Abb. 182: Signature Wall in my Apartment

7.2 Public Areas

To review the living conditions in Hong Kong, my first step was to take a closer look at the local conditions. It was very interesting to see that not the whole life is happening in the privacy of one's home. The public areas in a district play an important role and are authoritative for the design and the interior of the buildings. There is also an arrangement between some owner of private properties and the government, which allows the public to pass these areas.



Abb. 183: A Normal Day in Hong Kong

In a different way from Austria, the habitable space in Hong Kong is not restricted to public spaces, parks or pedestrian paths. In Hong Kong it is more a kind of symbiosis of every kind of space. Streets become rededicated for a couple of hours to a pedestrian path and back again. In buildings are hidden public centres to work on your own projects or restaurants and bars. Although the surroundings may look dilapidated, there are a lot of modern and trendy spots, hidden bars to relax or even restaurants that are Michelin-starred.



Abb. 184: Temporary Market in Temple Street, only there from 8 pm to 12 pm

A very big distinction between Hong Kong and Austria is that in Hong Kong in every district are several public playing fields for, football, handball and basketball. They are integrated into the surrounding area and are normally used very often, especially by the older generation, because they use the installed training equipment beside the fields. In the morning and also during the later afternoon, these places were often well-attended. The only negative thing was that this kind of concept was just used in the older district of Hong Kong. On Hong Kong Island there are some playing fields, but not in the same quantity like in the older district. For me was one reasons that in the districts on the mainland are living more elderly people and the government wanted to give them an activity. Caused by the bad retirement pension and the cheaper rents of the flats for example in Sham Shui Po, it is very usual to see an older age average in these districts.



Abb. 185: Possibility to Practice in many Parks in Hong Kong for every Generation

During my residence in Hong Kong, I recognized that it is more common, that you can go where ever you want to go. It was for me a big difference to Austria. Even my apartment had a shared rooftop, where people from the street could go to enjoy the view over the district.



Abb. 186: Playing Fields for every kind of Sport in mostly every District.

7.2.1 Base Areas



Abb. 187: Typical Base Area under a Chinese Tenement

One of the first things I recognized after my arrival, was the importance of the Base Area in Hong Kong. In this area the daily life is happening, because that is where all important stores reside. It is comparable with the pedestrian paths in Austria, but one big difference is the design.

Caused by the design of the traditional Chinese Tenements with their columns, the base area is almost everywhere roofed. With this design the base area looks like it would be extending from the main building. Therefore, it appears like there is a hallway under the building.



Abb. 188: Roofed Base Area with different Shops



Abb. 189: Covered Pedestrian Paths in the older Districts of Hong Kong



Abb. 190: Also Covered Pedestrian Path on Hong Kong Island

But the real difference to Austria is the amalgamation of the street with the clear inside work. Shops and also restaurants expand their rooms onto the street and the pedestrian way. Similar to Austria, above the Base Area starts the residential area. So the Base Area is the only ground plot which appears in a different way than the rest of the building.

Because of the less space on Hong Kong Island, it was not possible to create such a huge Base Area. But they built a much curious possibility, with a pedestrian path lifted to the second floor. This option allows to connect many of the huge buildings and shopping centres. Sometimes it is even possible to walk for hours on such ways through and between buildings, without reaching the street. This kind of locomotion is hardly convertible in Austria. Personally the reference to surroundings is completely lost and it is very hard to find a clue where you are.



Abb. 191: Map of the Pedestrian Paths on Hong Kong Island



Abb. 192: Connection of the Skyscrapers with lifted Pedestrian Paths on Hong Kong Island

7.2.2 *Markets and Restaurants*

Especially restaurants and markets had got it made in a perfect way. Many restaurants have moved their dining corner into the streets. So it is very often seen that people are sitting and eating into the streets. Some of the restaurants are only temporarily and open during some hours of the day. Similar to these restaurants are the different markets of Hong Kong. Some of them are always at the same place or building, but there are a lot of temporarily markets.



Abb. 193: During Night the Market Stands are closed and the Owner are sleeping aside to them

A main part of them have to remove their whole booth, so the street can be used as a main road again. But there are also some markets with small huts with a concrete base. This should protect the huts against monsoons and heavy winds. Normally the owner has to close them during night, so street cleaning and vehicles can pass. A lot of the owners are scared to be robbed or even their hut be removed because not all of them are legal. So during night one can see them sleeping beside their huts on mattress in the street.



Abb. 194: New built Market Stands in front of my Apartment Entrance

This kind of problem is untested by the owner of a spot in one of the market halls, which are distributed over the districts. These kind of market halls are 3 to 4 story high building, which are forming a central point in the district. On the lower floors are different kind of markets for meat, fish, live chicken, but also for fruits and vegetables. In fact the hygienic standards are not equal to Austria and maybe it is better not to try or buy everything, but it is definitely worth a try.

For me personally the most interesting floor was the top floor. Here are kind of restaurants arranged around a large hall, which contain only chairs, tables and maybe some air conditioning. At this “food hall” it is possible to bring the bought food from the market below and it is prepared for one. During the later hours of the day, after the market is closed, the “food hall” is still open and a kind of meeting point for the shop owners of the market and the surrounding area.



Abb. 195: Temporary Market Building in Sham Shui Po



Abb. 196: Inside the Market are different Areas, where one can find everything somebody wants



Abb. 197: Fresh Fish is offered in small Bamboo Baskets



Abb. 198: Hygiene Standards are not equal to Austria, Entrails are offered in Metal Bowls uncovered



Abb. 199: Normally on the Ground Floor of the Market Building, there was offered Fish and Meat

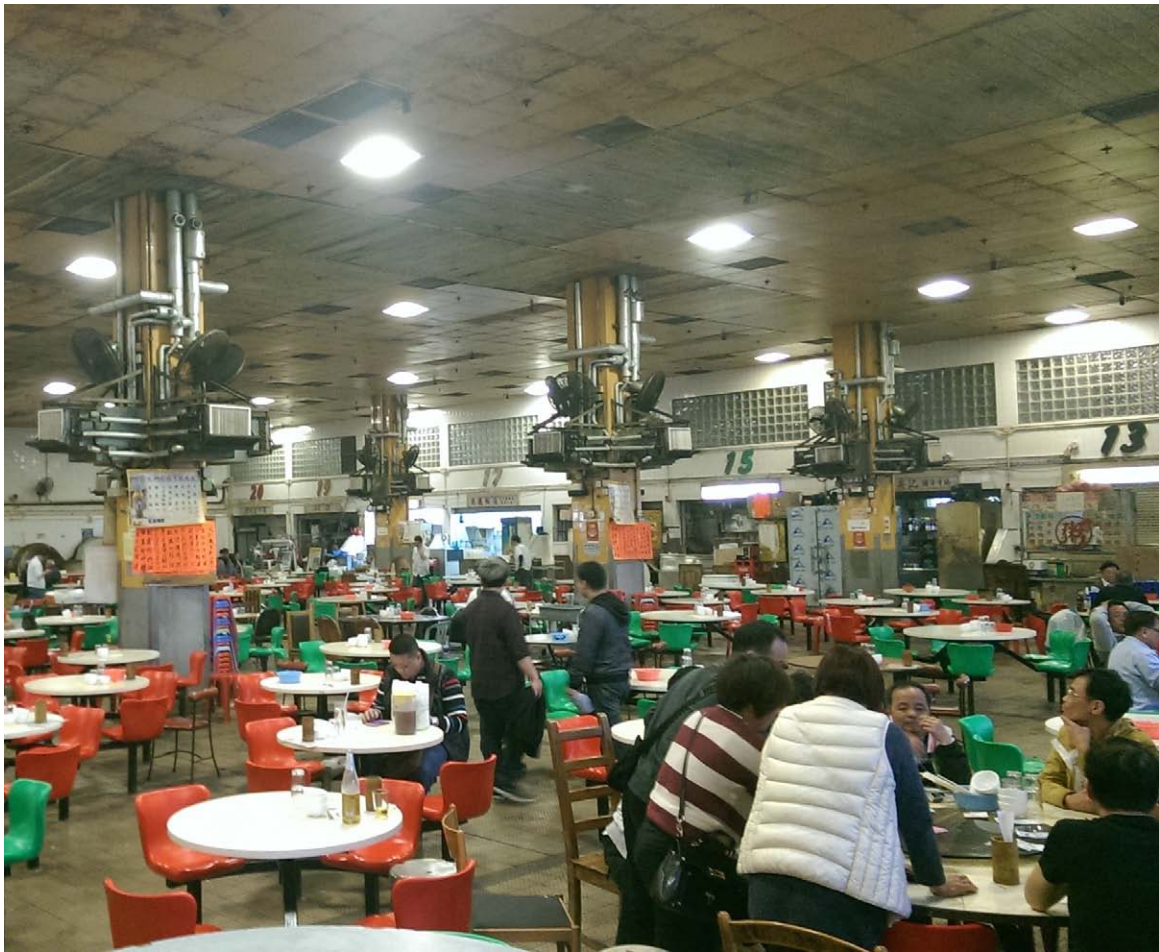


Abb. 200: Food Halls`during the Evening a Social Meeting Point for Everybody

The first time I ate there was an interesting experience. I liked it, that the social meeting point like dinner was transferred from the living room of a flat to such an impulsive place. Mainly because it is quite common, that people are not cooking that much in their own home. Instead of inviting friends to the own flat, it is more common to go eating in such bigger food halls. Although rarely nobody knows each other this “food hall” breaks the force of habit. It is possible to meet interesting people from different social levels, because they are all equal here.



Abb. 201: Compared to Austria, it is very differently in Hong Kong's Restaurant Küchen



Abb. 202: Temporary Restaurant in a Side Street, only during the Evening



Abb. 203: Having Dinner with some Friends on the Pedestrian Path, in front of the Restaurant



Abb. 204: 'Legal Flea Market in the Pedestrian Areas during the Day



Abb. 205: Temporary Vegetable Market in a Main Road during the Afternoon



Abb. 206: Temporary Fruit Market in a Side Street, only for some hours of the Day



Abb. 207: 'Illegal' Flea Market in some Side Streets of my Apartment, every Day between 9 pm to 12 pm



Abb. 208: Markets and Shops in the Base Area of the Buildings in Sham Shui Po around 1960



Abb. 209: Central Fruit Market for Restaurants



Abb. 210: Inside and Outside of the Building Fruit Boxes are stacked up to the Roof



Abb. 211: Even the Street is used as an Extension of the Market Hall



Abb. 212: Shopping Center similar to Austria, in the Heart of Hong Kong Island

A big difference can be seen at the shopping possibilities at Hong Kong Island. Here are mainly the big centres everybody knows from bigger cities in Austria. All of them are air-conditioned and often connected under earth or with the pedestrian paths in a upper level.

I personally did not prefer to stay very long in this kind of shopping centres, because for me they were plain. These huge shopping centres had nothing fascinating so I did not prefer to stay longer there than I should.

These surrounding areas in the traditional district of Hong Kong gave me the feeling to be in my own flat, even though I was staying in a public area. I would recommend it, if it is possible to create new concepts, which helps to get a better connection with the surrounding district. Not only in Hong Kong, but also here in Austria, it would be great to see this kind of spirit.

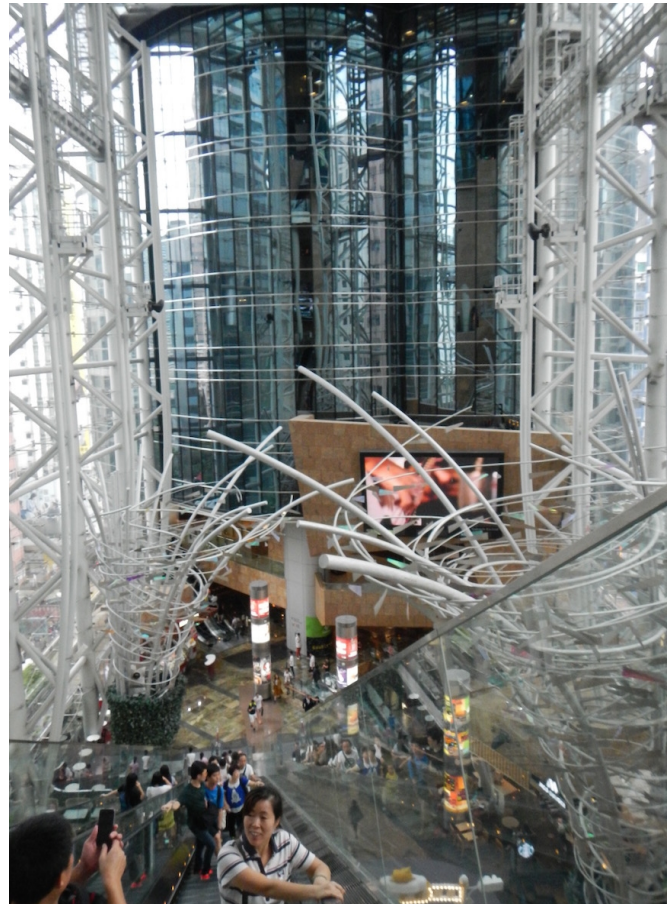


Abb. 213: Highly Modern Shopping Centre, often over more than 10 Floors

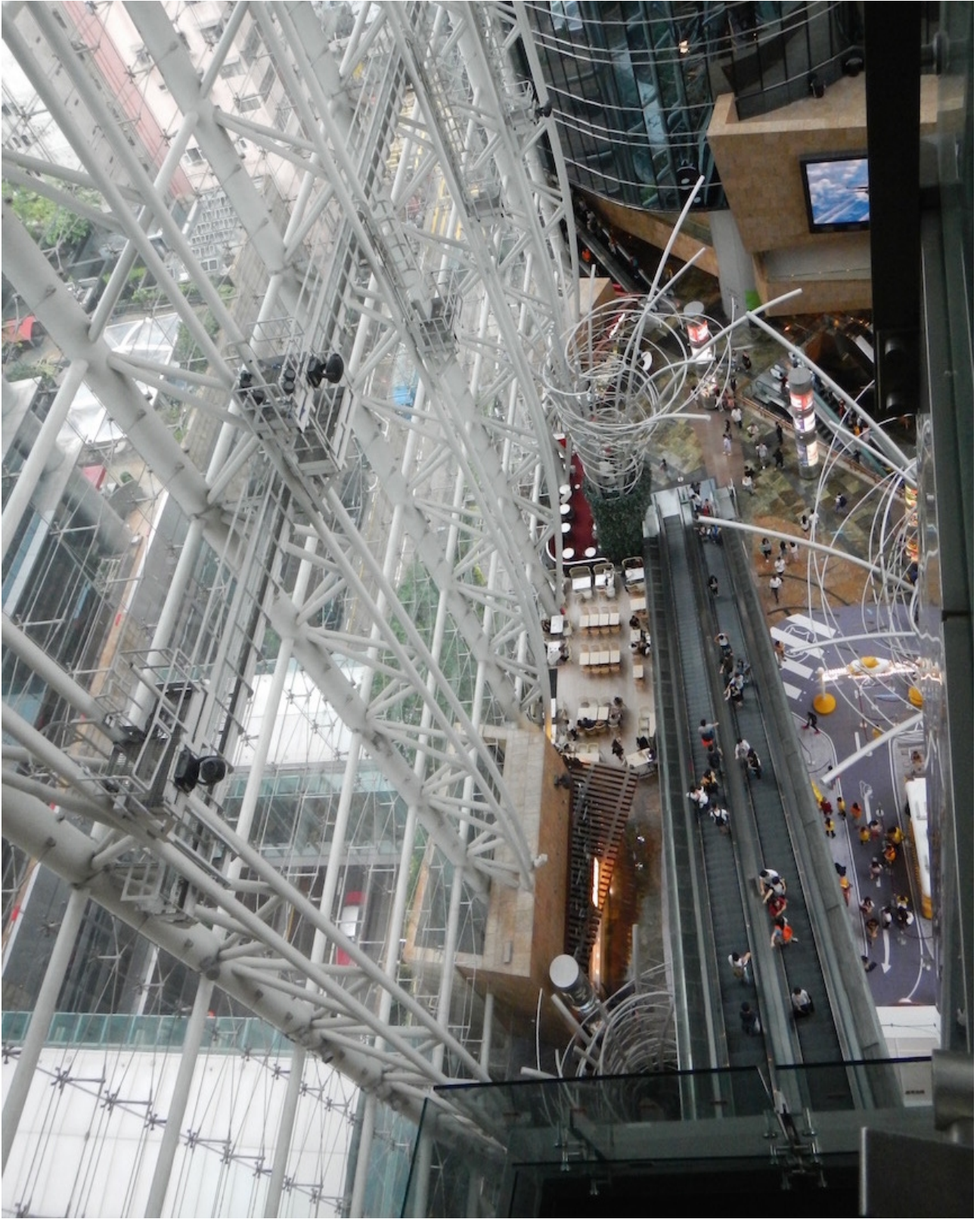


Abb. 214: Kind of Glass Palace with an extreme View

7.3. Semipublic Areas

During my residence in Hong Kong, it was very exciting to see how people claim the public space and try to create something private. With this attempt, they create some kind of semipublic areas in the public spaces. This is clearly visible every Sunday everywhere in Hong Kong. The reason for that are maids. Most of them are from Indonesia or the Philippines and work for many families in Hong Kong.



Abb. 215: A Typical Sunday on Hong Kong Island

Normally they earn not very much money and also their living conditions are very bad. In many flats there are special rooms just for the maids. Often without any windows or even a door. They can use a curtain for their privacy and for some daylight the drywalls are constructed a little bit lower than the ceiling. So they are living in a kind of open box in the flat. To boot, the space of the room is often only sufficient for a bed and that it is impossible to walk into the room.

Caused by these conditions, it is not possible for the maids, that they can meet their friends and families in their own room. So every Sunday, on their free day, they meet each other in the streets of Hong Kong. They take their picnic blankets or only cardboard, to create on the lifted pedestrian paths on Hong Kong Island or passages of smaller parks in the older districts, their own kind of living room. There they all sit together, eating their own dishes, drinking or singing and enjoy their free day.



Abb. 216: Most of the Maids use cardboard to create their own private Spot in the Pedestrian Zone

The first time I saw this situation, it was very funny and interesting, because it was completely tolerated by the police and the government. It was hard to imagine something like that in Austria, because nobody would do a kind of picnic in a shopping street. Also the tempo, how fast the areas are converted for their use was very impressive. It just took half an hour and a completely new kind of space was created.



Abb. 217: Maids having Lunch in a Pedestrian Zone in Sham Shui Po

But the most important thing I recognized were the living conditions of the people. Hong Kong tries to be a modern and good looking city, but if one looks closer, one can see that even a modern city can have some problems. In the case of Hong Kong, the main problem is the social welfare support.

7.3.1 *Homeless Shelter*

The social support problem was for me clearly visible in the area of Sham Shui Po. With the support of a restaurant, which shares the food with socially deprived people, I had the possibility to get a closer look at some homeless shelters. These shelters were settled under a highway access to be protected from the sun and rain during the monsoon time.



Abb. 218: Homeless Shelters in the Area of Sham Shui Po

It was very unusual to see, how the inhabitants had created their own kind of private space in a public



Abb. 219: The Shelters are made out of cheap Materials

area. In certain cases they just put some furniture under the motorway and created their living and sleeping space. Most of them built their homes out of bamboo, europallets, mattresses and tarpaulins.



Abb. 220: Only a small Curtain to have a little bit of Privacy

It was interesting to see, that these people try to integrate into society by building their own homes, with the same areas one is having in a flat, although these homeless people are excluded from society. For me the society but also the government have failed to work. Instead of helping these people to reintegrate into society, with supported flats or jobs, the government had the main focus that these homeless shelters are getting removed. For this goal the police destroy the shelters, if the owners are not there or they use pepper spray cartridge, which the police hide in the area, so that nobody can stay for a long time. Another solution for the government is to build some kind of green areas with rocks and fences under the highway, so nobody could build a shelter there. Equal to Austria the Hong Kong government should also install a jukebox to chase the homeless off the area.



Abb. 221: Living in a Public Area

For me personally was an interesting fact, that the most homeless were elderly persons. Caused by the bad social support of the government, most elderly people, who have not a family, are getting very easily and fast homeless. In Asia it is kind of tradition that the children have to support their parents after retirement. If they do not have any relative, where they can live or giving them money, the rent for most flats is too high for them. I also recognized a lot of mothers with babies, who are living in these shelters. Most of them were inadvertent pregnant and were repudiate from their families.

The background story of this place was shocking for me, but how this place has developed and how the inhabitant are living here was quite interesting for me. The homeless had created their own privacy in a public area, although the most persons would generally steer clear of this shelter area. Here it was clearly visible, which are the main things somebody need for living. Sometimes the small things are essential.



Abb. 223: Sometimes they behave as staying in the own flat



Abb. 222: A kind of City in the City with own Rules

7.3.2 *Secret Rooftops*

During my residence in my apartment the most important area was the rooftop, because exactly here was the social meeting point for all inhabitants of the building but also for foreigners. It was possible for everybody to enter the rooftop through the staircase. The only obstacle were the nine floors one had to walk.



Abb. 224: The Second Living Room in my Apartment: The Rooftop

Normally the rooftop was shared only by the top flats of the building but in the area of Sham Shui Po, one can find many semipublic rooftops. During the evening it was quite usual that the rooftop was used for BBQ's, movie nights or other activities, like art exhibitions. If somebody knows where to go, one can find some beautiful spots with a great view over the city.



Abb. 225: On many Rooftops a Garden is a common Thing

For example at the rooftop of my apartment it was common that a lot of tourist visit us to take a photo, because they read in the internet about this spot. I personally liked it a lot, that the living room was a way to the rooftop and that the combination of living inside and outside of a building was a great experience. But also to see from my rooftop what was happening on the other ones. It showed me, that there exist a second layer, which was lifted from the ground floor to the rooftop. From the street it was not possible to imagine what happens up there, but after my first visit I saw that there exist a kind of second life.

Inhabitants of the building quite often use the rooftop for doing sport activities in the morning or try to be independent with their own gardens. I also tried it out with some friends and after some weeks we had a great rooftop garden with a lot of vegetables, which we could use for our BBQ's. But also the feeling, if one is standing up there and see this kind of green islands rising on this concrete blocks, is very exciting. Even years ago the rooftop was always an extension of the building. As a primary school for example, was one of the appropriation.



Abb. 226: With a little bit of Passion, Everything can grow on a Rooftop in Hong Kong



Abb. 227: Rooftop Garden in the District of Sham Shui Po

Also Hong Kong Island tries to use the rooftops of the buildings in different ways, but the most common thing is the use as a garden or park. The 1881 Heritage Hotel in the Victoria Harbour is a nice example.



Abb. 228: Semipublic Rooftop Garden in the Harbour of Hong Kong



Abb. 229: The 1881 Heritage Hotel

On the one hand they reuse the former headquarters of the water protection police, which was built in a classic style as a hotel and on the other hand the hotel itself and the corresponding park is lifted up to the third floor. On the first three floors are different shopping stores but on the fourth floor there is a really nice and beautiful semipublic park for guests of the hotel but also everybody else.

Another nice example is the Ozone Rooftop Bar in the ICC Tower on the 118th floor. There I had a great view over the whole harbour. But in comparison to the rooftops in the older districts the use is quite different. In the modern areas of Hong Kong it is like in Europe with fancy Rooftop Bars or Restaurants. This is also very nice, because one can get another feeling for the city and can also imagine the bigness of the buildings. For me the more interesting and new use of a rooftop, was the experience in the area of Sham Shui Po.



Abb. 230: Trying to get the Nature back to the City Centre



Abb. 231: The Rooftop Shopping Centre

7.4 Private Areas

The privacy of the own flat plays a major role in the Chinese society. As a foreigner it is nearly impossible to be invited to a friend's place, like it would be usual in Austria for example. Even friends are normally meeting each others in public for dinner or other activities, but the own flat is a kind of holy.

It was for me a strange experience, because in Austria it is normal to know at least the neighbours of the same floor. But especially in the bigger resettlement blocks it is common that everybody lives their own lives without looking left or right.



Abb. 232: High Rise Resettlement Blocks with tiny flats on Hong Kong Island



Abb. 233: Living Space is squeezed on the tiniest volume

Maybe one reason is the Chinese culture, were already the youngsters are under extreme pressure to perform. It is not really a cooperation between the inhabitants of Hong Kong, it is more a one against the other. In my mind with this situation they are creating their own privacy in public life.

Living in a mostly tiny little flat, go to work, go home from work, stay at a taller shopping centre, going back home, repeat.

This was my experience with some inhabitants from Hong Kong Island, which somehow represents our society in some taller cities. The living together with neighbours and the interests of other people is more and more lost and develops into an egotistical living style. For me personally it was very exciting to see these two different sides, which exist in Hong Kong.



Abb. 234: In a shared flat for three person, there is not so many privacy possible

Both of them definitely work, but I would prefer a revival of traditional styles with the influence of modern architecture. By the reason that these old traditions are still working in some parts of Hong Kong and also their influence into today's social housing.



Abb. 235: Bed Rooms have enough Space for a Bed and maybe a Wardrobe



Abb. 236: In a shared flat, there is not so much Space to invite Friends



Abb. 237: Bathroom and Toilett is combined in one Room to save Space



Abb. 238: Bathtubs are rare, more common are Showers because they are not so dissipative



Abb. 239: Kitchens are very often only provided with essential functions

7.4.1 Home is ...

For my whole residence in Hong Kong, I stayed in a nice apartment in the old district of Sham Shui Po. The apartment was on the ninth floor of the building without an elevator. The building was from the design from the 50s to 60s as I mentioned previously. But this was not the only difference between this apartment and my apartment back in Austria. In Hong Kong, the whole apartment is more a kind of open loft with circa 30 square metres, for sleeping, living, cooking.

A small bathroom, with a toilet and a shower was separate and also a private room, which was leasable. But the biggest difference of all, was that this apartment was a shared loft. Normally tourists or people from mainland China, like from Guangzhou rented a bed in this loft for maybe just a week. So it was quite usual that every week new people would come to the apartment and there were less moments to be on your own.



Abb. 240: The Entrance to my Apartments Building was always open, on Hong Kong Island there are often Security for the Entrance of a Resettlement Block



Abb. 241: One of the less windows in the Staircase which are extremely manky because nobody cares



Abb. 242: The 'Kitchen' of my Apartment, with a Fridge and a small Countertop for cooking

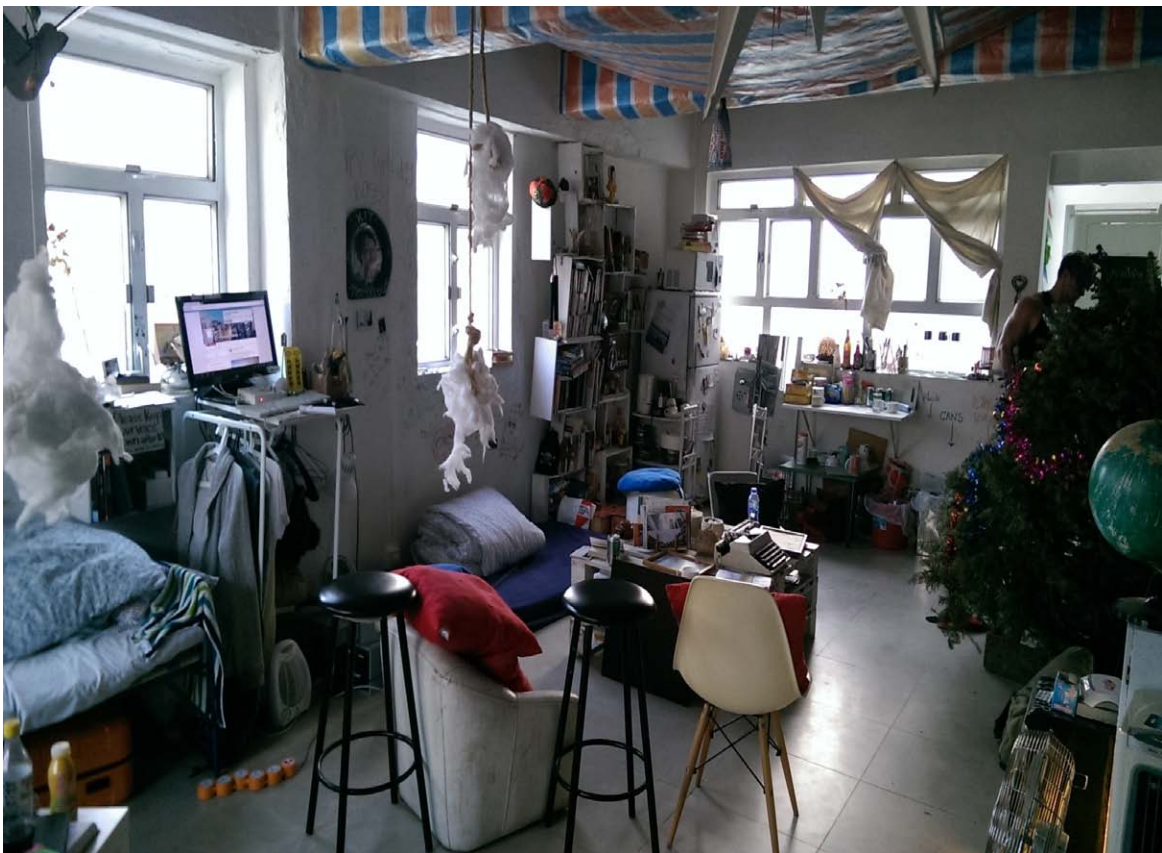


Abb. 243: Kitchen, Living Room and Bedroom in one big Room combined



Abb. 244: Stacked Mattresses created the Couch



Abb. 245: The Corridor from the main Room to the Bathroom and the Private Room, which was able to rent



Abb. 246: A small Shower, a Toilett and a Washhandbasin with a Mirrow created the Bathroom



Abb. 247: Three Bunk beds and two single Beds were positioned in the Sleeping Area



Abb. 248: The Furniture did not changed a lot since the beginning of Social Housing, because Bunk Beds were always used.



Abb. 249: The double Bed of the Private Room was built on the former Kitchen of the Apartment



Abb. 250: With 15 Flat Mates, Privacy becomes an other Definition

Especially during the time of Chinese New Year, which is celebrated for 7 days here in Hong Kong.

The number of flatmates rose to the number of 16 people on circa 70 square metres. Two were sleeping in the private room, ten were sleeping in bunk beds in the living room and four were sleeping in tents on the rooftop.

If one is subtracting the square metres of the bathroom and the corridor, there were less than 4 square metres per person left. Compared to my own apartment in Austria, which has nearly 65 square metres for two person, this was insane living conditions here in Hong Kong. Caused by the fact that I paid as much rent for this shared loft as for my apartment in Austria.

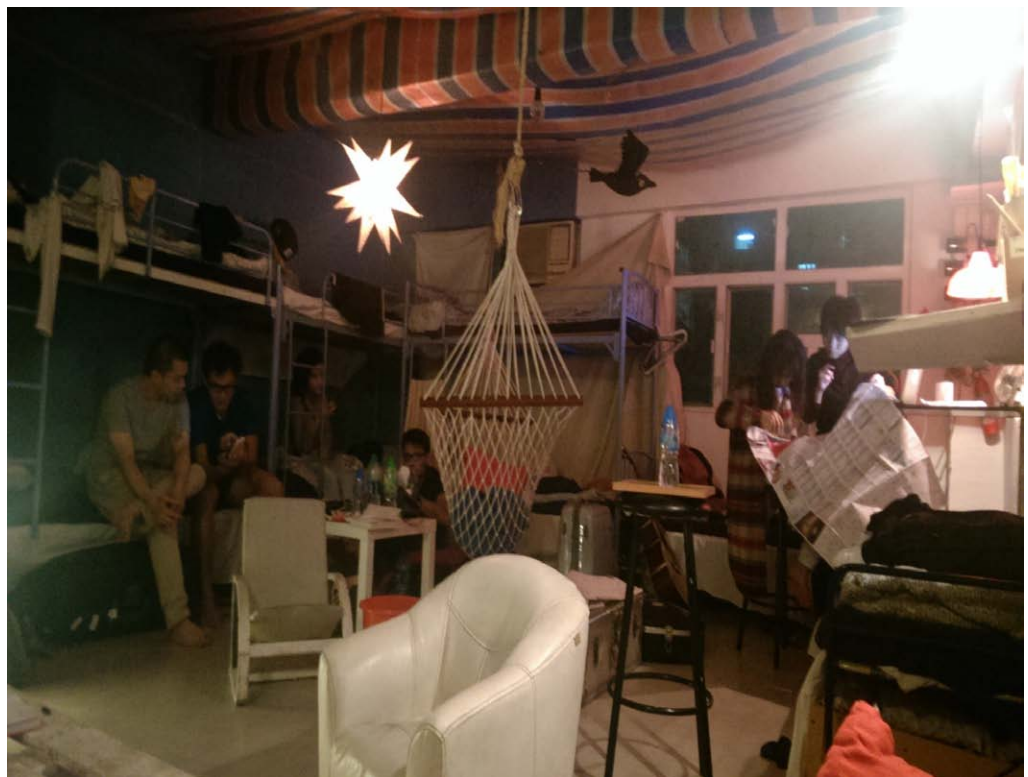


Abb. 251: Living in a shared Apartment was very common in the Area of Sham Shui Po



Abb. 252: If one was a tall Person, the upper bed was a little bit tricky



Abb. 253: The Apartment during renovation around 2010

For a city with so many high rising buildings, resettlement blocks and satellite cities, the rents for a small flat or even a private room are extremely high. And they are getting more and more high, especially if one is moving closer to Hong Kong Island. Here I would have paid for a private room more than 800 Euros per month. The extreme costs for housing is also a reason why there are so many new residential buildings which are nearly empty.

The sad thing is that most investors prefer to let their apartments sit empty instead of letting it for a lower price. Here in Hong Kong it is clearly visible, that the main focus is profit-making and not creating new living conditions for everyone. Although there exists so many old buildings in the city, which could be remodelled, the government tries to demolish them. And they want to replace them through new buildings, which very less people are able to afford.



Abb. 254: Resettlement Block on Hong Kong Island



Abb. 255: The Base Area of the New Resettlement Blocks is very similar to the old Chinese Tenements



Abb. 256: Chinese Tenement are also built on Stilts

This was for me one reason, why I chose this old building in Sham Shui Po. The design of the building was quite interesting, because it was placed belong a side street, were a electronic market was situated.

The building's Base Area was integrated into the surrounding buildings and created as usual in Hong Kong a kind of hallway for the pedestrians. The entrance was just an open door with a staircase, which led into the building.

The whole staircase into the ninth floor was in the centre of the building, so you were always walking in the dark. There is a lightwell next to the staircase, but through the tiny and polluted windows, there was not much light coming inside the staircase. On the fifth and third floor were a kind of dustbin on the half-pace of the staircase. They were emptied once a week.



Abb. 257: The Entrance to the Building was a little bit hidden between the Shops

After a five-minute walk upstairs, one is standing in front of a double door. The first one is only a metal grid door and the second one is a normal wood door. During extreme warm and sticky days, it is completely normal that the wood door is opened and only the metal grid door is closed. If one is opening the windows, the wind can pass through to the staircase, which is just a kind of chimney effect. This worked very well, because the rooftop door was always open, so everybody could go there.

The other option to have a nice temperature into the apartment was the air condition and ventilators. But on the one hand the noise of these machines are very exhausting, they need very much energy and it was not very healthy to sleep in such cold rooms. I used the air condition mostly during the evening, so the room was a little bit cooler. To ventilate just for a short time is not very useful in Hong Kong, caused by the extreme humidity.



Abb. 258: Air Conditions are a typical Element of every Facade in Hong Kong



Abb. 259: Ventilate or Air Condition, what is more useful?



Abb. 260: Huge Glass Surfaces makes difficult for a comfortable well-being inside the flats of Hong Kong Island

This humidity is not only noticeable, it is also visible on almost every building. The more older buildings do not have a gasket seal or insulation, so the humidity is inside and outside of the walls. Most of the wall paint falls down and outside the building and it is clearly visible that the facade was mildewing. The building where I lived was not the only one affected. Nearly every building in Hong Kong have visible signs of destruction by the humidity. Hong Kong itself is a nice city, but one of the main problems is a solution for conserving buildings for a longer period.



Abb. 261: One can hear the dripping of the Air Conditions everywhere and anytime



Abb. 262: Facades are mildew and getting dark caused by the Humidity



Abb. 263: Because the Buildings do not really have a sealing, the Humidity can slowly destroy the Building



Abb. 264: The View from the Rooftop in the tenth floor

It starts at the rooftop. In fact we had a huge rooftop, which was free to enter for everybody. But there was no waterproofing of the roof or even an overflow. Each time it was raining, the whole water would stand on the rooftop and would slowly trickle into the ceiling. That is one reason why we had plastic planes installed at the ceiling. If it was raining during the night it was usual that on the next day the floor would be wet. Another problem was the water, which slowly destroyed the ceiling. Sometimes some parts of the ceiling were falling onto the plane and it was also mildewing behind it. This kind of living condition was not comparable with anything else I had ever seen.



Abb. 265: Damages due to damp were marked in the Staircase of my Apartment

The main living room was an exciting combination of everything, what one needs for living. A tiny kitchen with a fridge, a kind of couch area and a the bunk beds, which stood in the room without a boundary. Because I was living at the top level, the living room had three sides with windows.

One the one hand it was very nice to have so much light inside the room on the other hand it was a little bit strange. I had the feeling of being observed, because the windows had no curtains or persiennes. Another scary moment was during the Typhon period, because I had to mask the windows with tape. The main reason was, that these windows had just toughened glass. So if something would hid the windows, the tape should help, so that the glass is not cracking into thousand peaces.

In fact, I personally knew toughened glass from my own apartment in Austria, because it is an old building in the city centre with huge counter-windows. But here in Austria we do not have to handle the possibility of a monsoon. In fact I was wondering, why it is not normal to use safety glass at all the resettlement blocks. Sure on the one hand it would be more expensive, but this should be balanced with the benefits of more security and saving of energy for the whole building.

Another nice option of saving energy was installed in the bathroom, because in Asia it is normal that one is having a switch for the boiler. It was unusual not having warm water at every time during the first days. But the key for that is time management, because it took just ten minutes until I had warm water for shower.

I personally think that this kind of change would be useful in Austria. Hopefully in general the bathroom had developed during the last forty years in a better direction. Because I would not prefer it nowadays to have still a shared bathroom and even toilet. Nowadays every flat has it own plumbing unit, which is for me a better solution..



Abb.266: Toughened Windows in my Apartment

In my mind the use of pipes and wires is extraordinary. In Asia the utilities management chute is not very widespread like in Austria. Here in Hong Kong it was normal that all pipes and wiring were exposed. So in some way Hong Kong is a kind of gigantic Centre Pompidou, where one can see all installations, which are normally hidden inside the building in Austria.

For me the most significant difference was the use of the kitchen, because at my apartment I normally cook a lot. In the loft, the original kitchen room is now the private room. One just put a countertop and a mattress over the kitchen substructure and the room was finished. The new kitchen was outside in the living room, but personally I would not call it a kitchen. It was just a fridge, a small countertop and an electric plate. In Hong Kong it is normal not to use the kitchen very often, caused by the extreme density of restaurants, food hall's and shops. There it is possible to get something to eat and drink at every time of the day and if you know where to go it can be extremely cheap even for Hong Kong.

It was possible for me, to visit some other flats of some friends of mine in different parts of Hong Kong, and also at this apartment the kitchen was always very tiny when compared. In the case of my flat, the kitchen was displaced to the rooftop, because here we had the possibility to make a BBQ. Normally in Hong Kong there are several spots in the surrounding national parks where it is possible to have a barbecue.



Abb. 267: Pipes and Wires are always on the Facade of the older Buildings to save Space inside



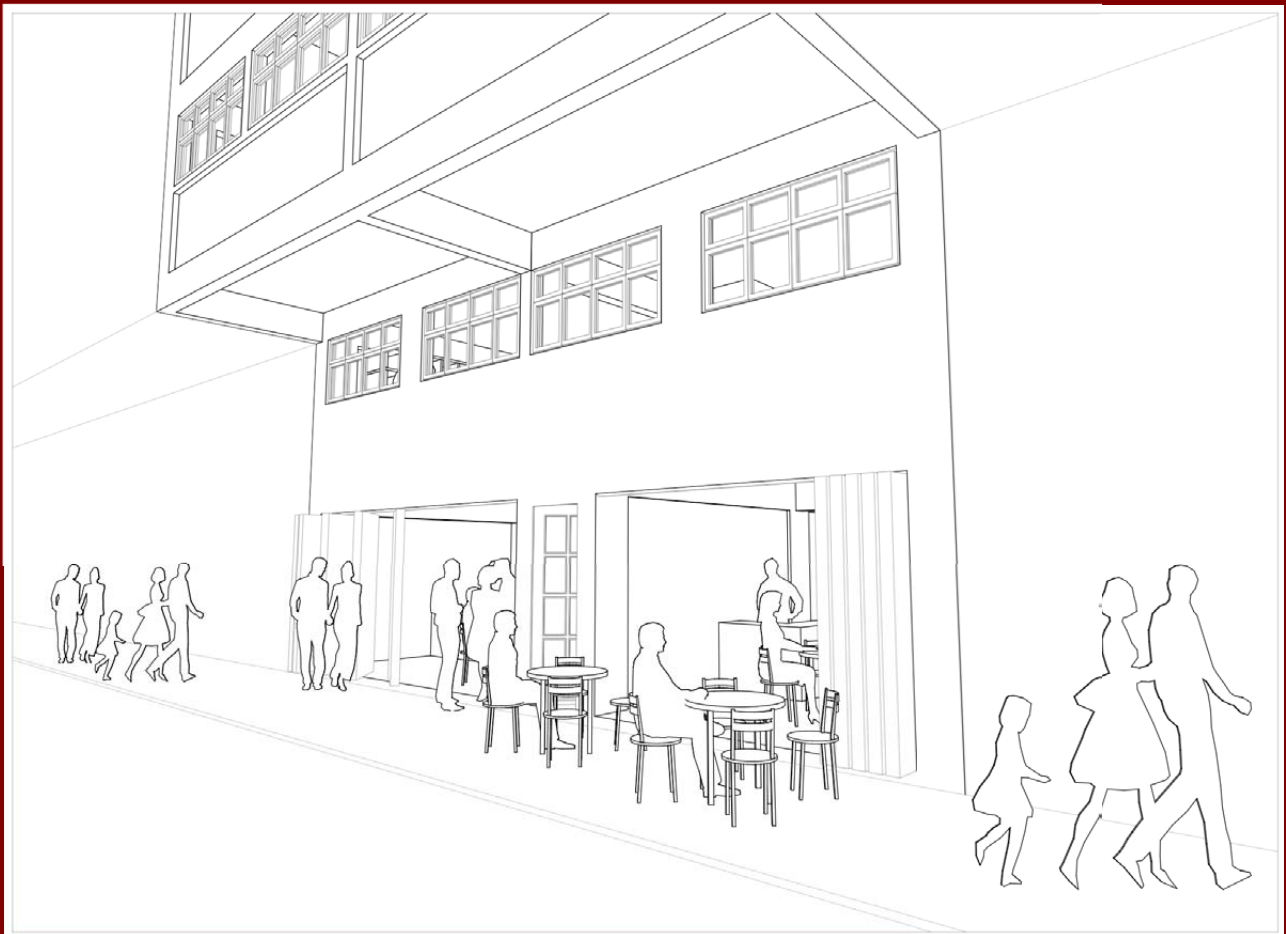
Abb. 268: BBQ on the Rooftop was the social Event for the Apartment every Weekend

Mainly during the weekend these areas are highly frequented because it is a kind of social meeting point. But also the rooftops of the old buildings slowly develops to this kind of area. Very interesting was the fact, that even years ago, the possibility to cook was always delayed outside the building. Forty years ago, it was common that the kitchen was at the access balcony and in the same way like the rooftop nowadays, it was the main social meeting point of a building.

Indeed the fact this lack of privacy can be very hard to handle, but these traditional old buildings give the inhabitants very special living conditions. Some of them are disturbing and not comparable with the living standards from European cities. But there are still many, which could be quite useful in combination with modern buildings.



8. *Tin Tong*



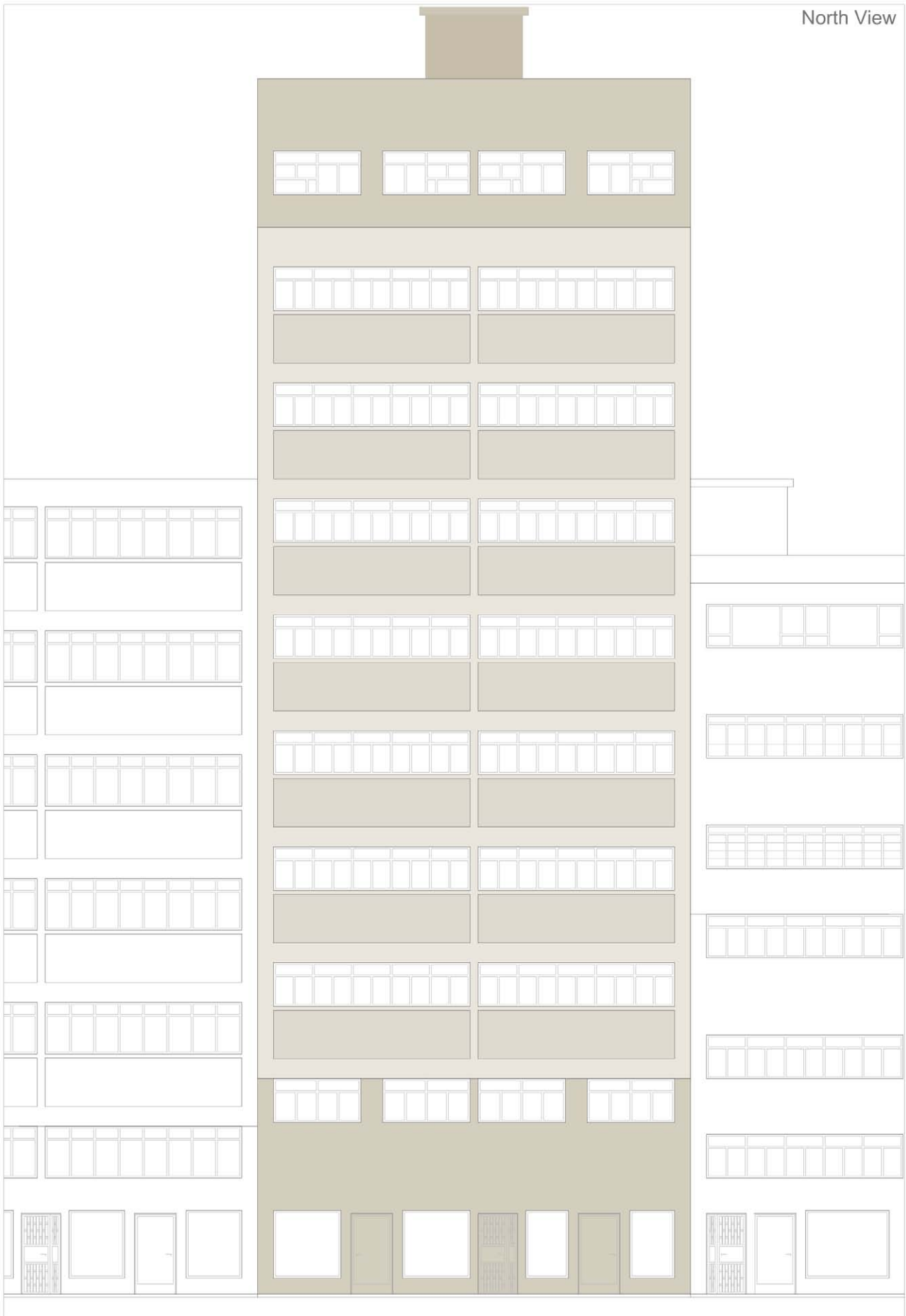
8.1 As-Built Plan

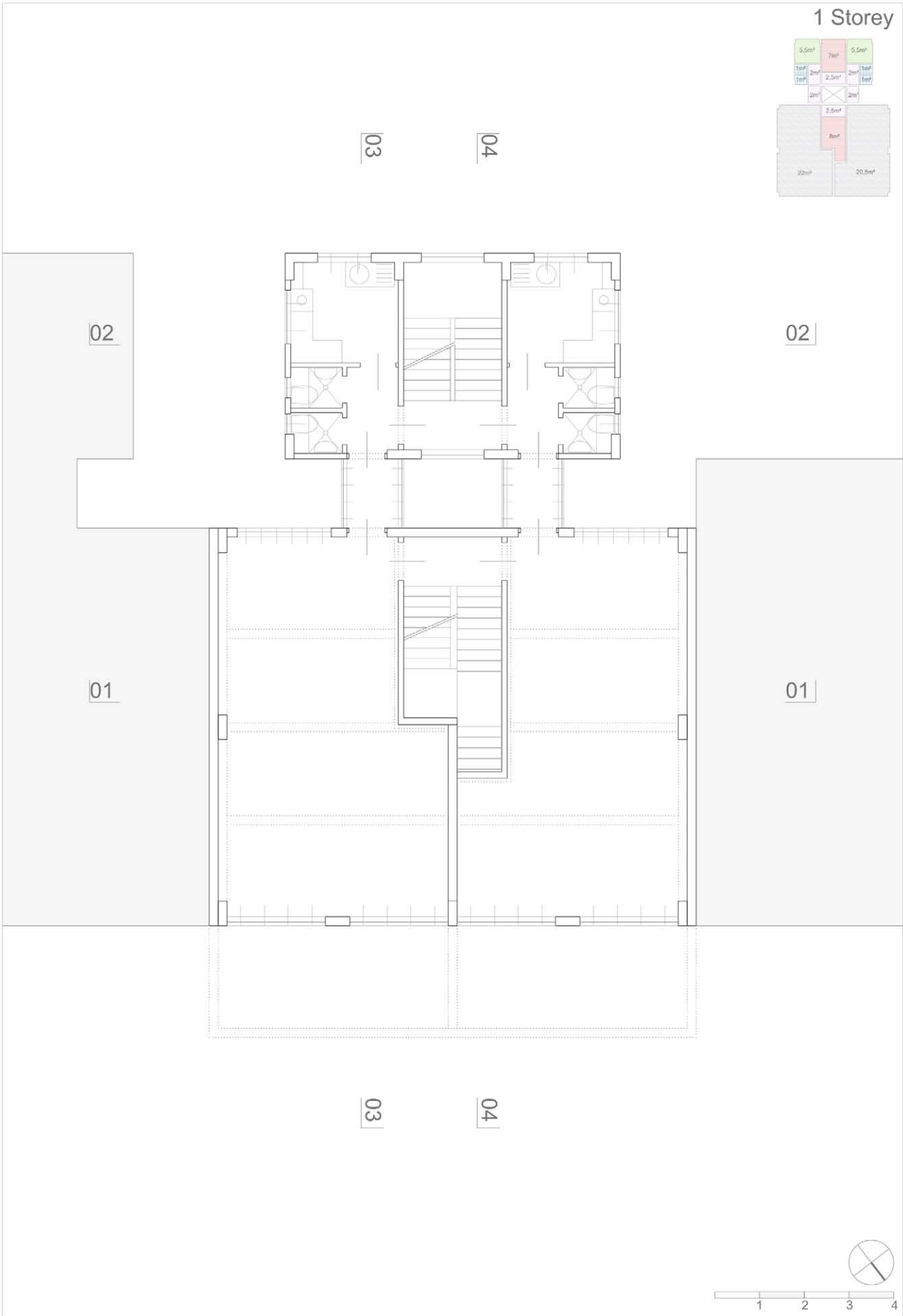
For my design project I took a closer look at the building where I lived for the last 7 months. I tried to find a solution to reuse the building, because in the area of Sham Shui Po many buildings are going to be removed and newly built. For this research my first step was to take a closer look at the as-built plan.

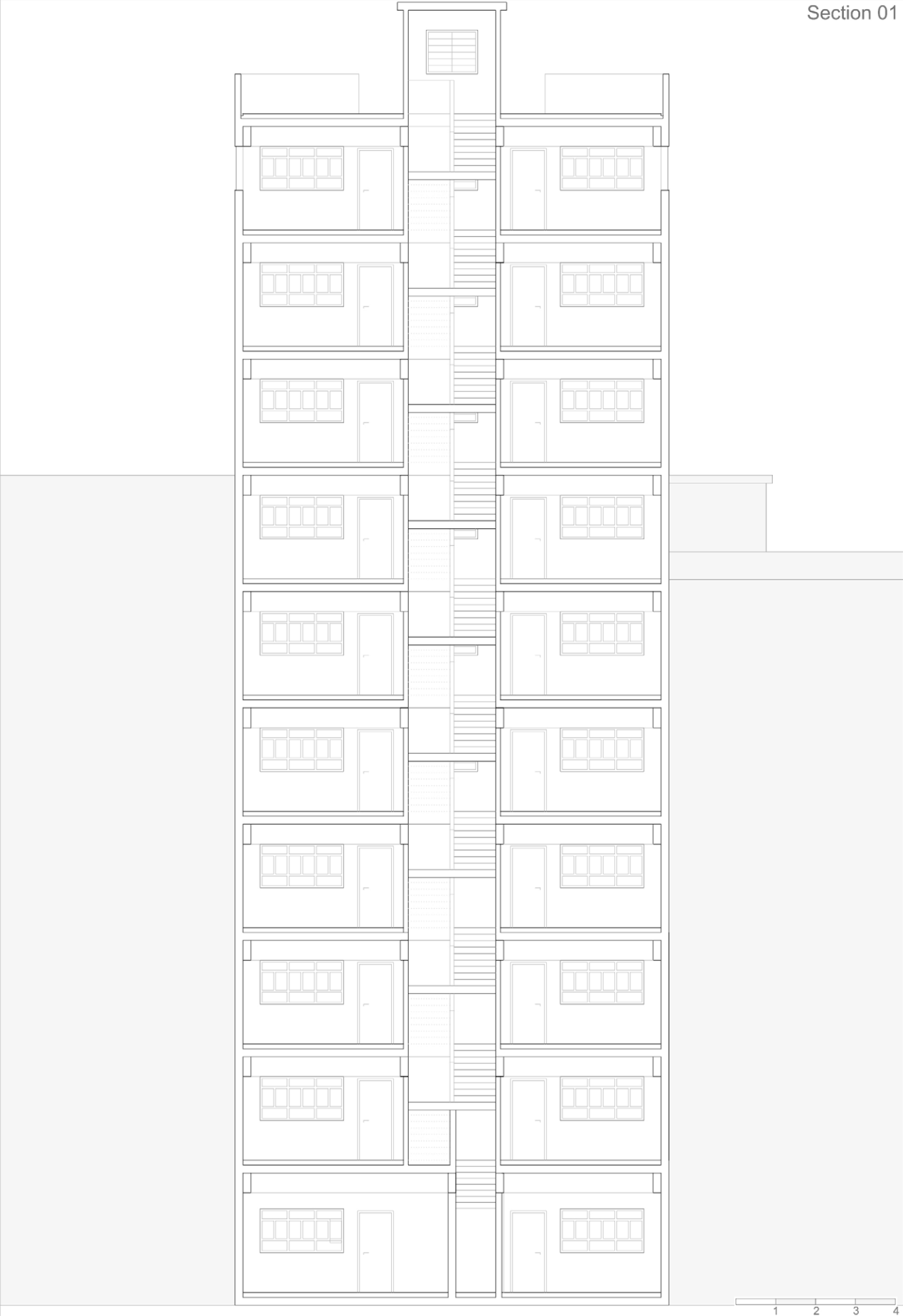
I tried to get a better understanding of the different function areas of the building.

Equal to the Chinese Tenement, this building had an Base Area which was provided to be used as a shop area. In the rear area of the shop was normally a kitchen and a two toilets for woman and man. The first floor was usually owned by the shop owner and were used as a flat and storeroom. From the second to the eight floor there were only flats which were taller than the ground floor and the first floor. The reason for that was the projection of the building. In the most flats, the owner of the flat had his private rooms towards the northeast windows. Inside the apartment there were normally rooms for servants, which had no direct daylight.

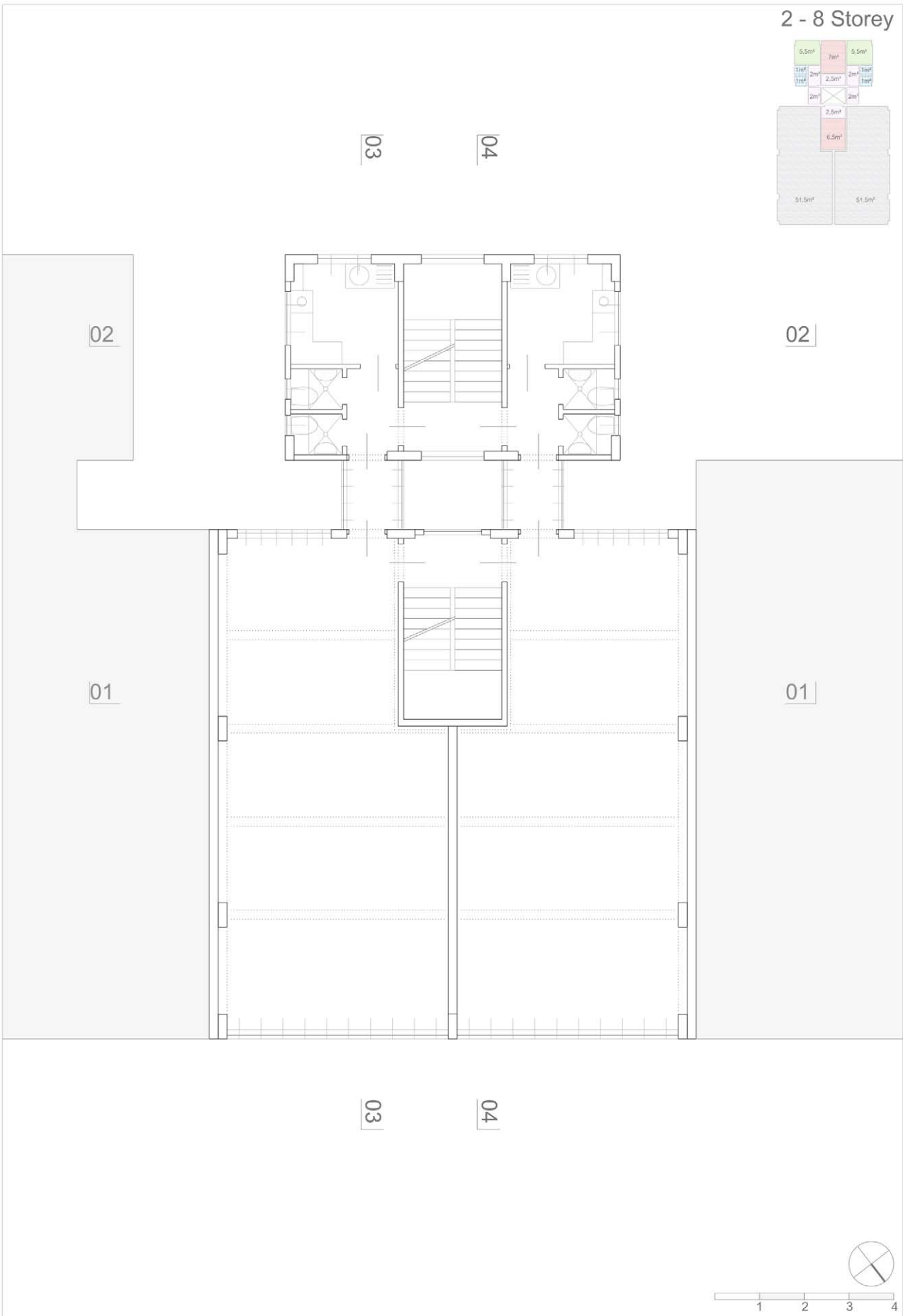
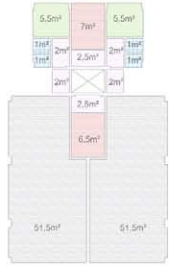
The ninth floor was equal to the first floor, but it had natural light in all rooms, caused by the many windows. Another advantage of this floor was the direct entrance to the attic floor. Very often the attic floor was only used by the inhabitants of the ninth and eight floor. Another interesting fact were the two staircases, which had to be integrated into the building, because of the possibility to escape during a fire. After the history of the huge fire in the area of Sham Shui Po, most of the buildings had two different ways to escape. Particularly because many inhabitants used in their kitchens oil power and very less electric power.



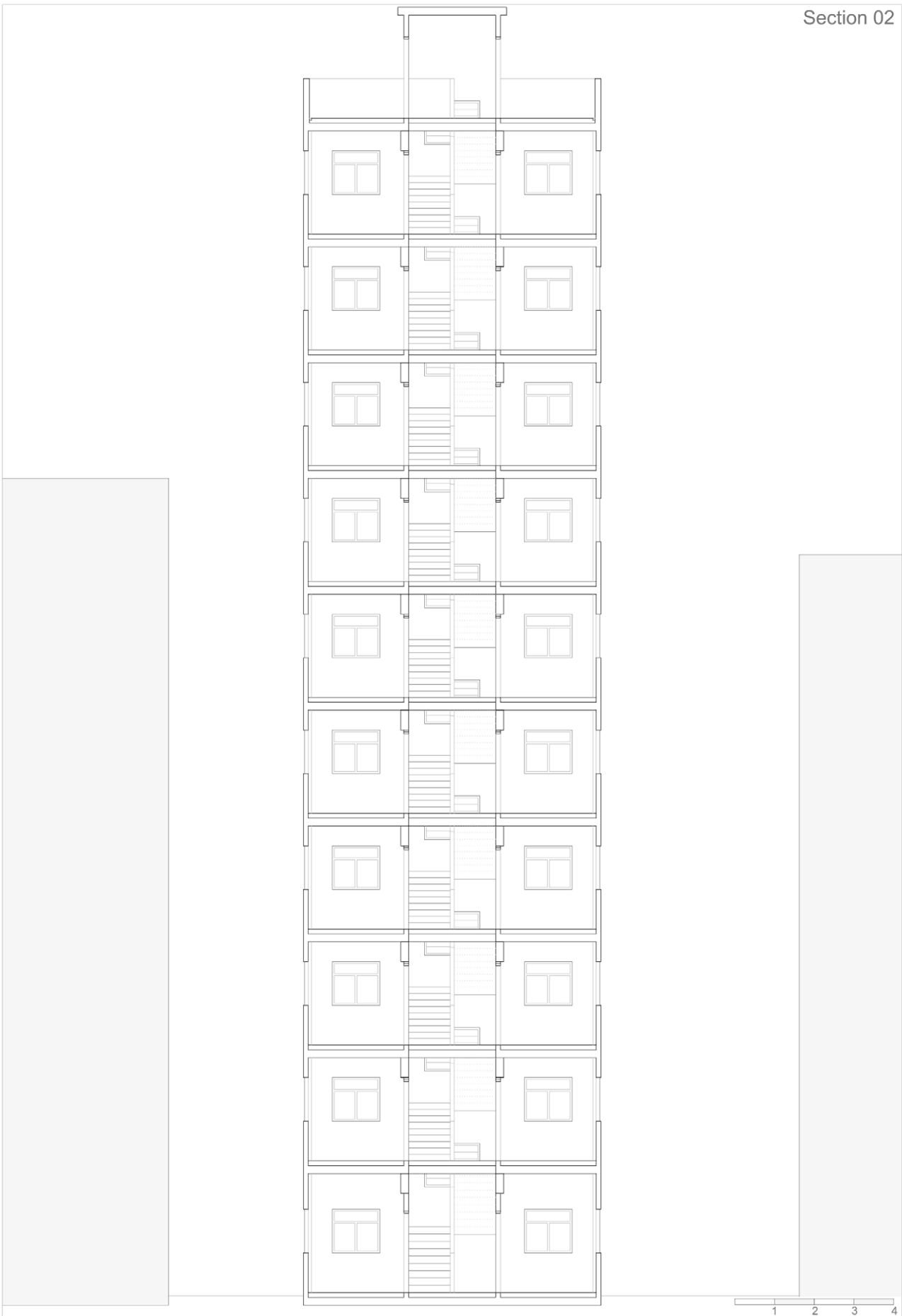




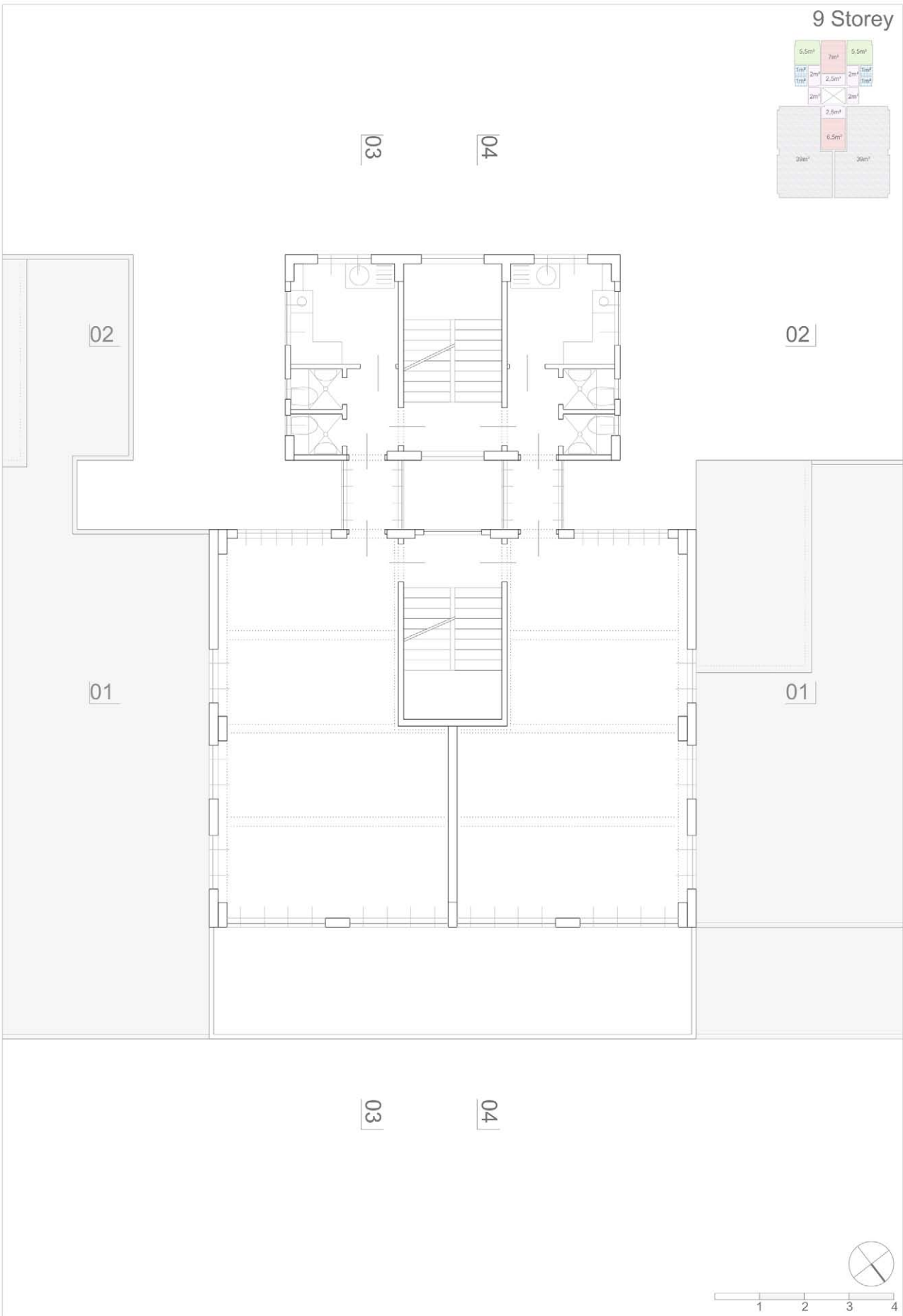
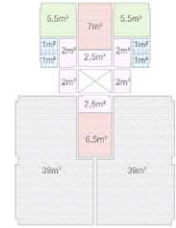
2 - 8 Storey

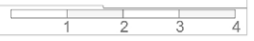
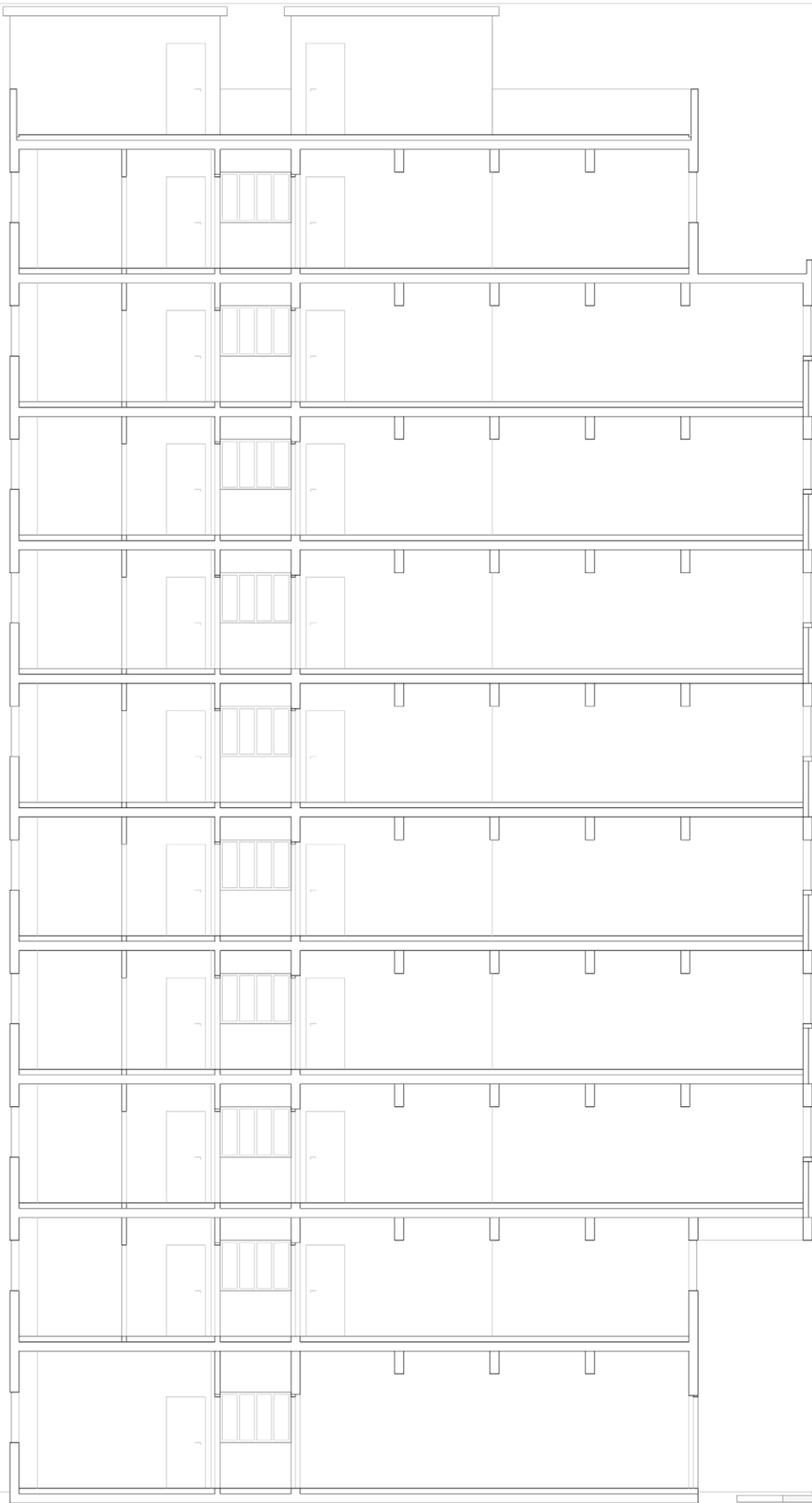


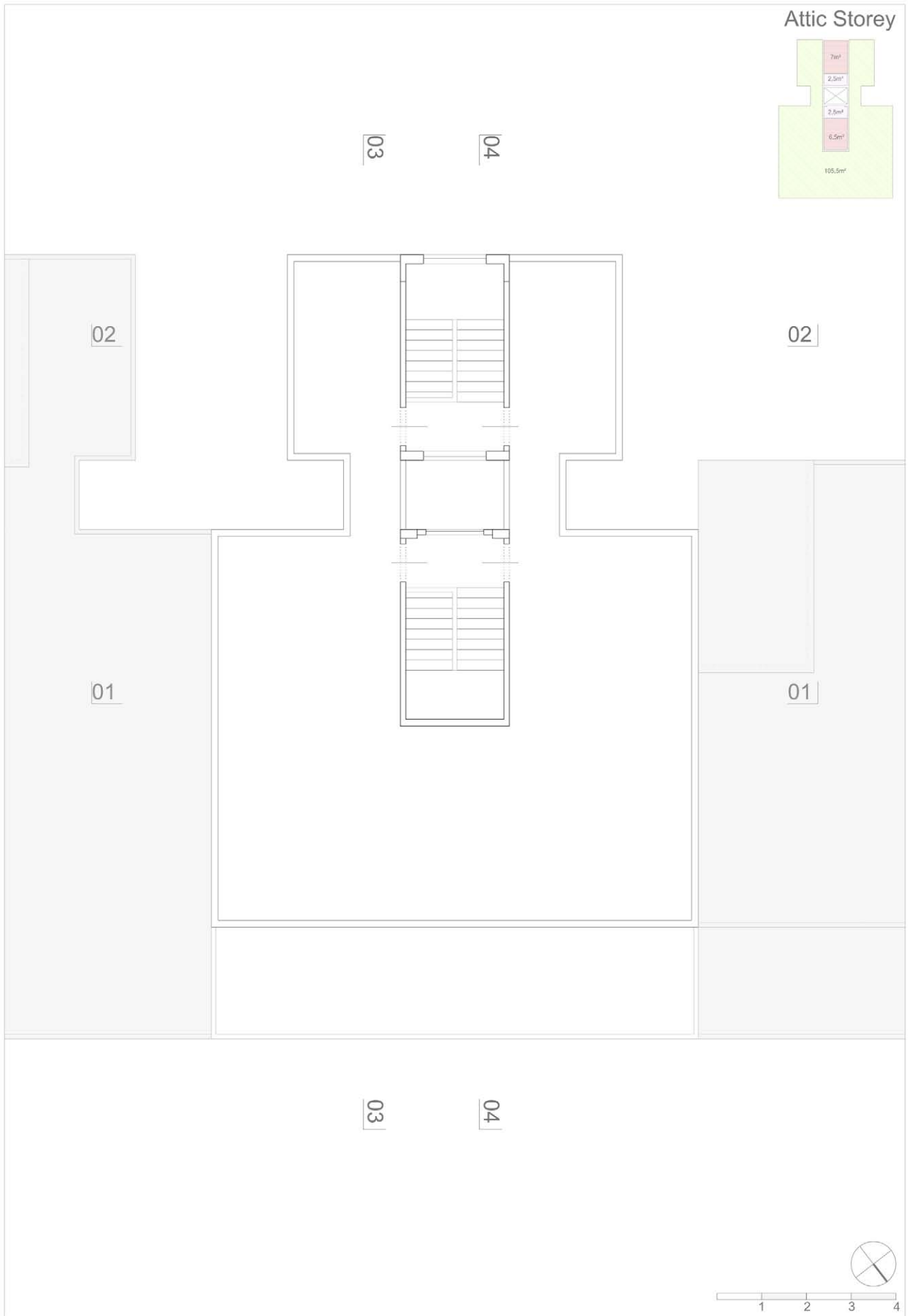
Section 02

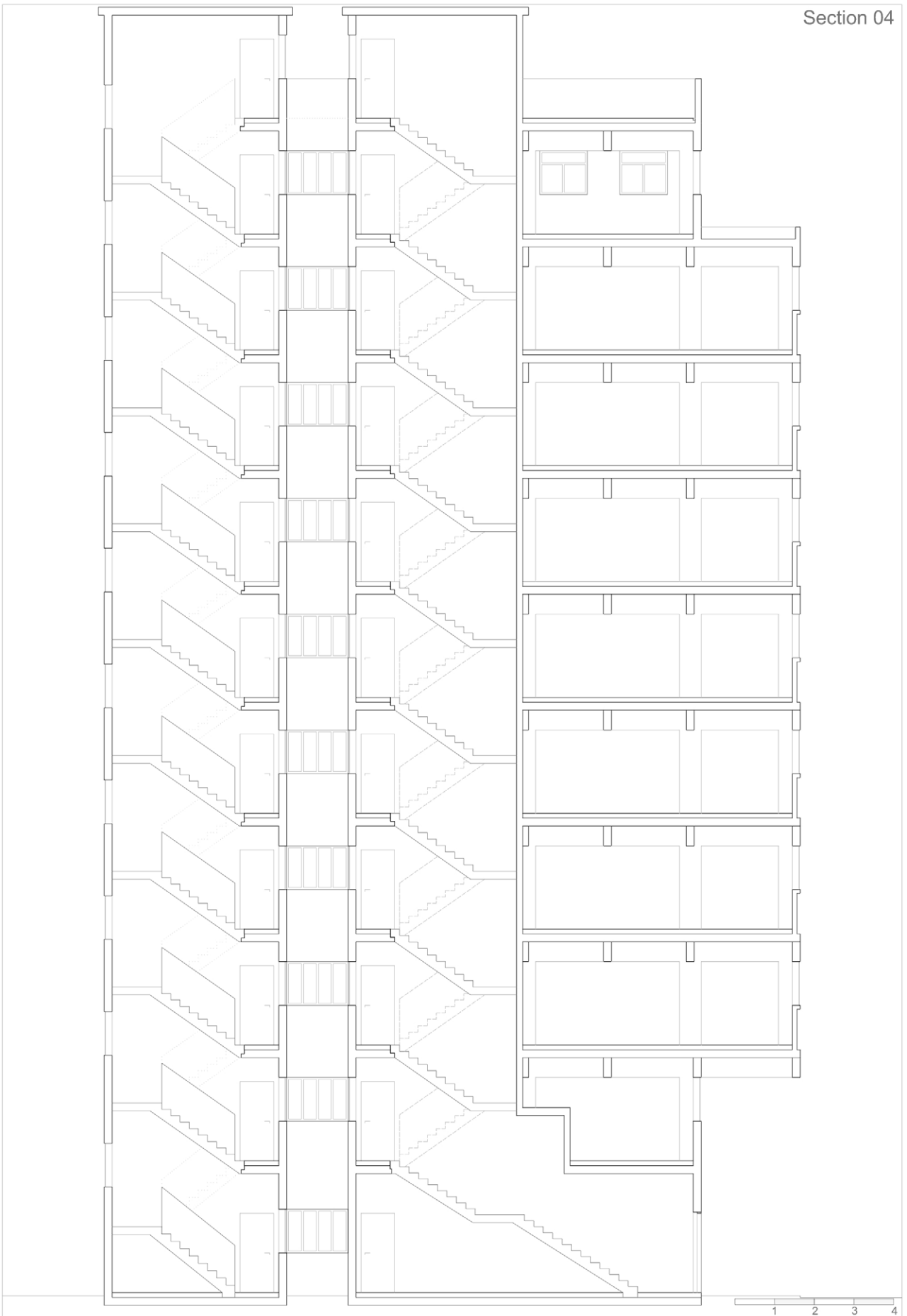


9 Storey









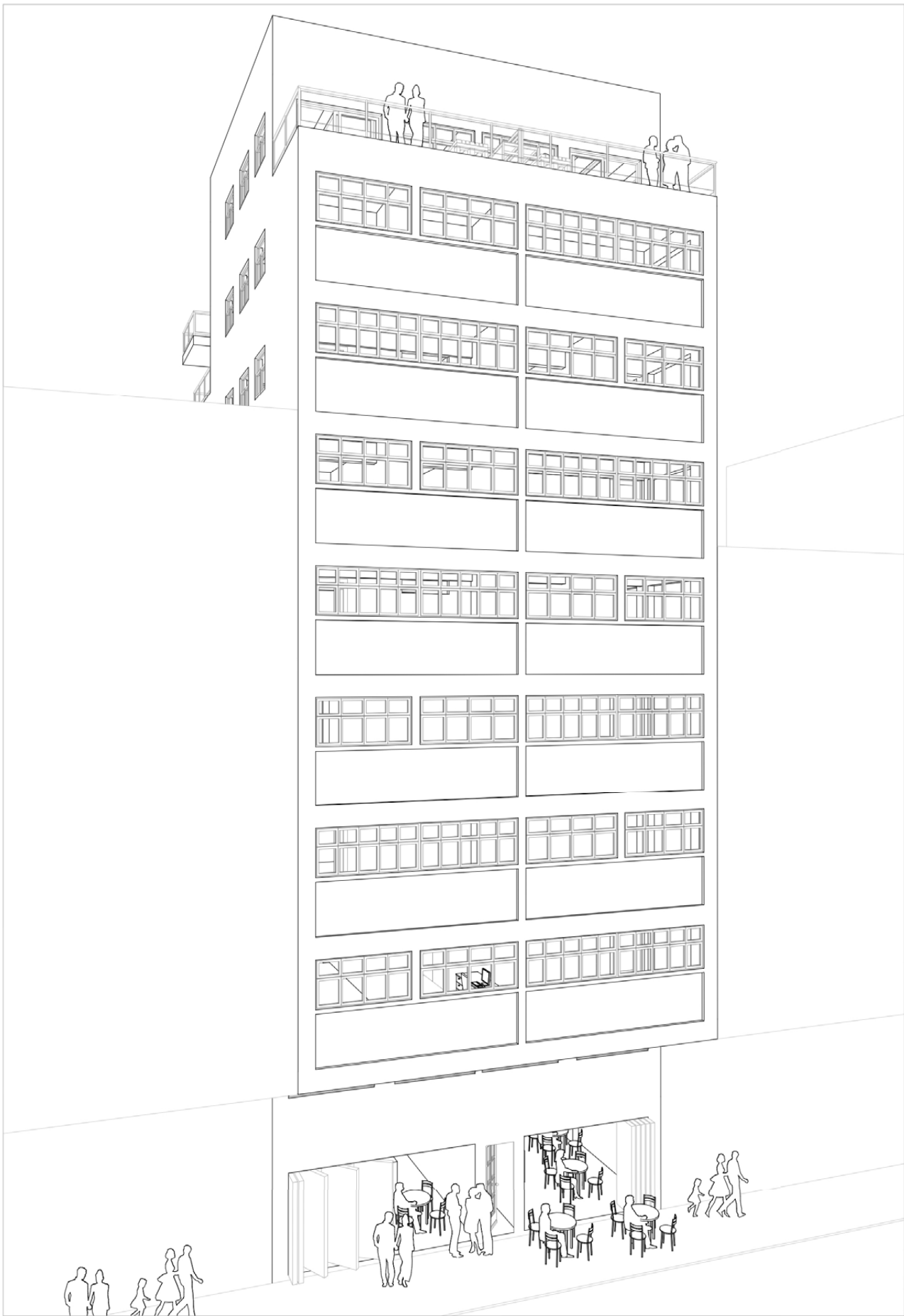
8.2 Current Utilisation

After my investigation of the As-Built Plans, my focus was to figure out, how the inhabitants used the buildings nowadays, because the original plans were from the 1960s. It was interesting to see, that many of the functions were used as the architects had imagine. But most of the inhabitants had made slight alterations, to use the small flats in an more effective way.

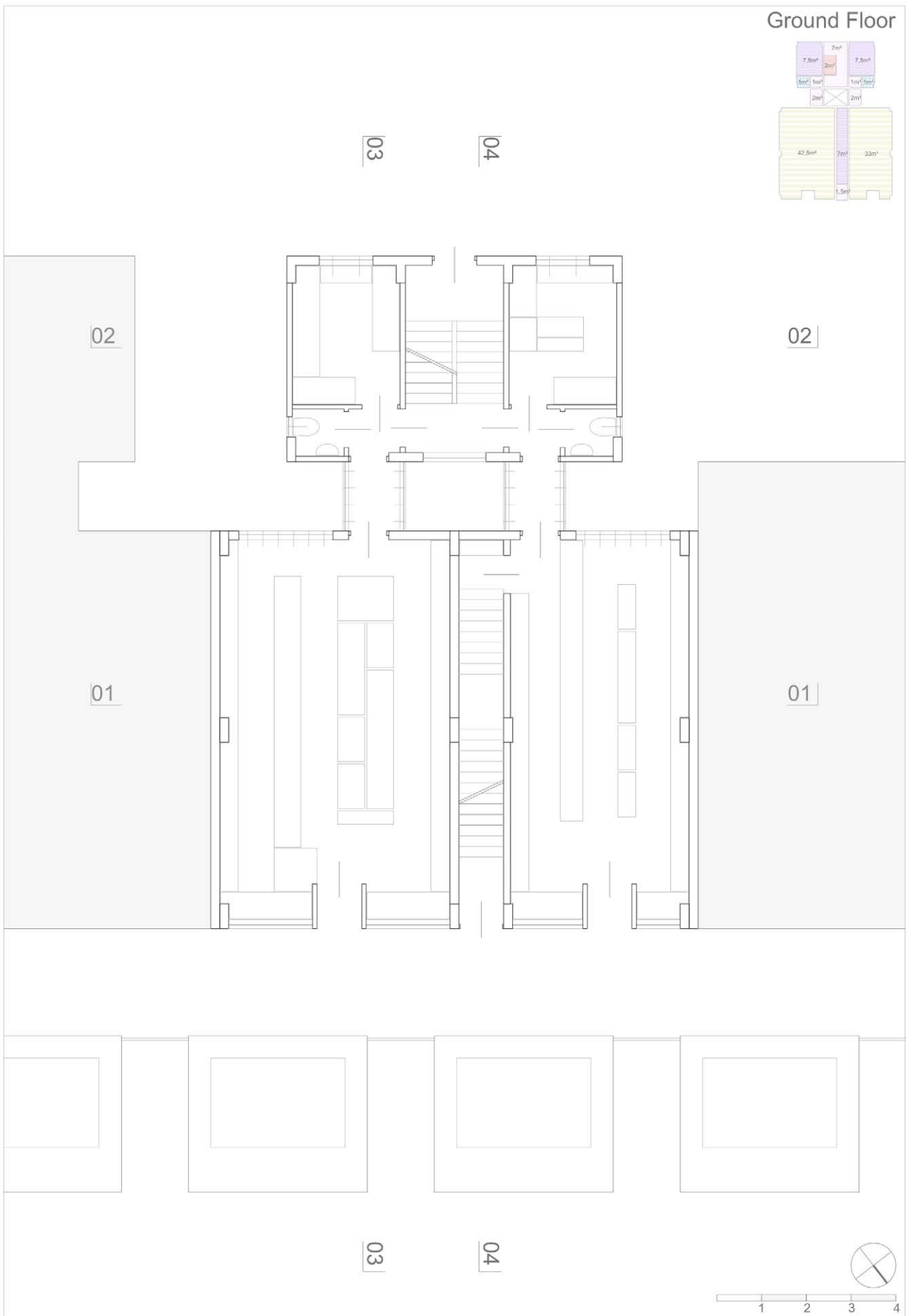
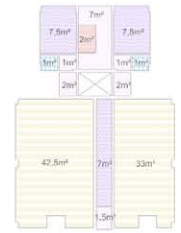
For example the ground floor shops were still existing, but they did not had a kitchen or two toilets anymore. Instead there was only one toilet left and the former kitchen was now used as a storeroom. The flats in the upper storeys were nowadays used the same way like 60 years back. In the most flats, there was an own room for the maids, which was very tiny. The owner of the apartment had very often a bigger sleeping room and a living room with a small kitchen integrated, which was rarely used.

As previously said my flat in the ninth floor was quite used in a different and effective way. In fact there was a big problem with the privacy, but the exchange between the inhabitants was more intensive.

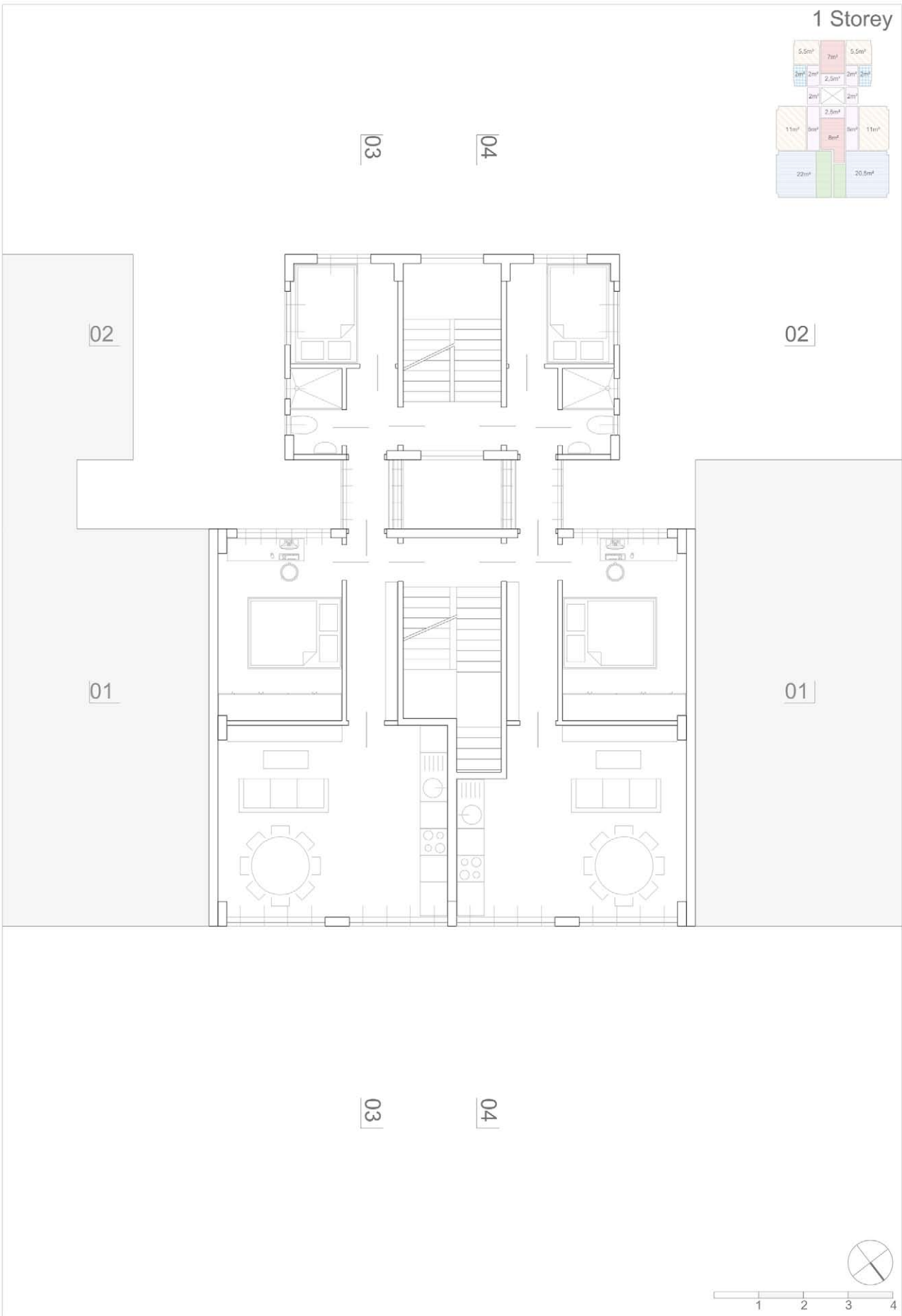
Especially with the use of the attic storey as living area. The attic storey was completely used in a different way to the As-Built Plans. It was used as a living room, a storeroom, a greenhouse and we even installed a shower for people who were camping in a tent on the rooftop.

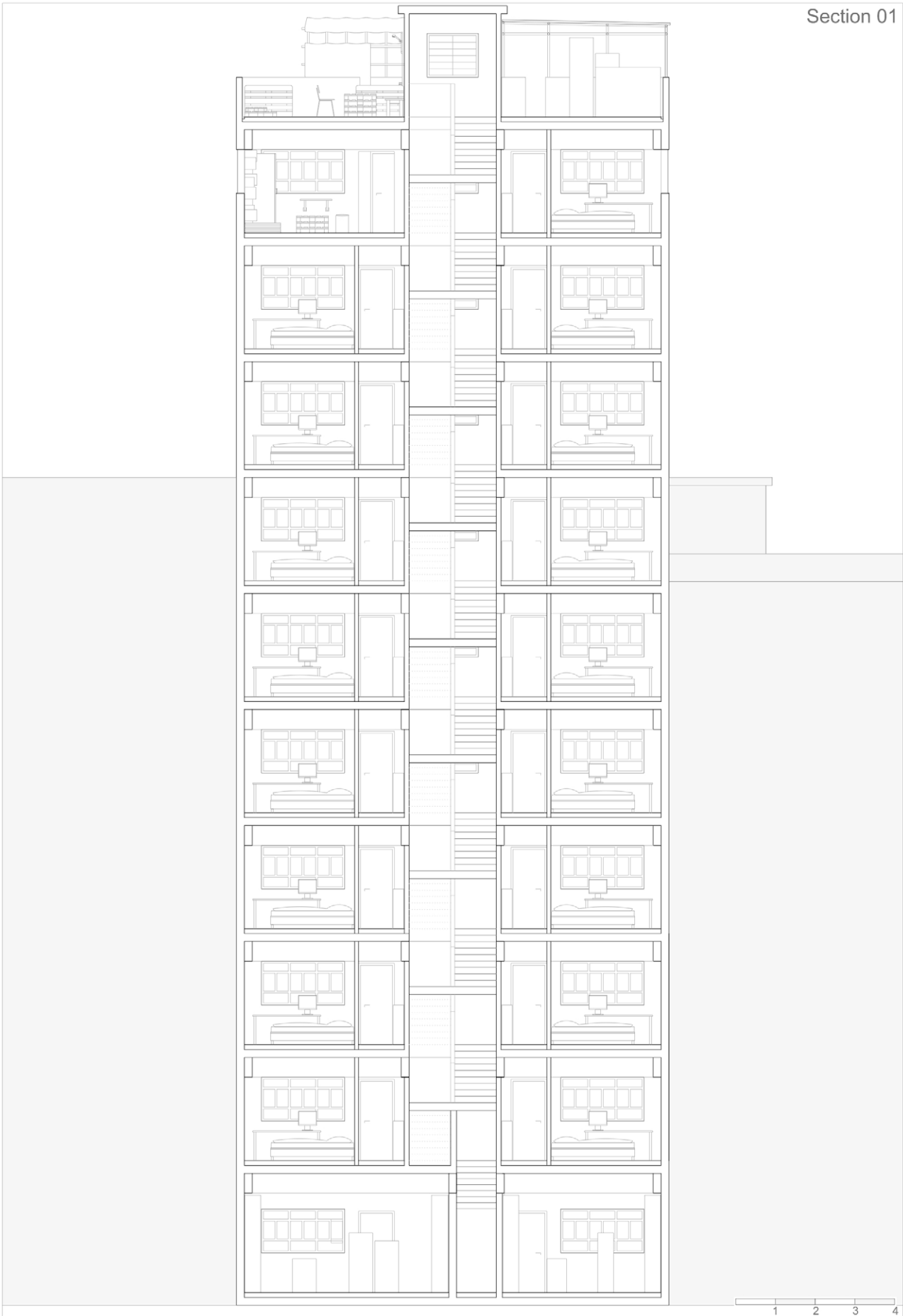


Ground Floor

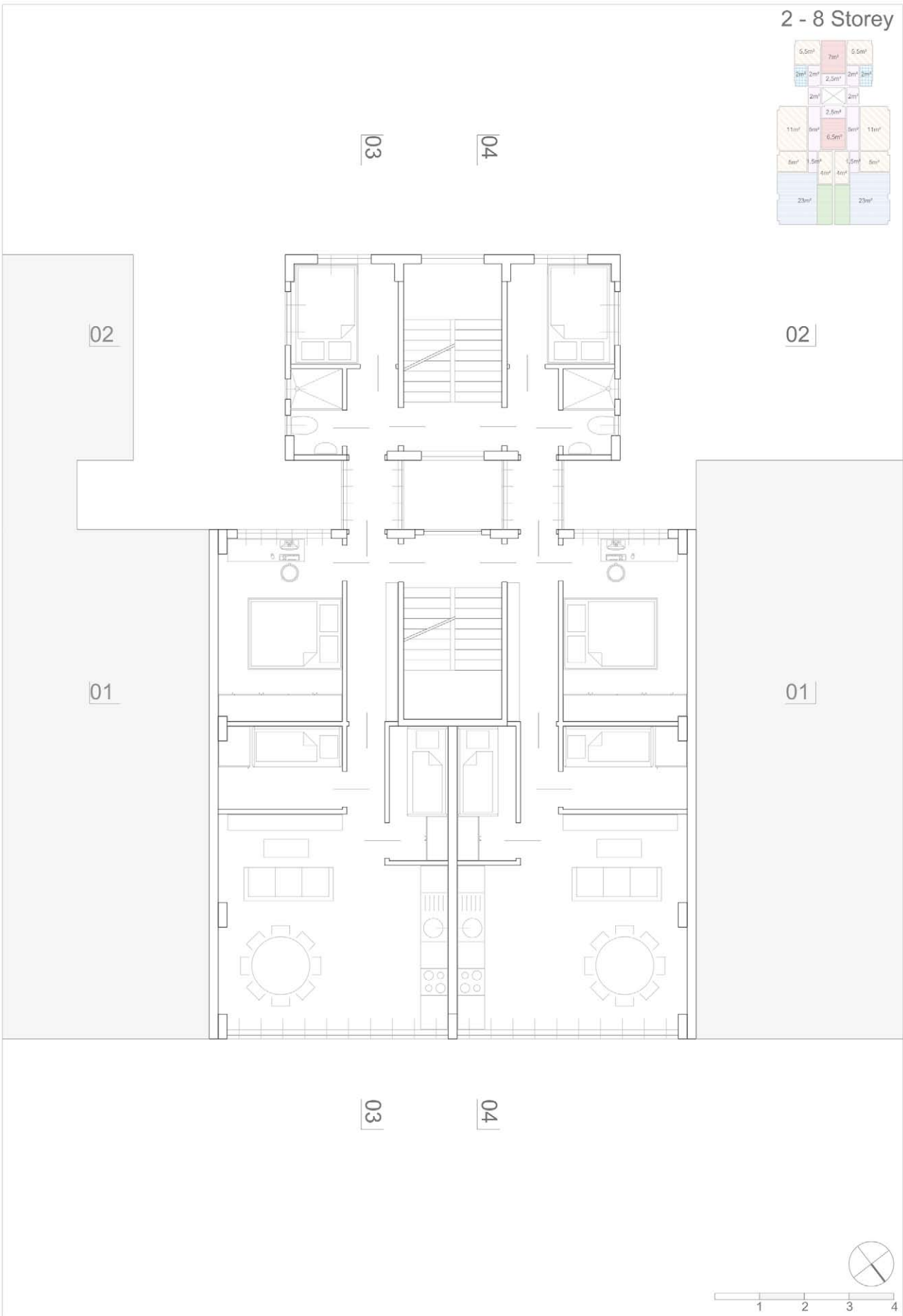




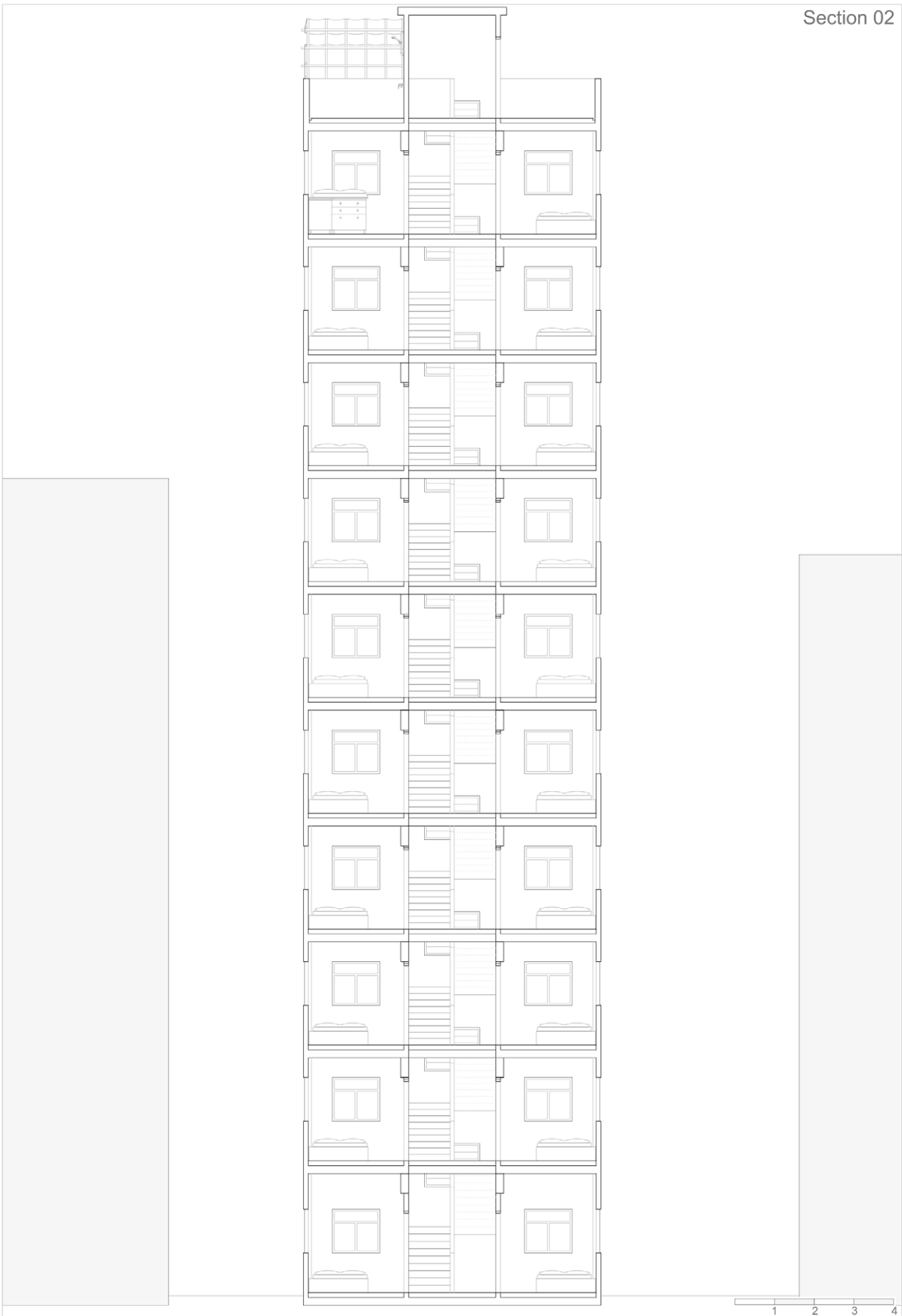




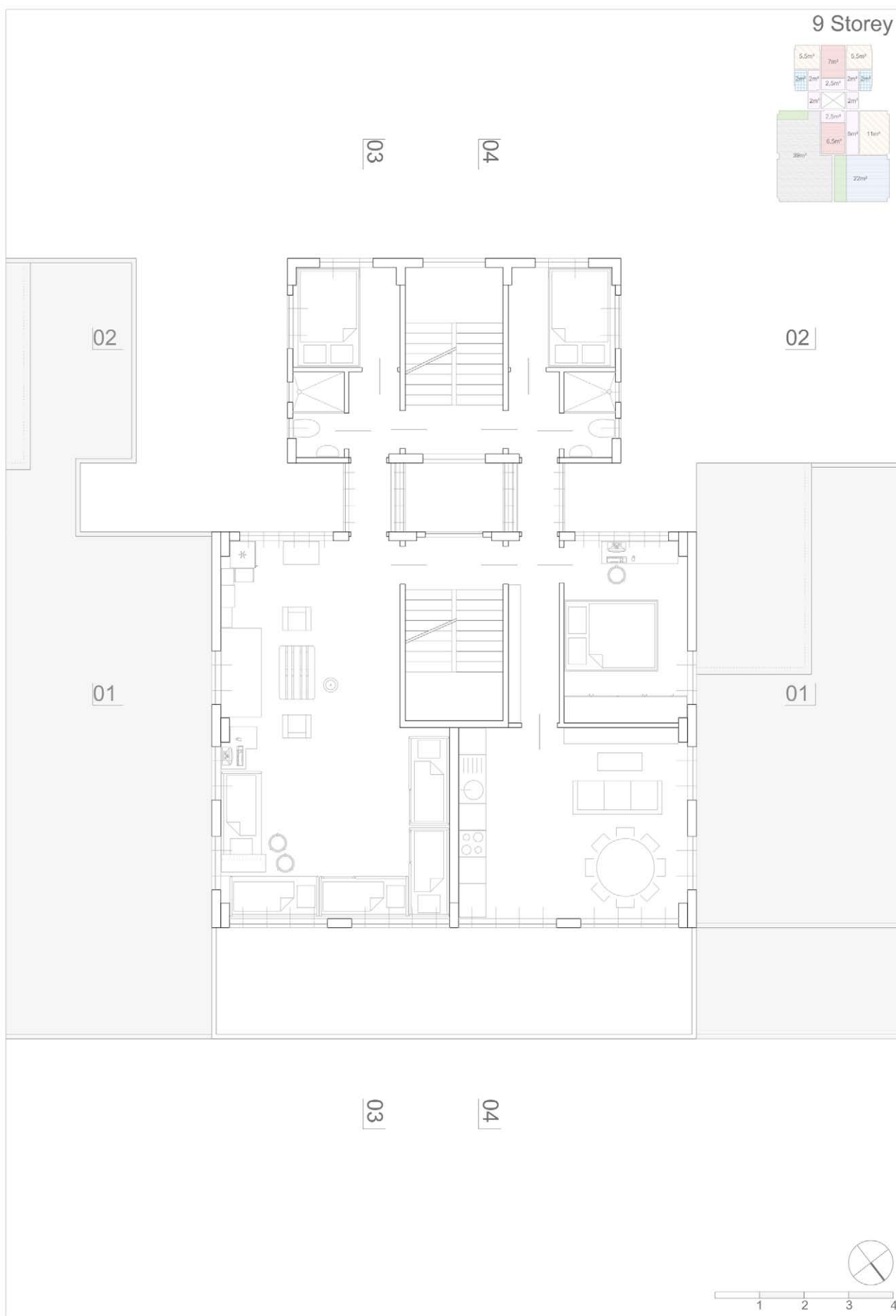
2 - 8 Storey



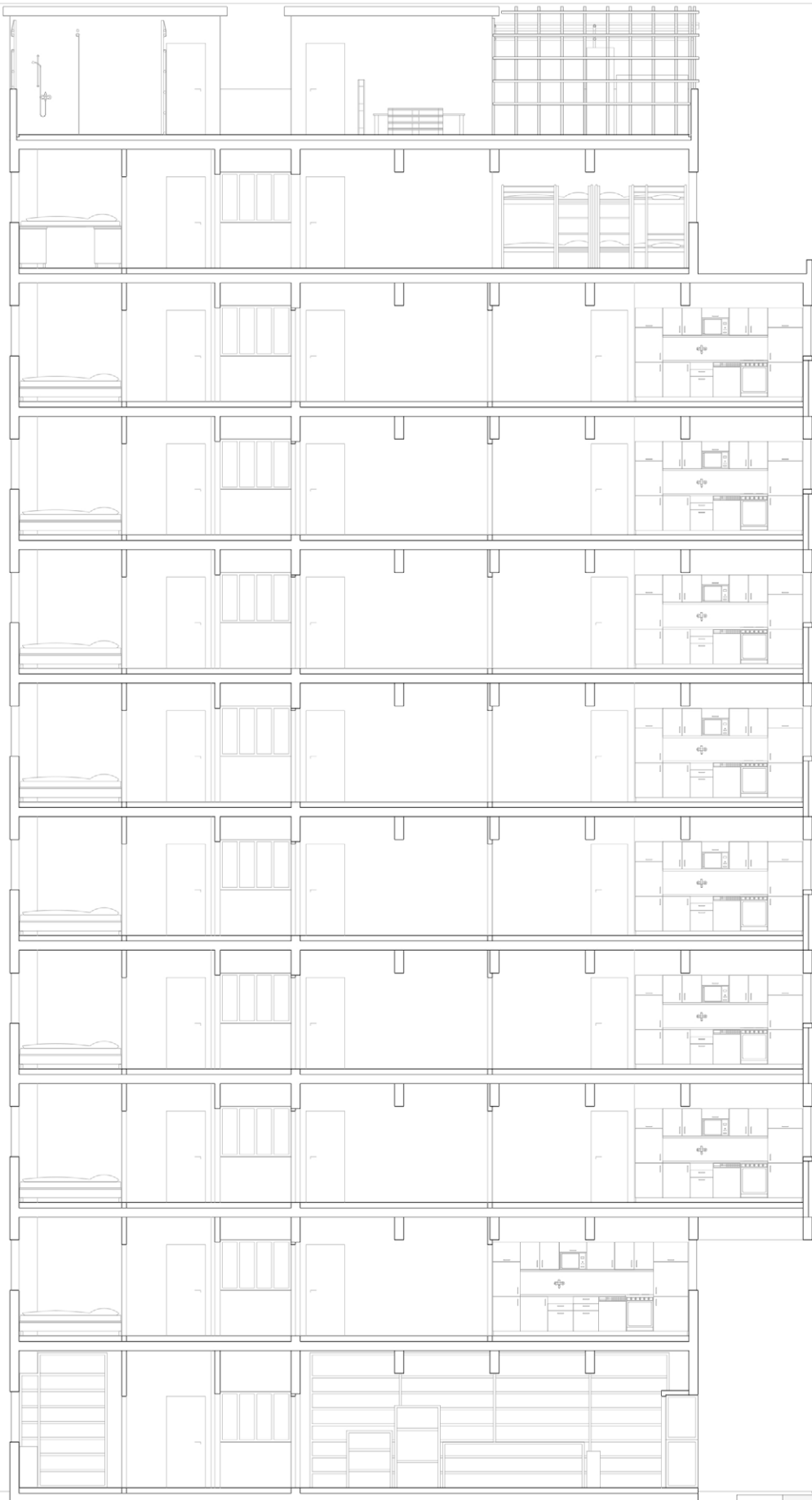
Section 02



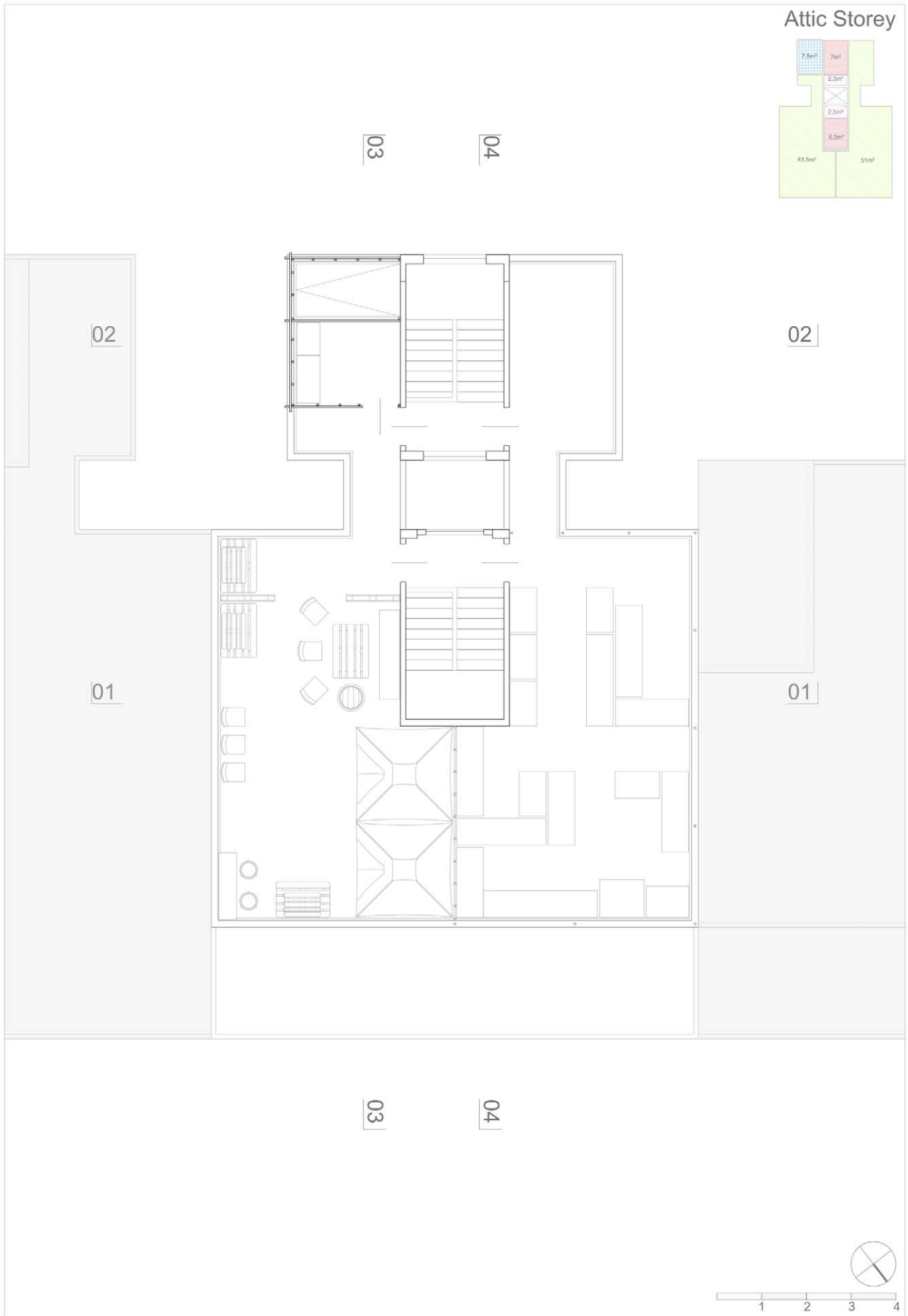
9 Storey



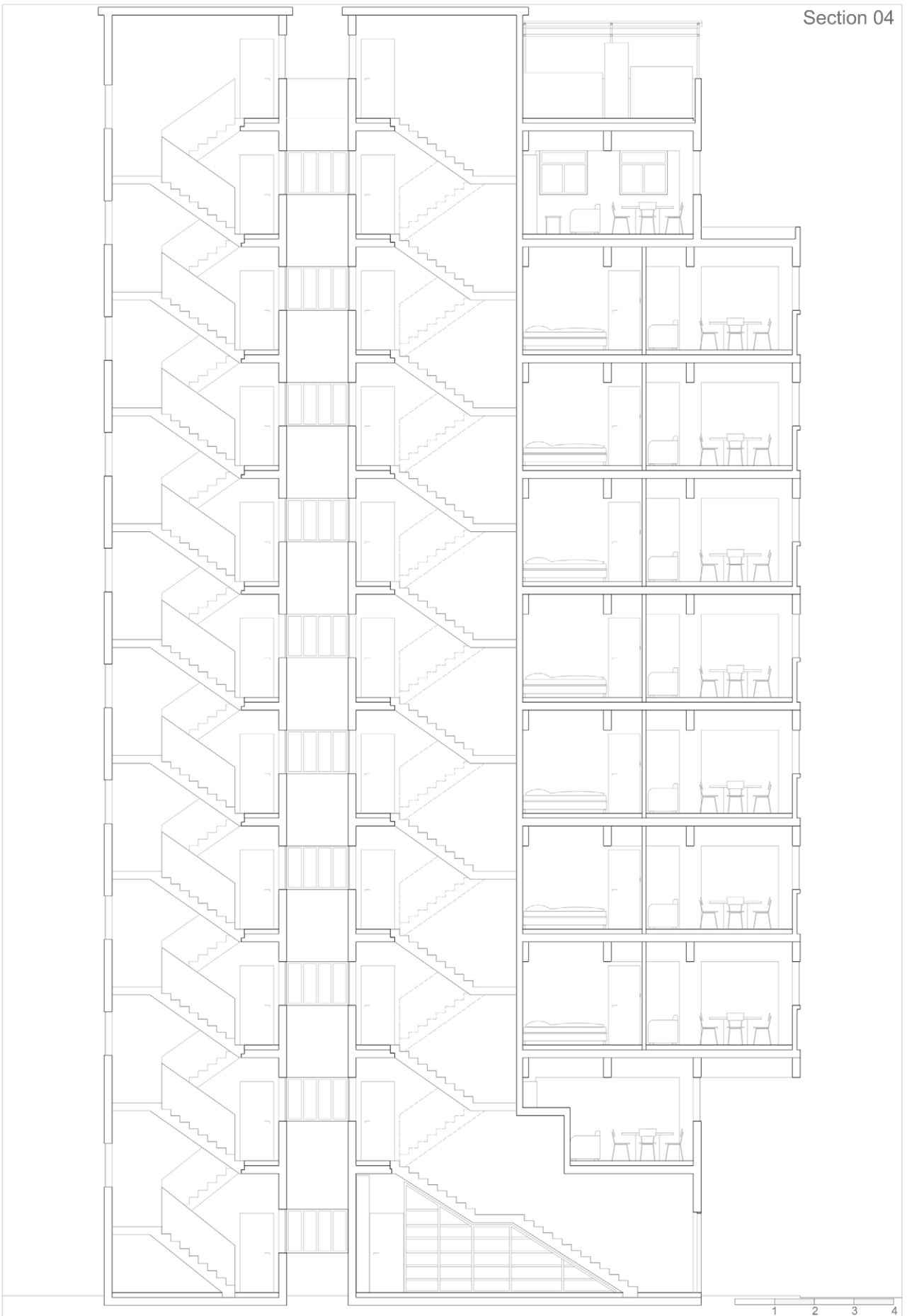
Section 03



1 2 3 4



Section 04



8.3 Improvement Design

After all my research the biggest influence for me was to create a building with living conditions, which improves the social surrounding of the inhabitants. My main focus was to design flats with nice and interesting meeting points, like balconies in the south of the building. Because I displaced them on each floor, I wanted to create the possibility of interaction between the inhabitants of the different storeys. The same topic I used for the shops at the ground floor, because I designed them with mobile partitions. So it is possible to extend the shop or restaurant into the pedestrian way, which is already a common thing in Hong Kong. I also integrated an elevator into my design, so everybody can enter their flats more comfortable. Because of the two different ways to enter the building, both sides of it were used more often and the focus is not only on the front area.

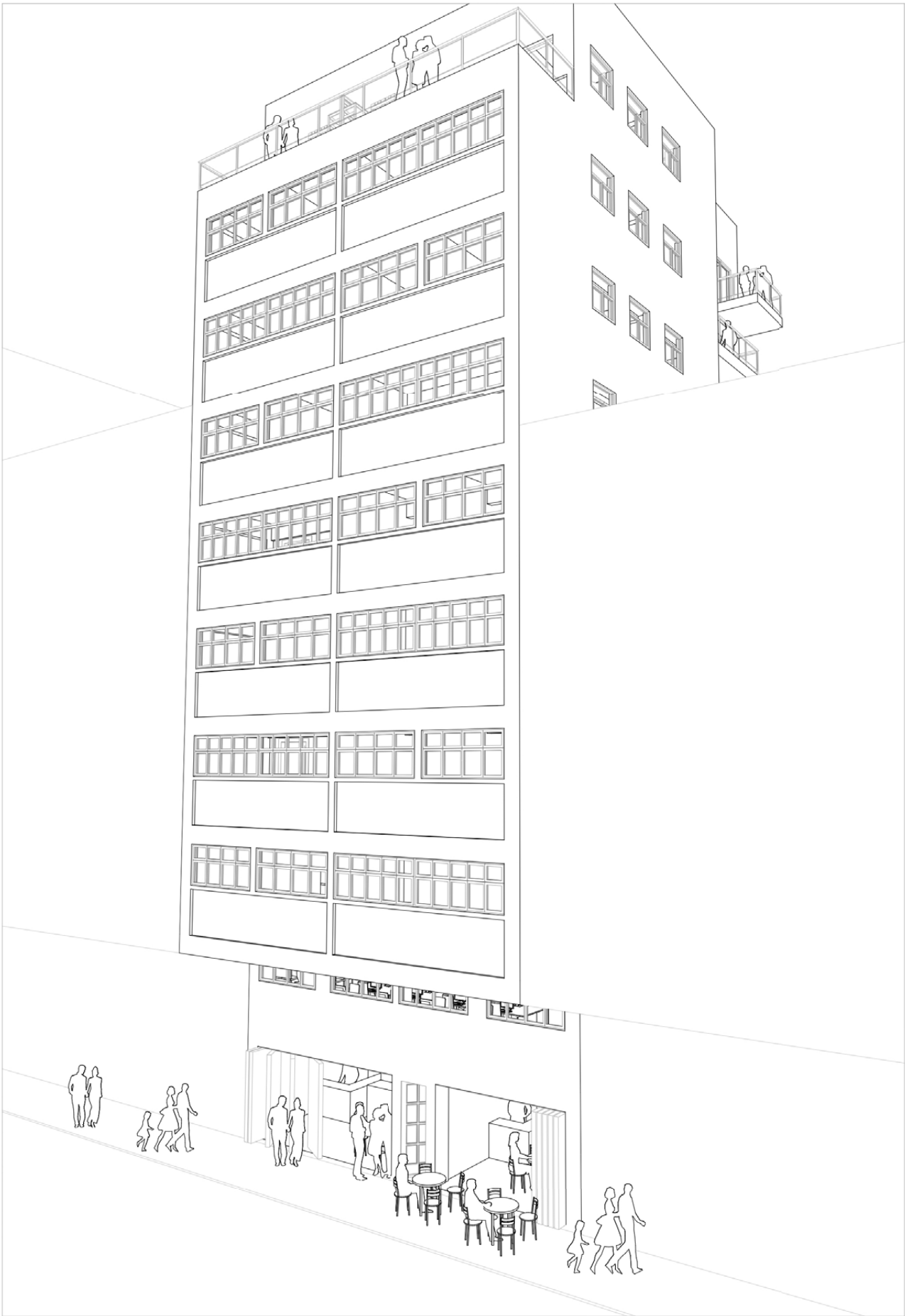
I also extend the corridor between the front and the back area of the building, so it was possible to arrange the toilet and the shower to the inside of the building. There they have an direct illumination and ventilation from the halation, which is in the centre of the building. On the first floor I created an open work office, which can be rented by everybody who needs a working space. With an open kitchen in the rear area of the building, two balconies and two bigger living rooms, there is also the possibility to relax and exchange with other people.

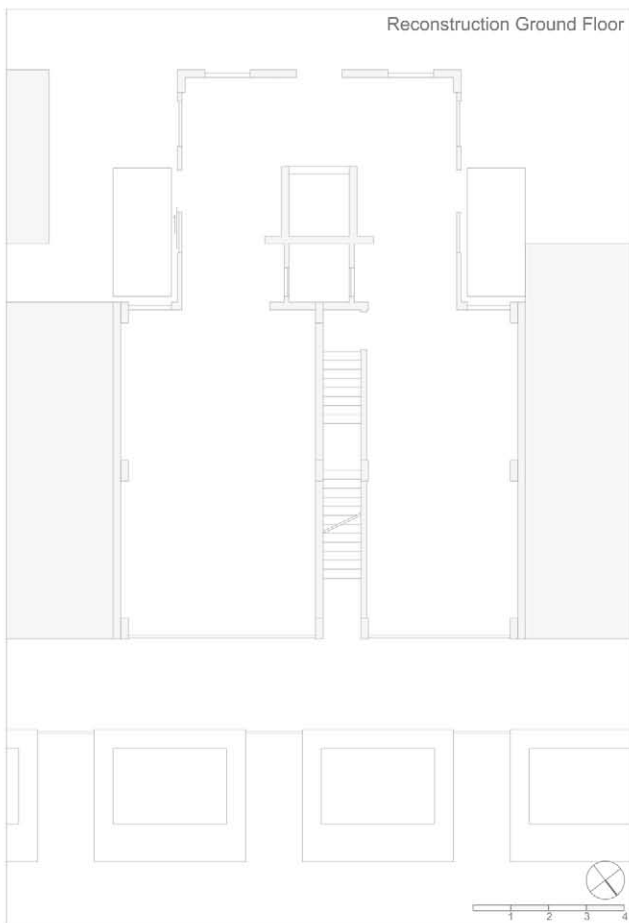
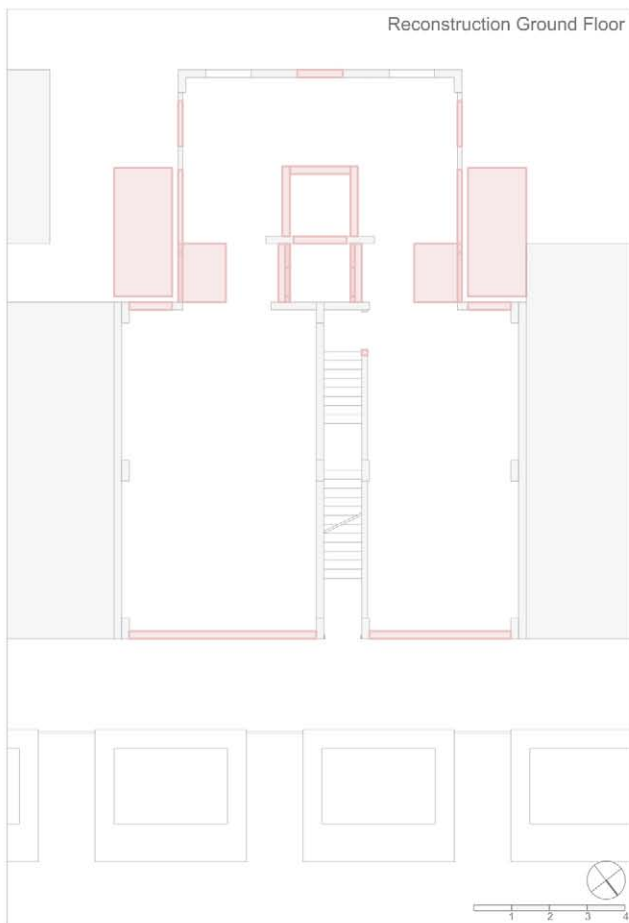
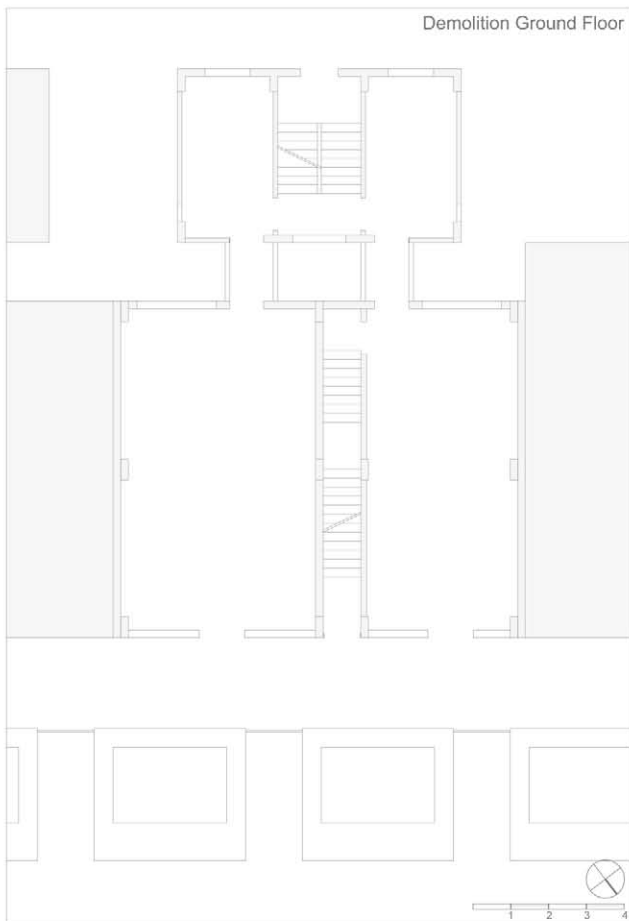
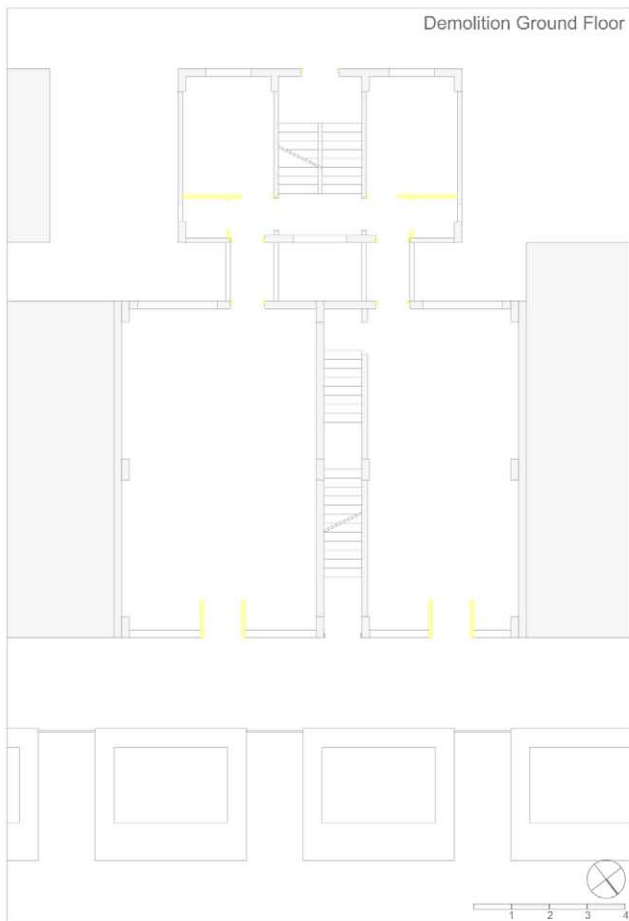
The upper flats have different possibilities of room layouts. In every flat there is for everybody an own sleeping area with integrated working area, if someone of the inhabitants want to be undisturbed. But I decided to keep this areas smaller compared for example to Austria. Because on the one hand the sleeping areas in Hong Kong are usual not very huge and I wanted to have more space for bigger living areas and social meeting points.

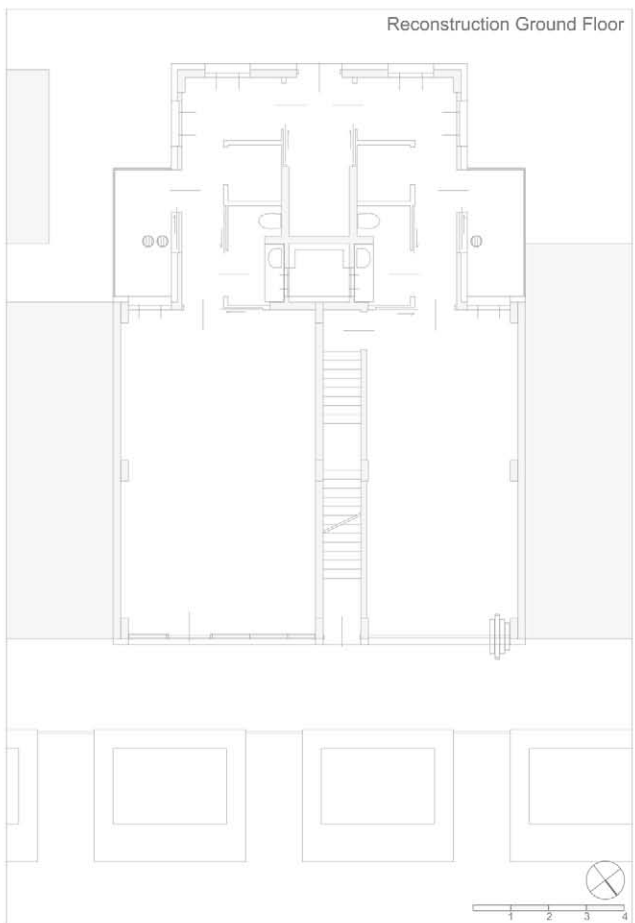
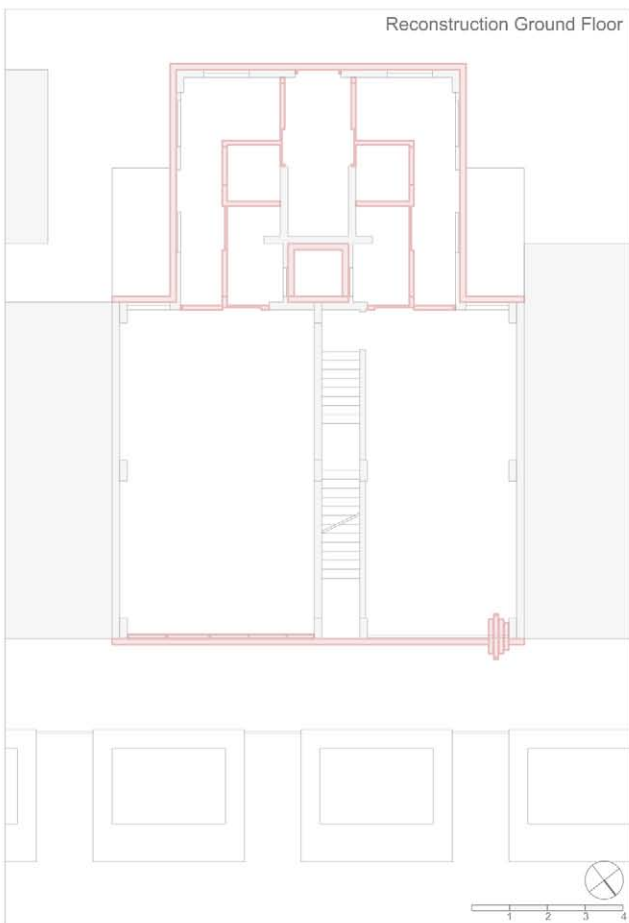
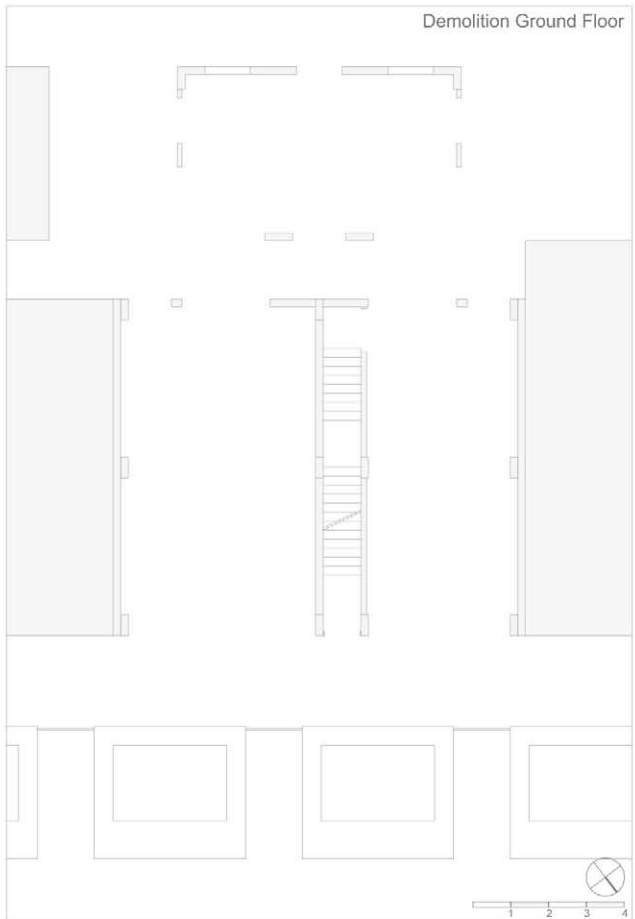
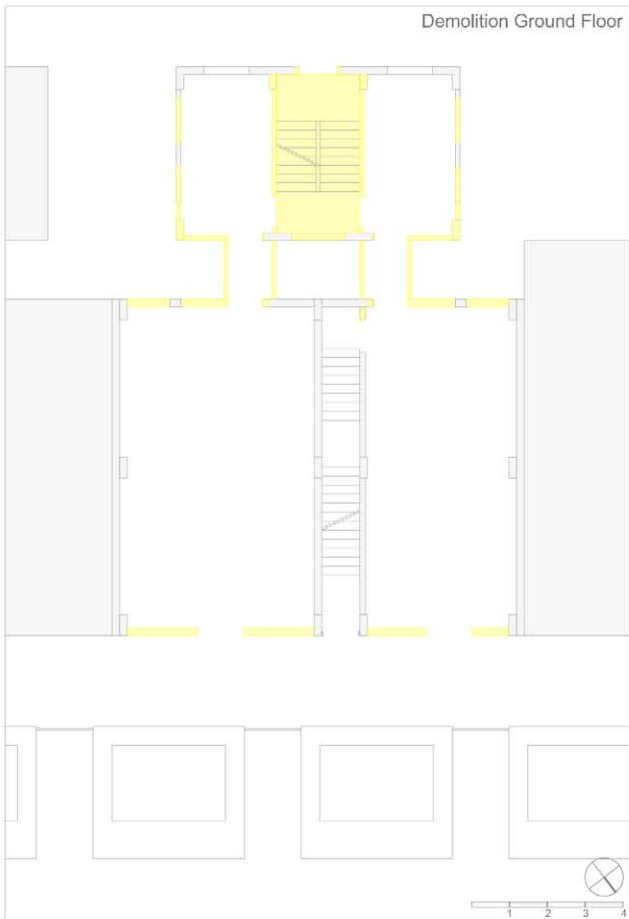
On the ninth floor I decided to give the inhabitants the opportunity, to layout their flats on their own use. So I designed there mobile partitions, which create different layouts and also used the huge rooftop of the ninth floor as a terrace.

For the attic storey I decided that every inhabitant of the building should get the opportunity to use it. For this, everybody can easily enter it with the elevator. I kept the shower areas in the rear area of the building, so people could stay at the rooftop in a tent, if some of the inhabitants have visitors and too less space to them for an overnight.

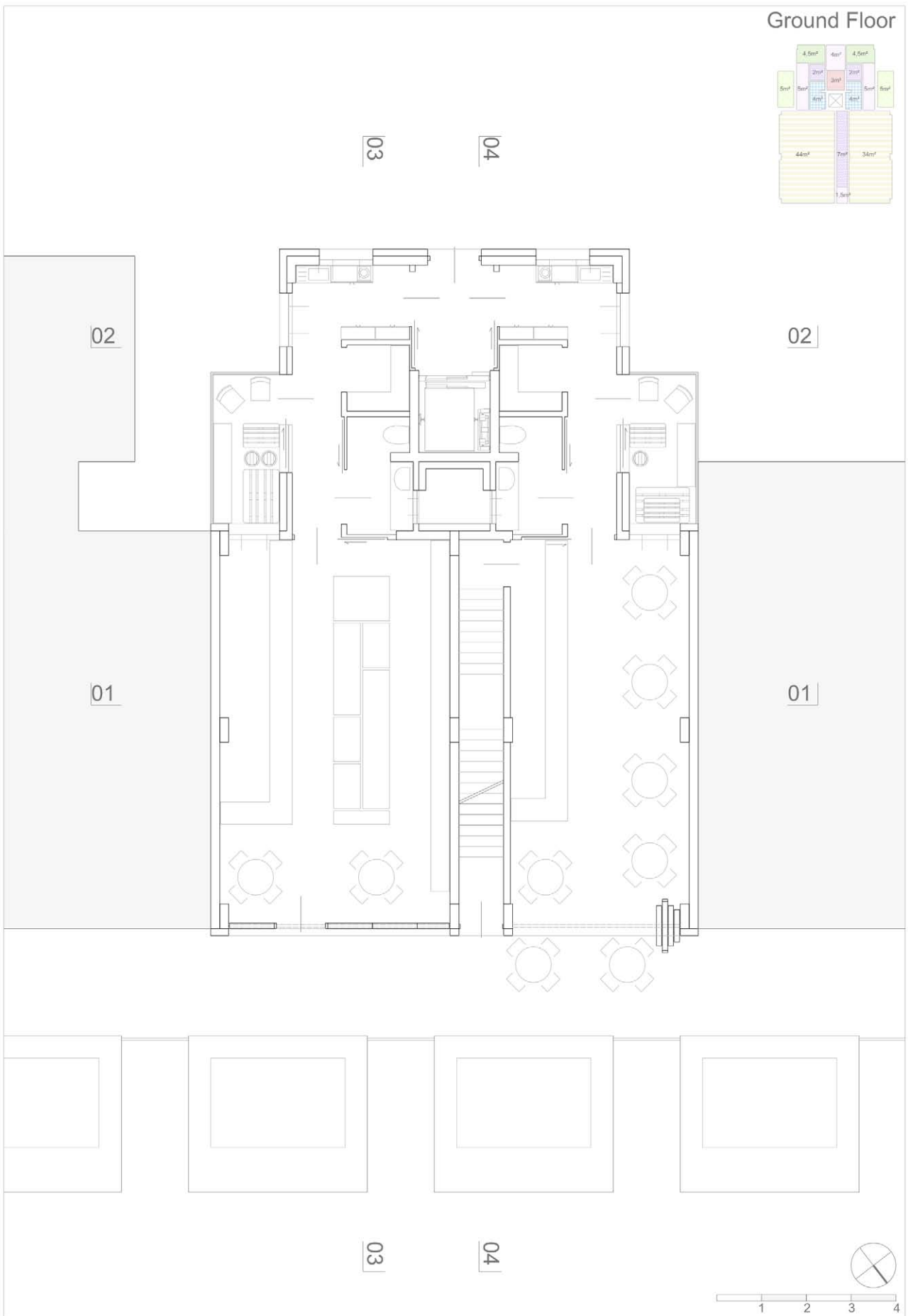
All together this design concept should show the possibilities of new usages of these old buildings, with smaller interventions, instead of demolishing and rebuilding.

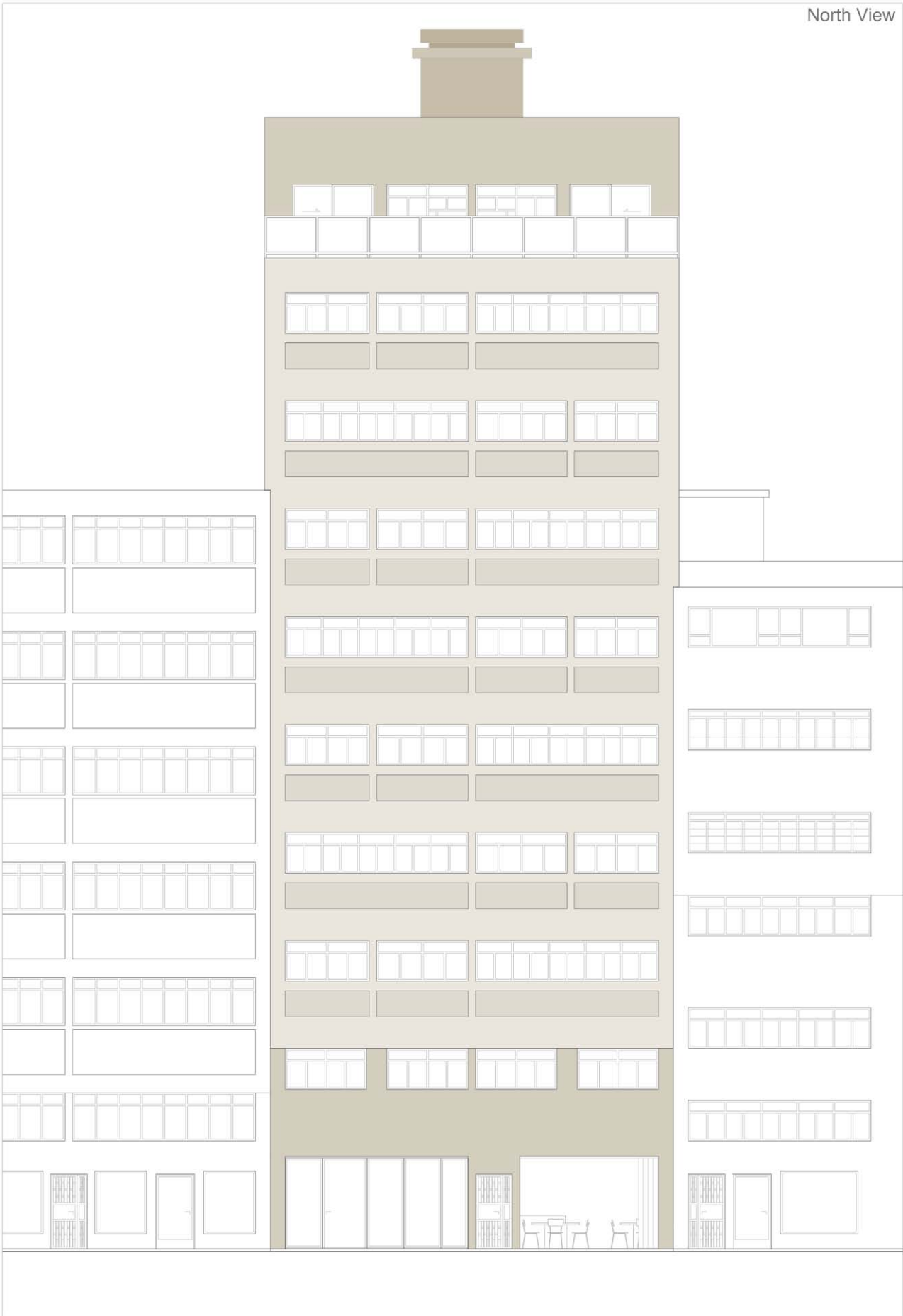


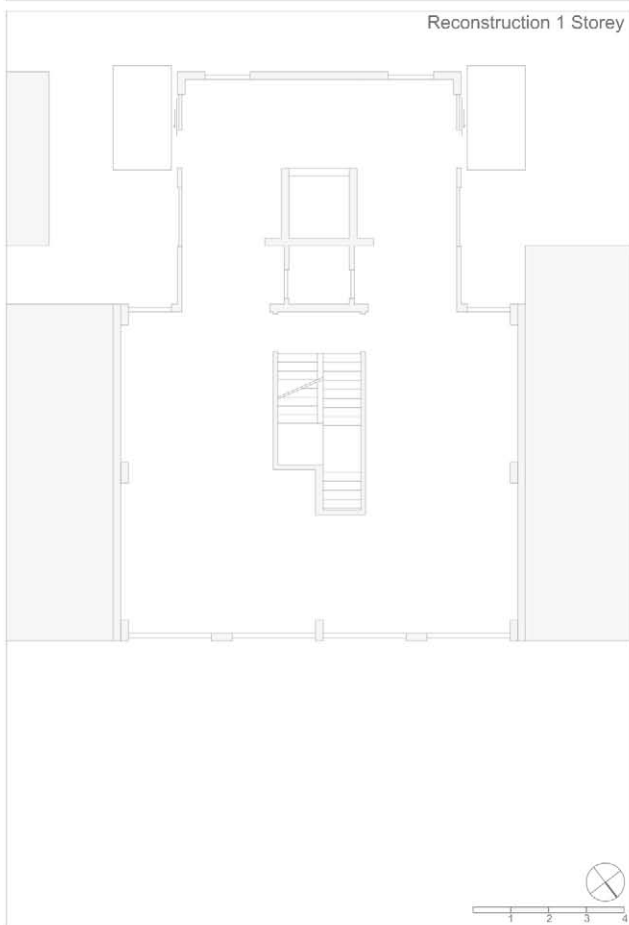
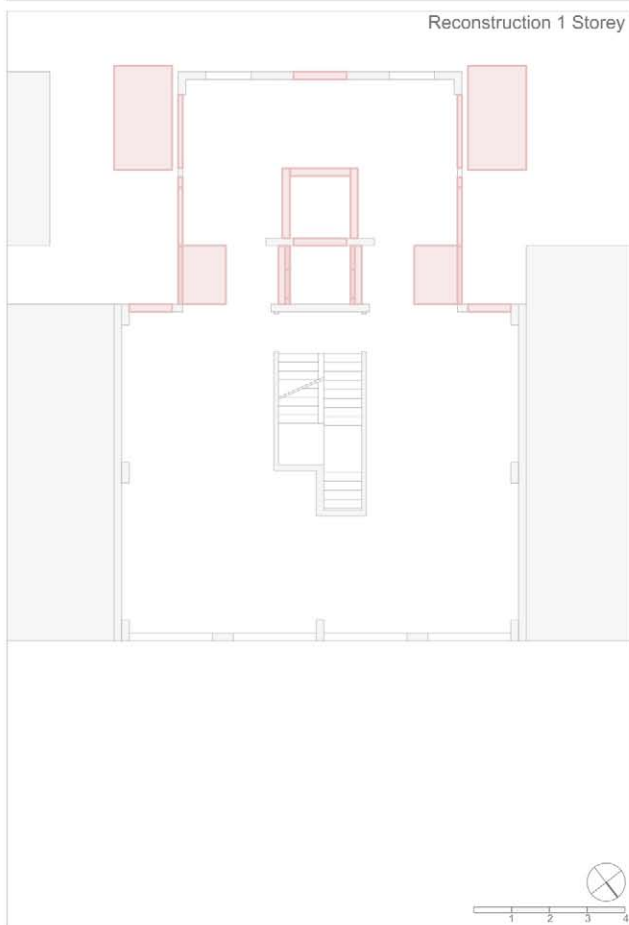
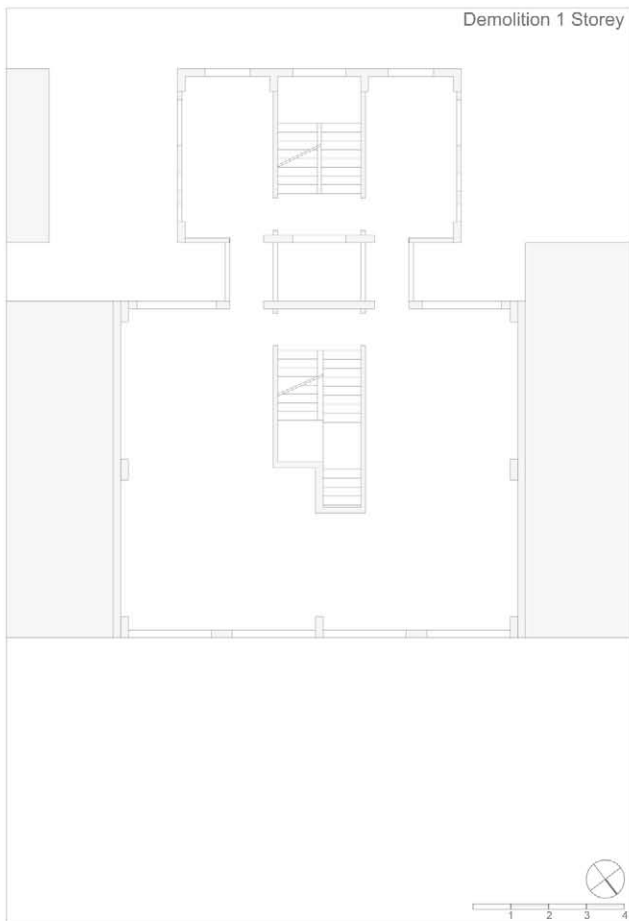
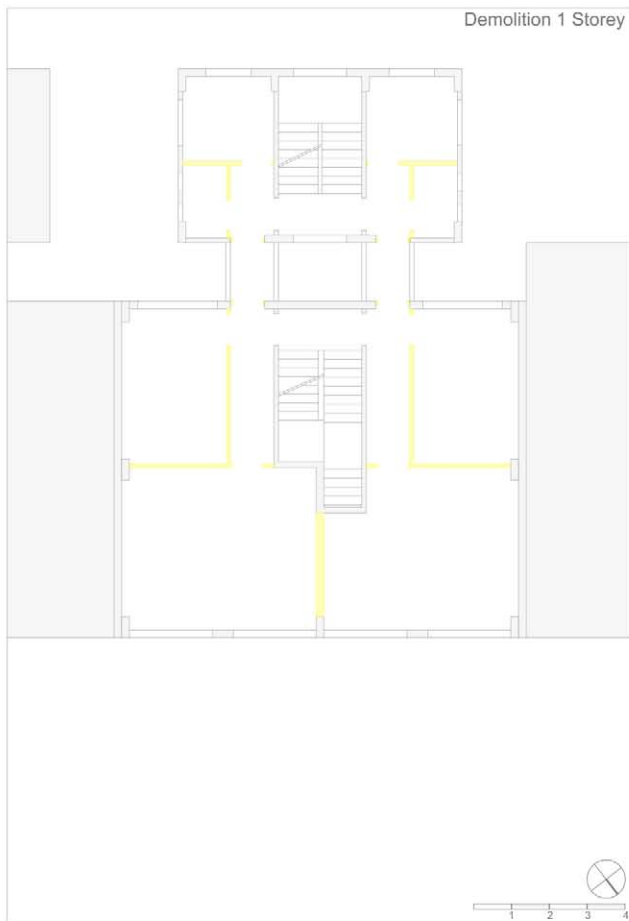


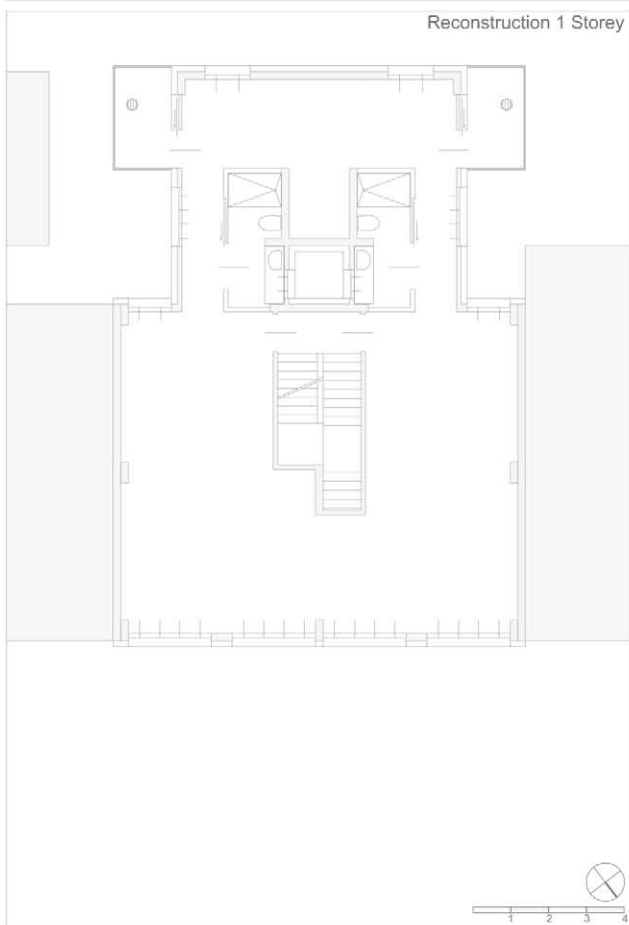
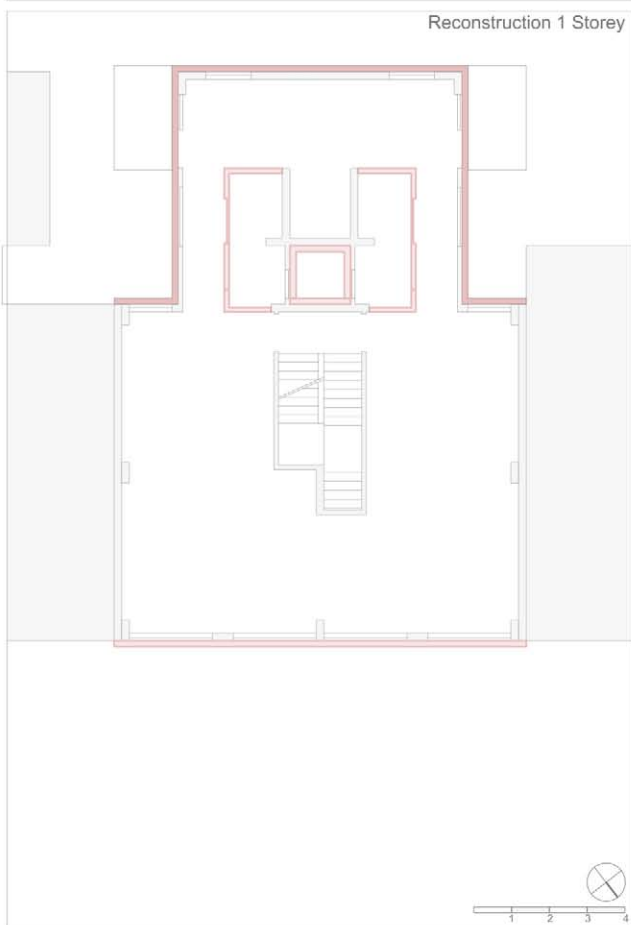
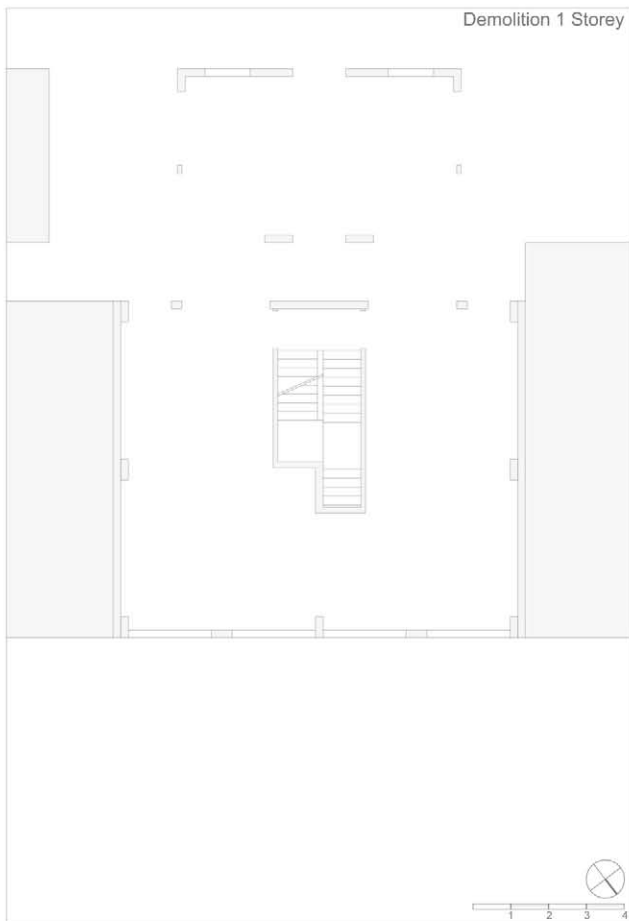
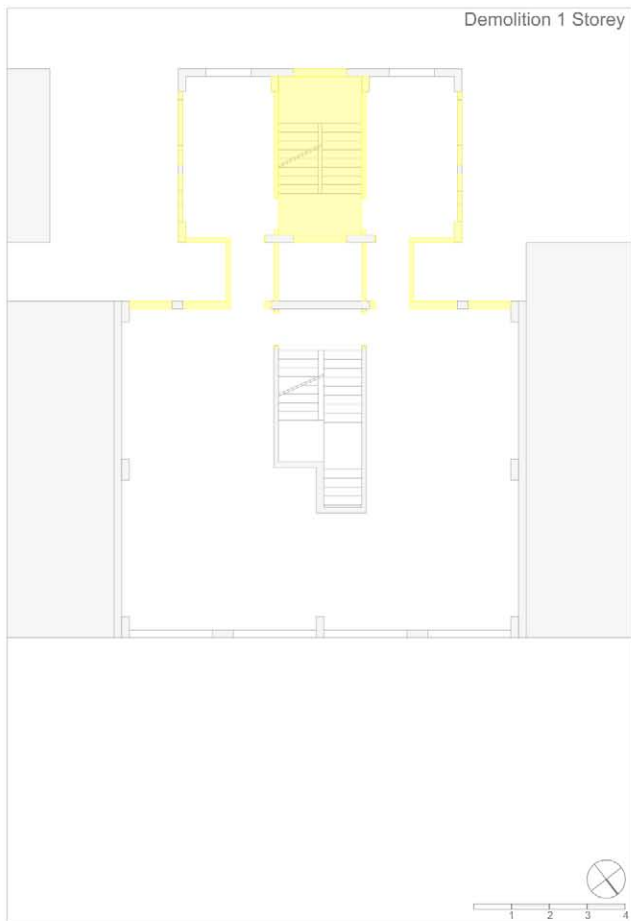


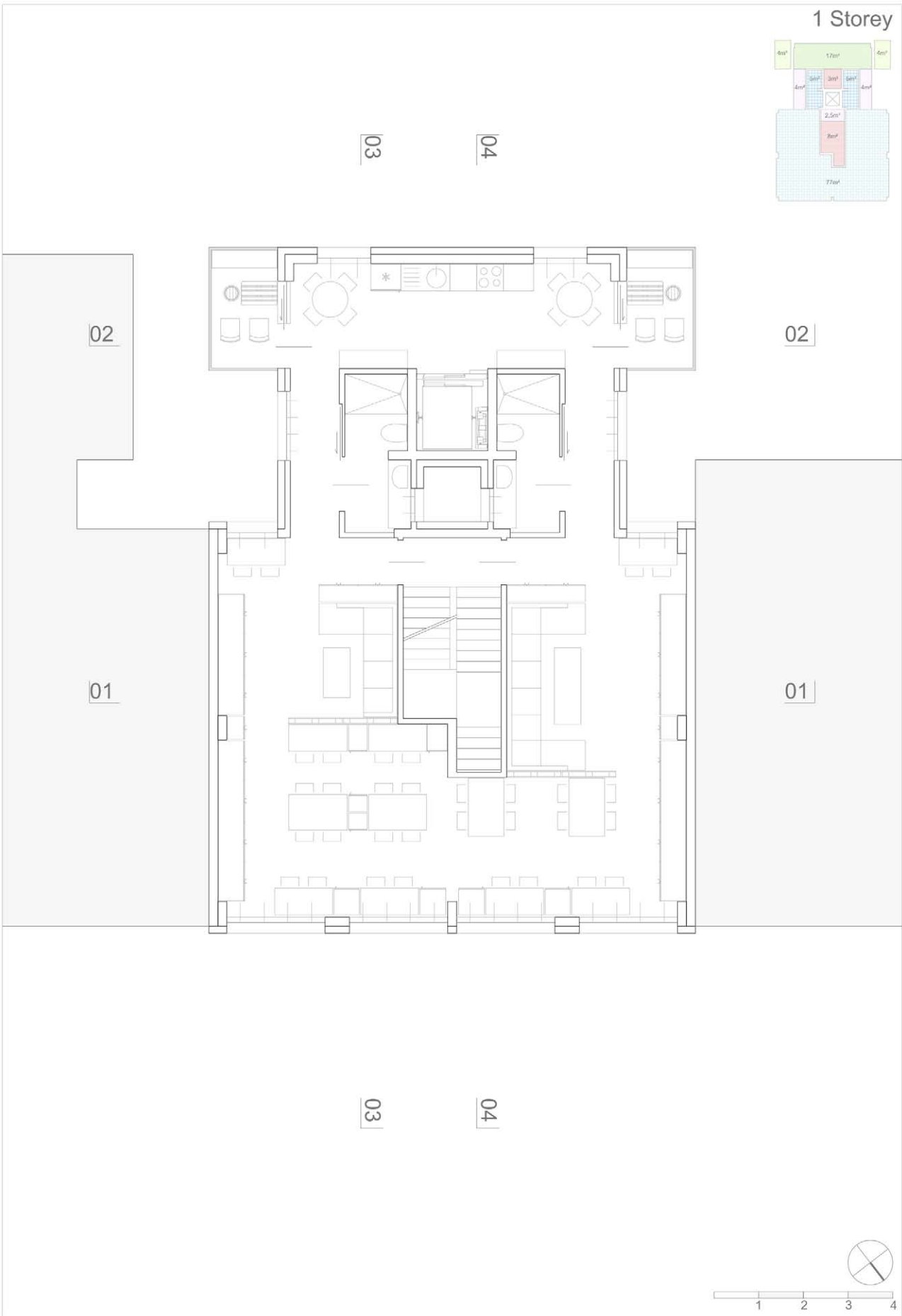
Ground Floor

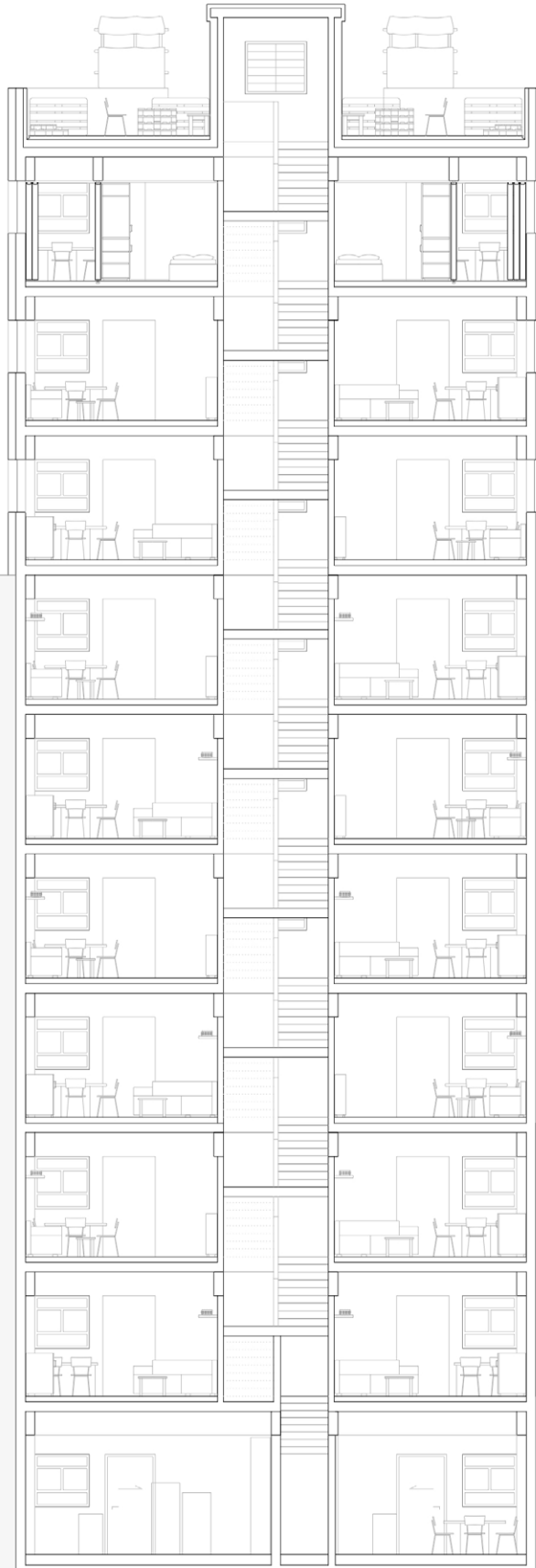




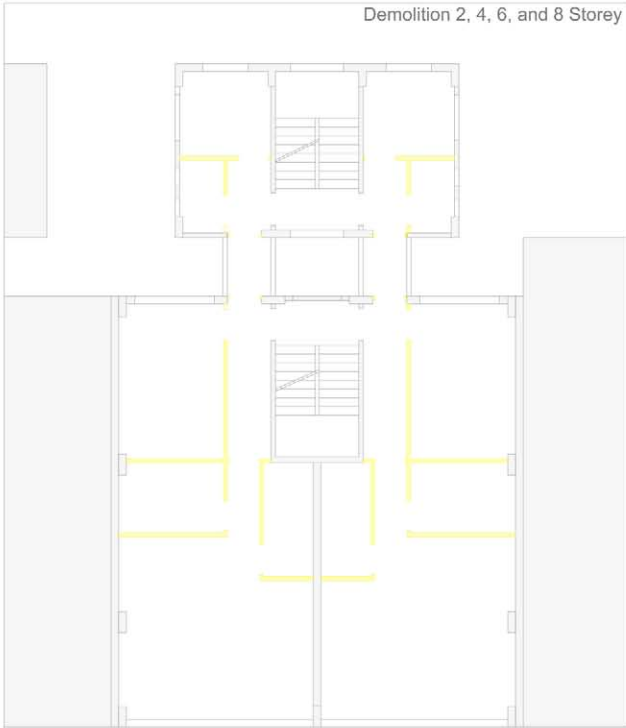




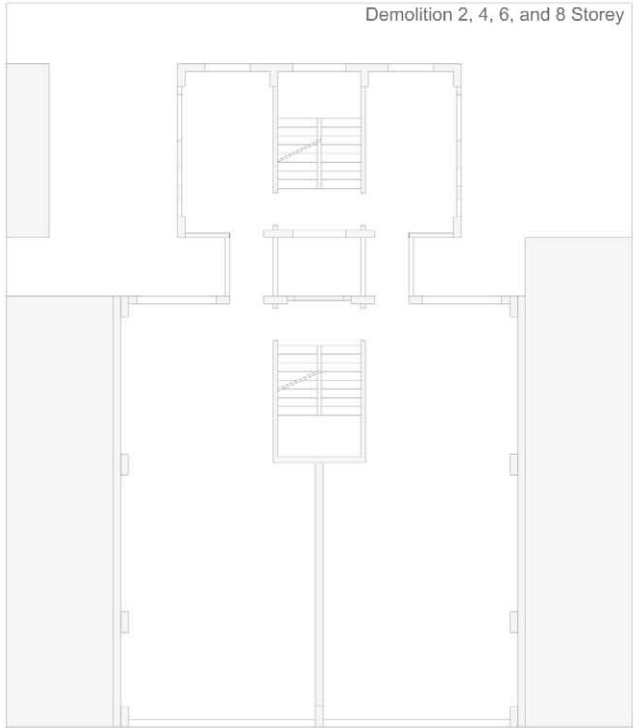




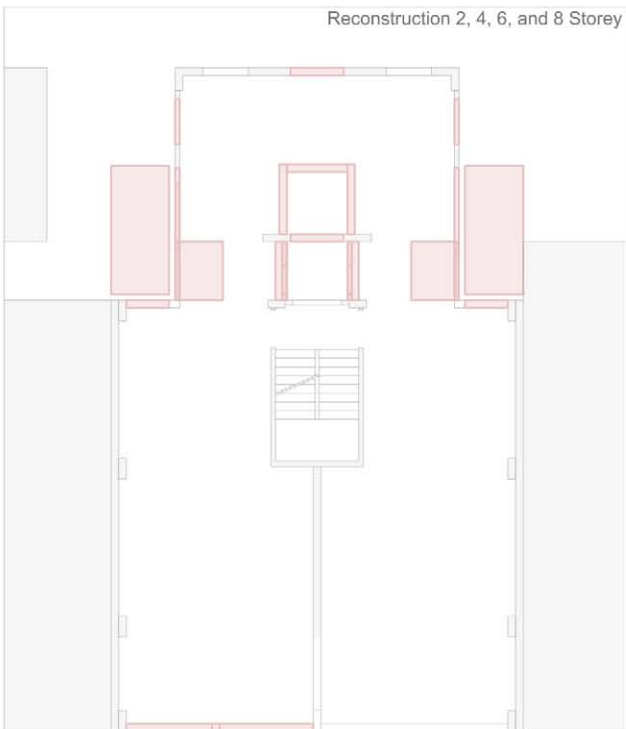
Demolition 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey



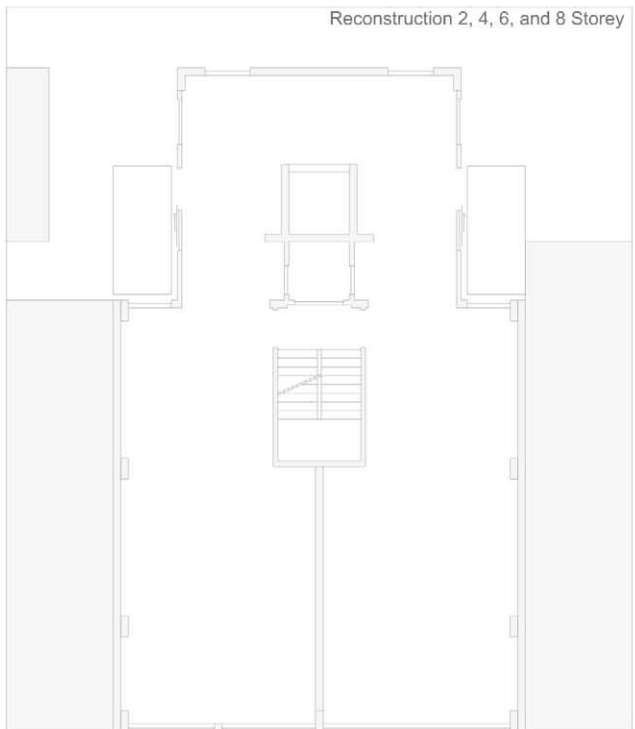
Demolition 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey



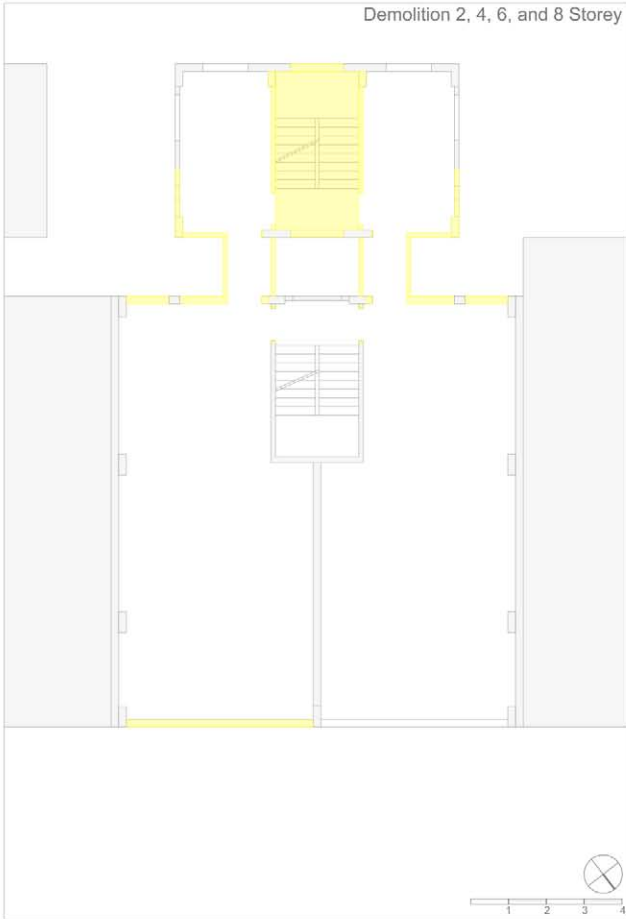
Reconstruction 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey



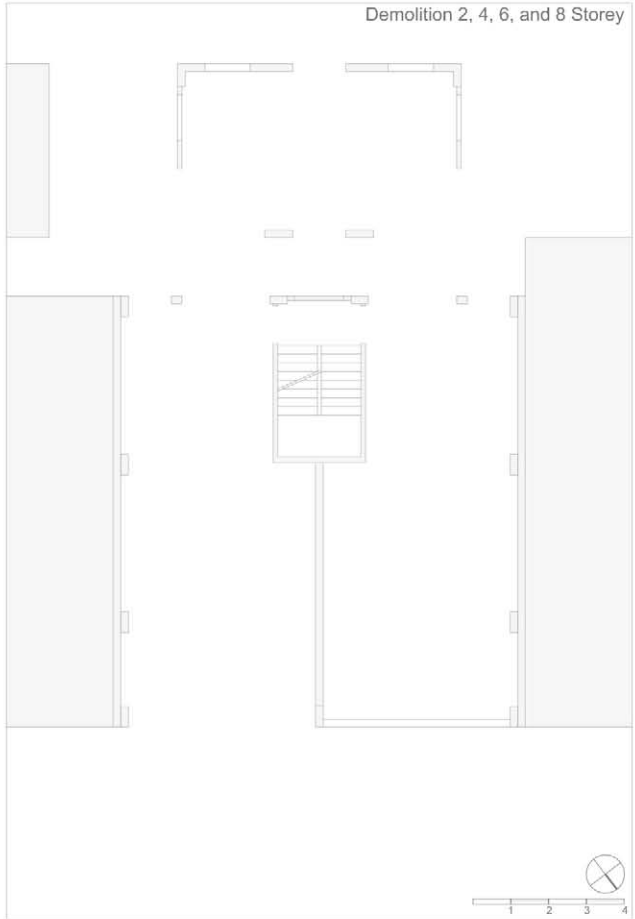
Reconstruction 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey



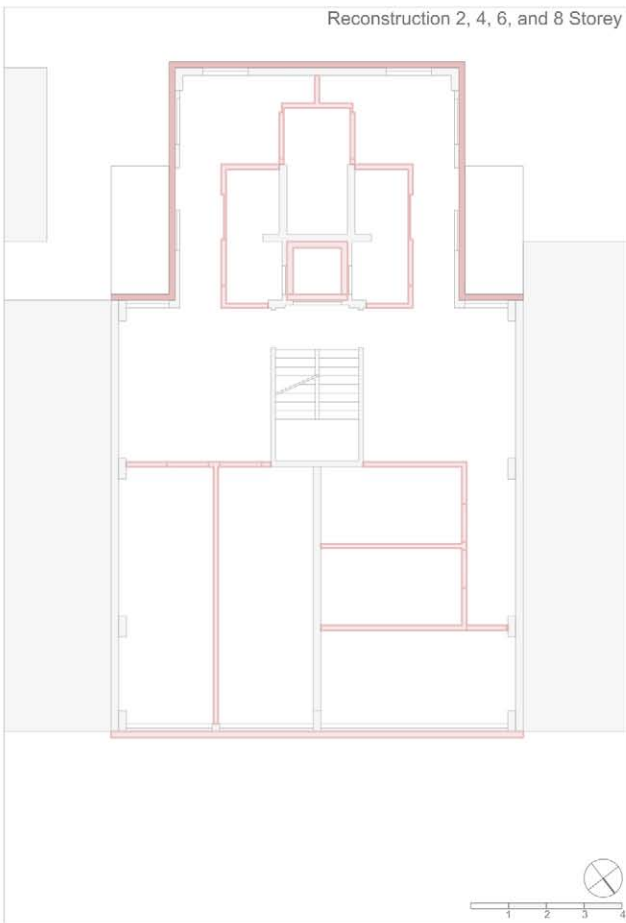
Demolition 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey



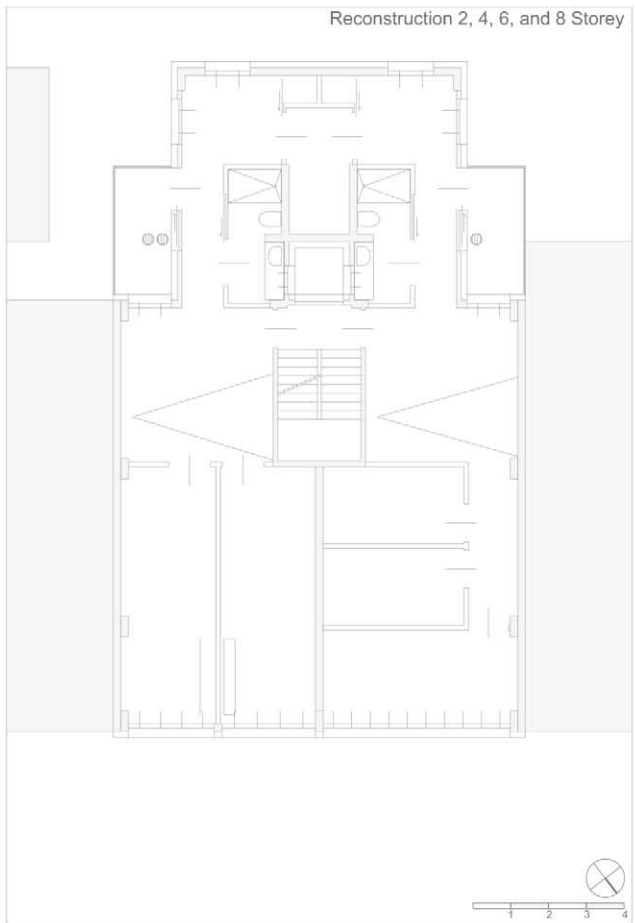
Demolition 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey



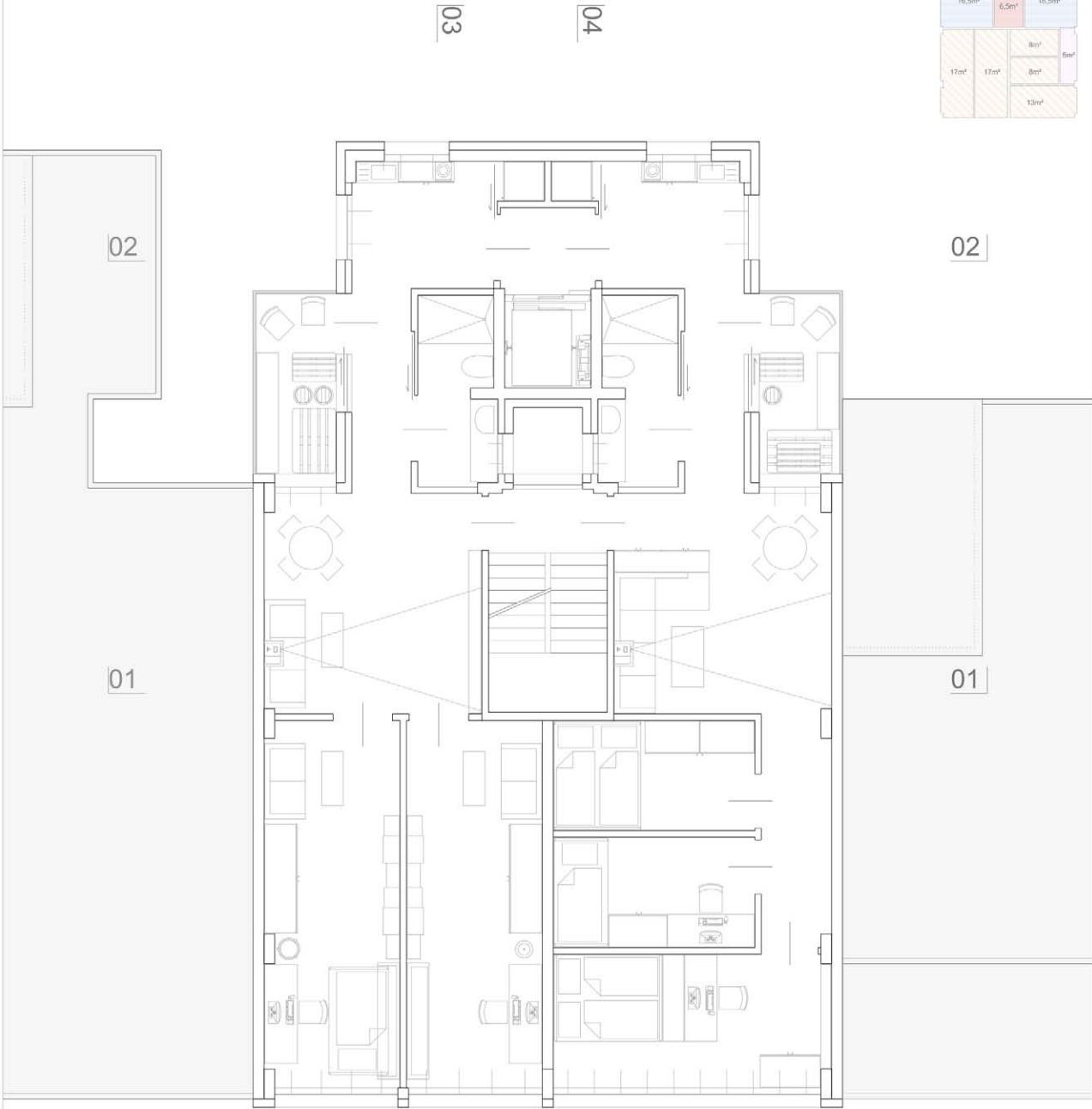
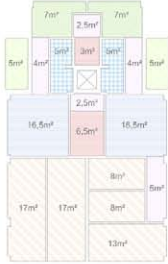
Reconstruction 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey

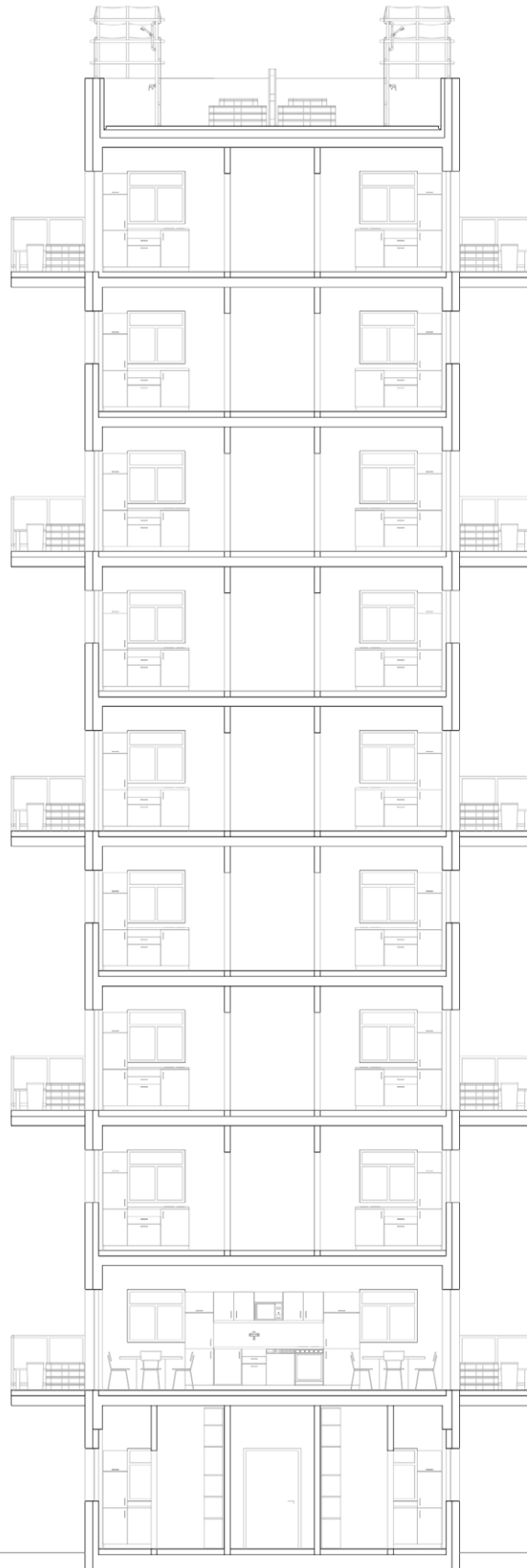


Reconstruction 2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey

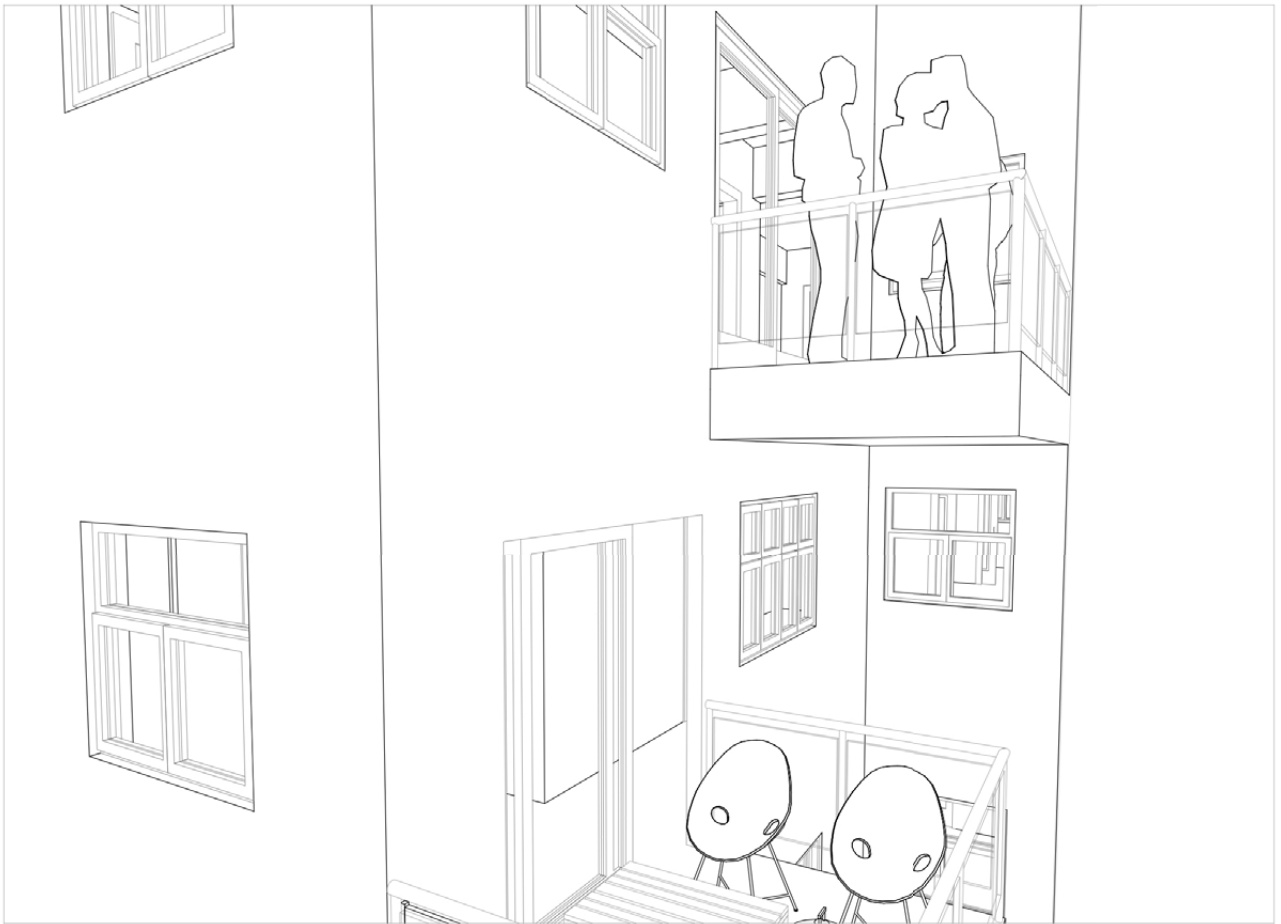


2, 4, 6, and 8 Storey

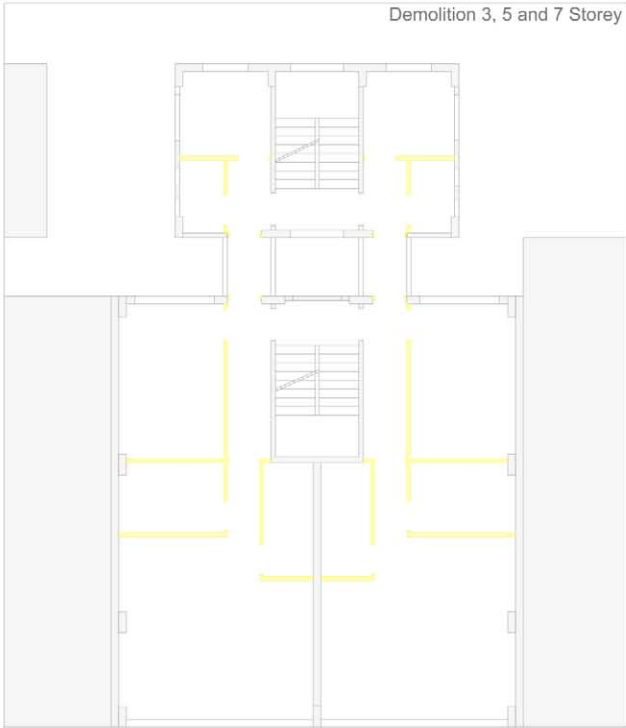




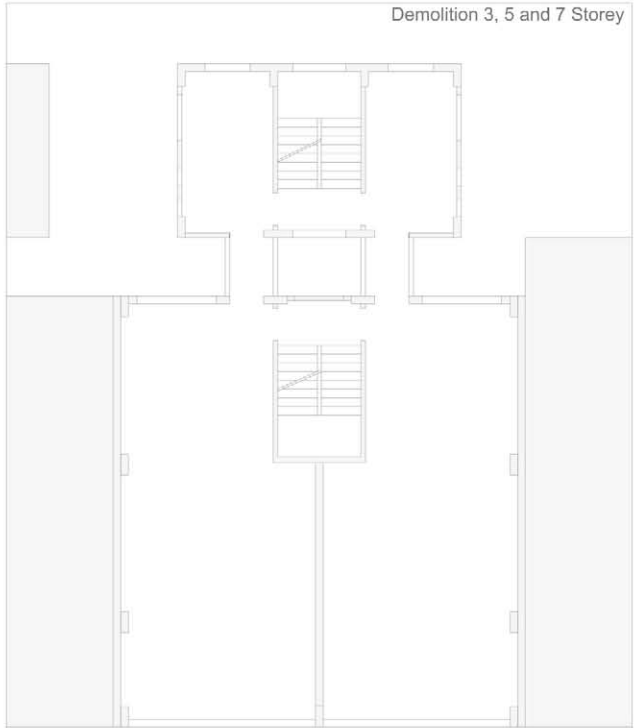




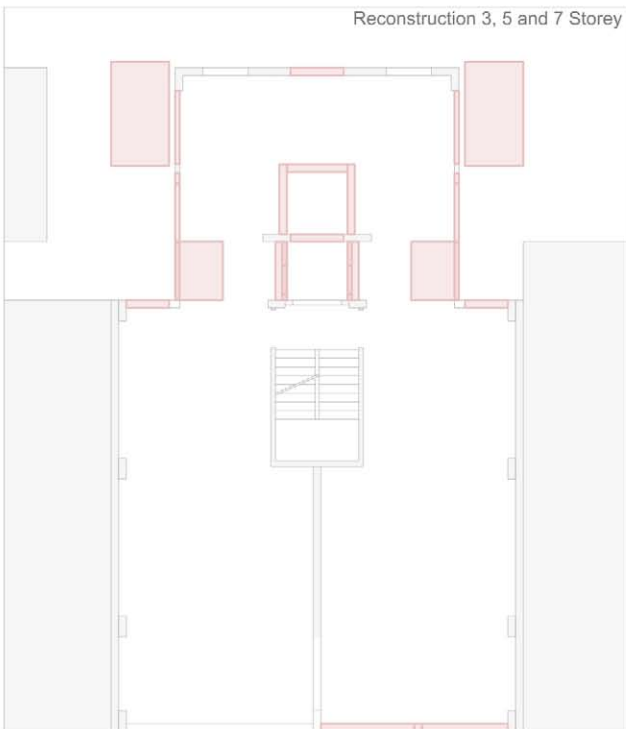
Demolition 3, 5 and 7 Storey



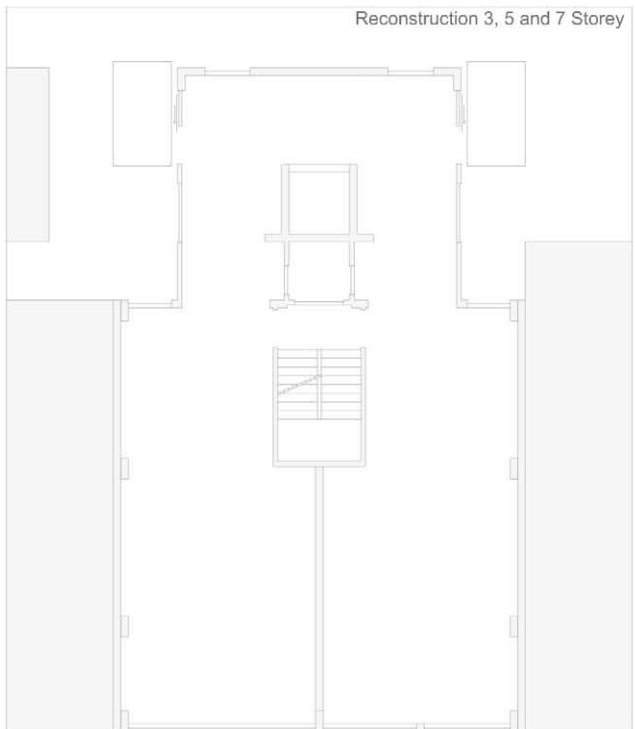
Demolition 3, 5 and 7 Storey



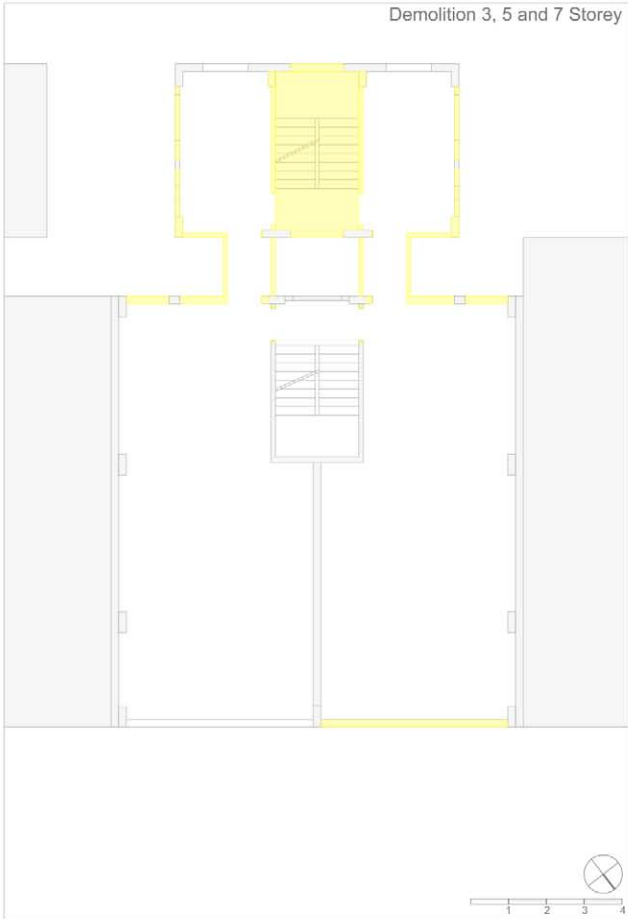
Reconstruction 3, 5 and 7 Storey



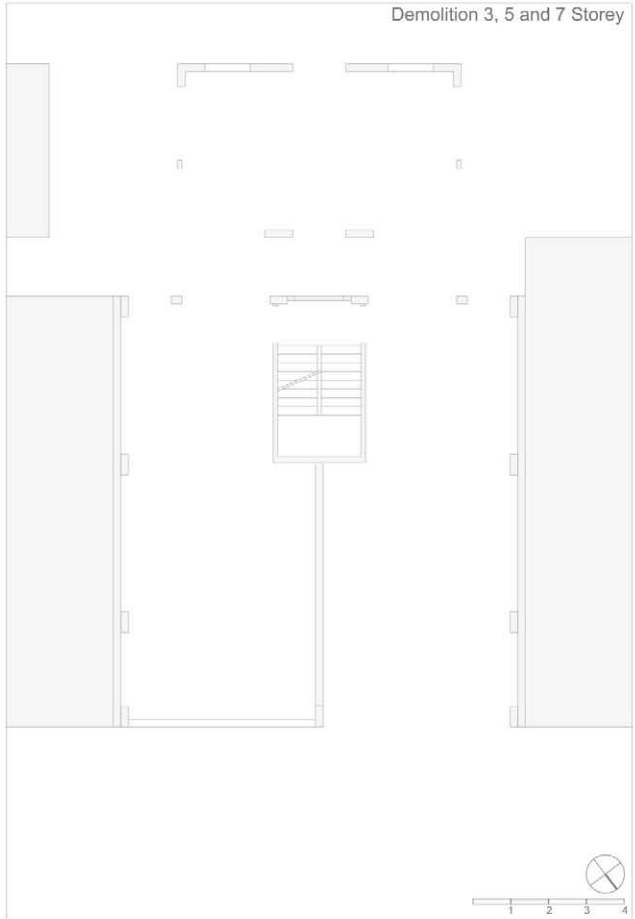
Reconstruction 3, 5 and 7 Storey



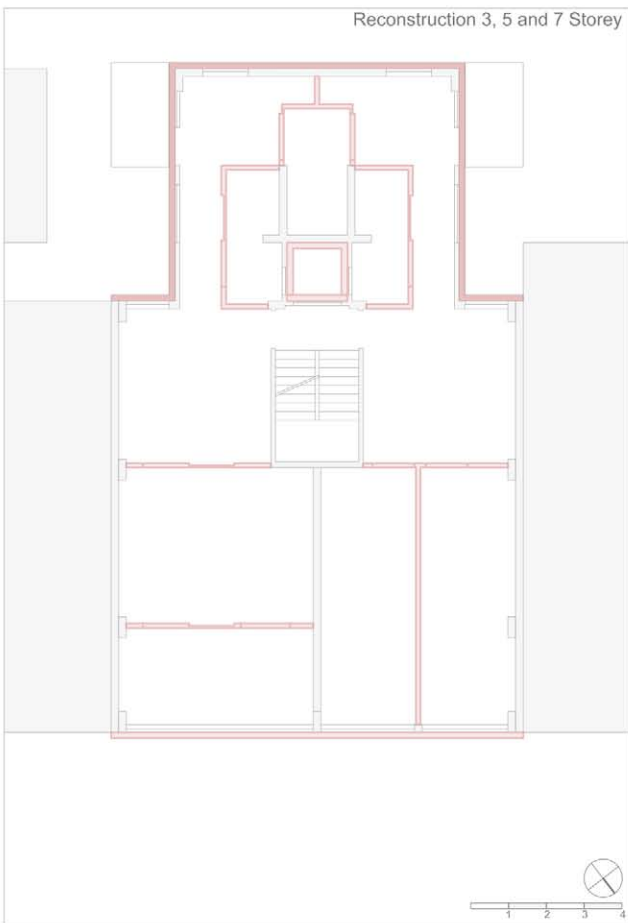
Demolition 3, 5 and 7 Storey



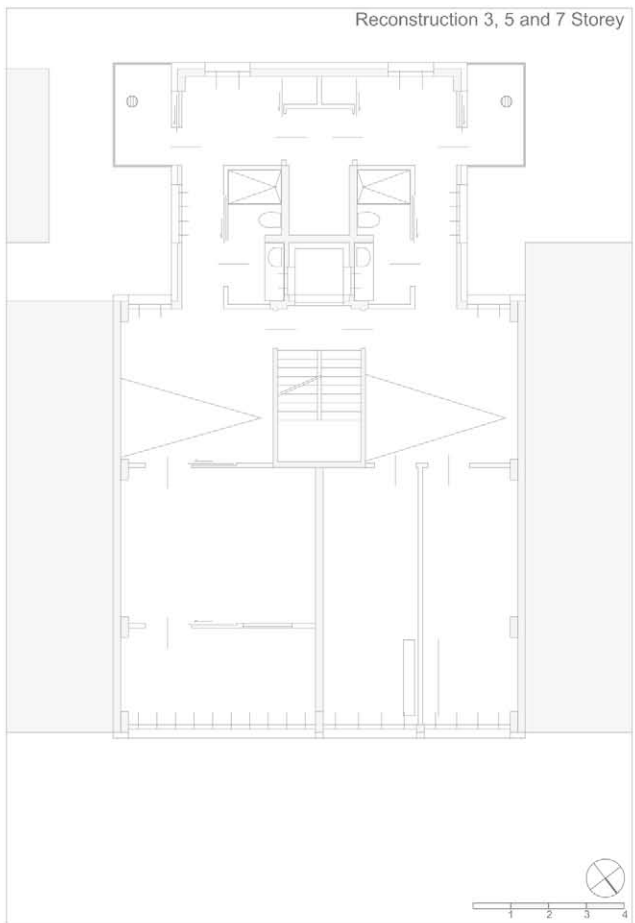
Demolition 3, 5 and 7 Storey



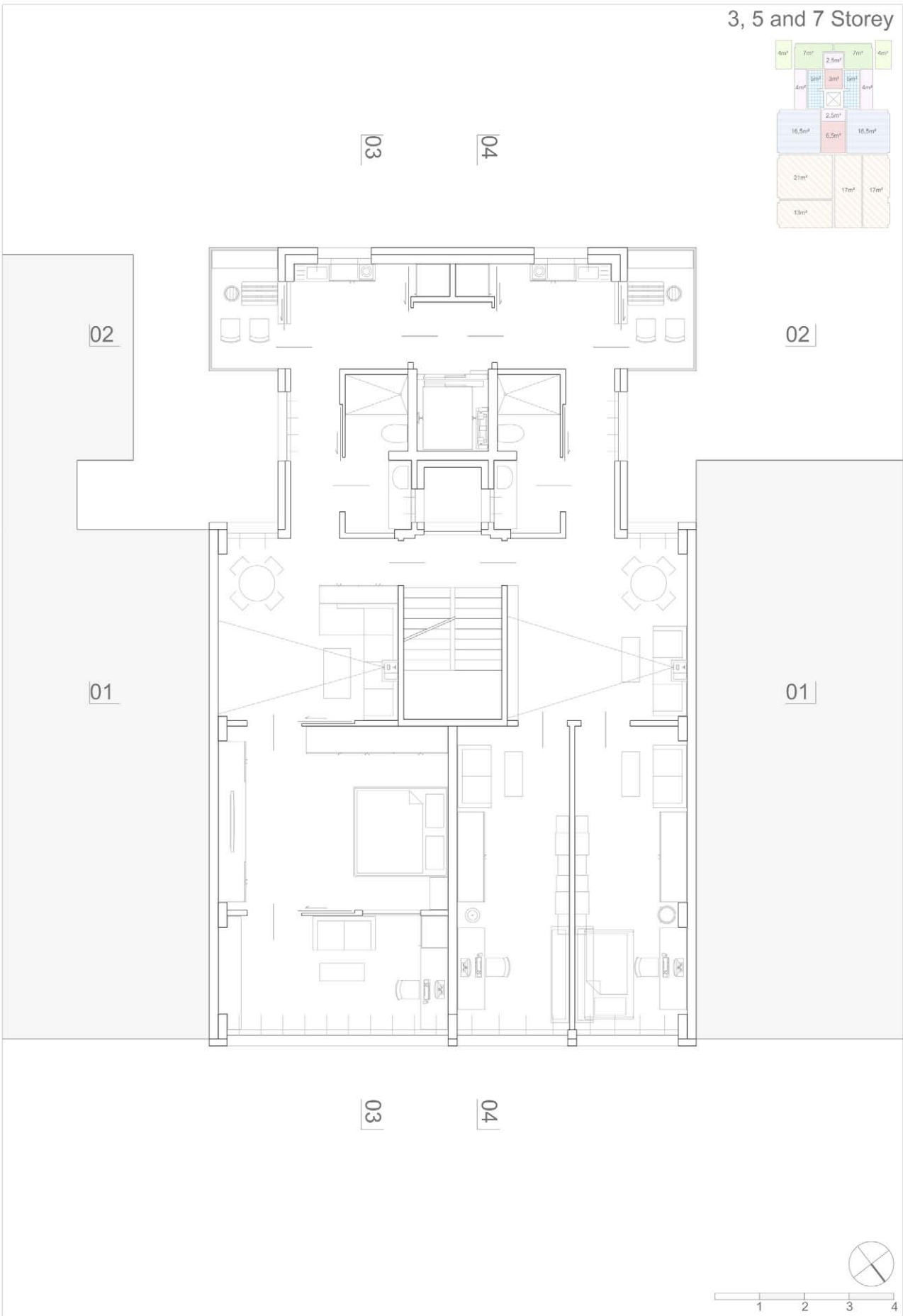
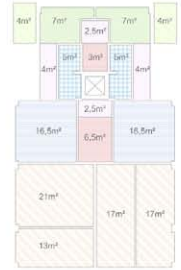
Reconstruction 3, 5 and 7 Storey

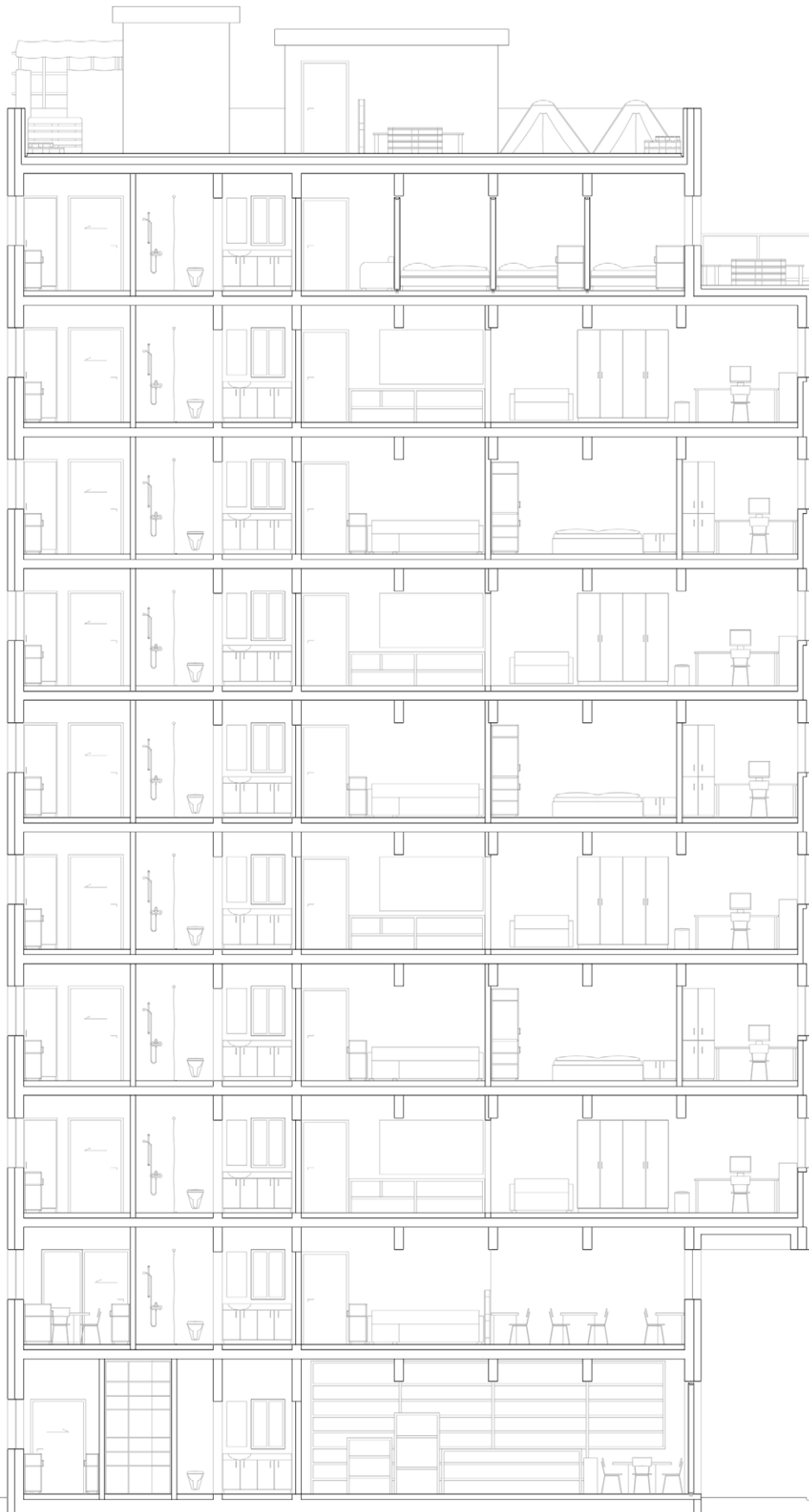


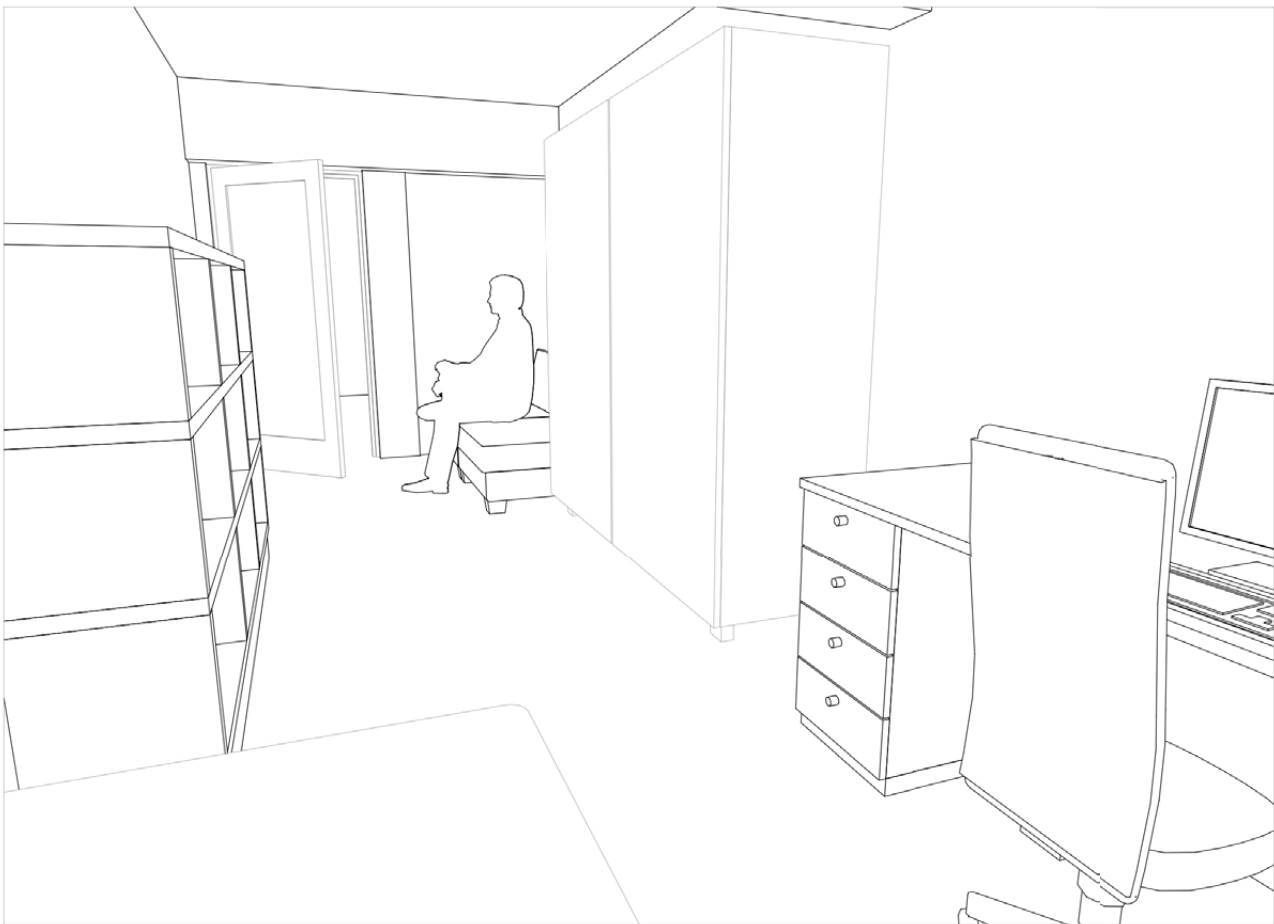
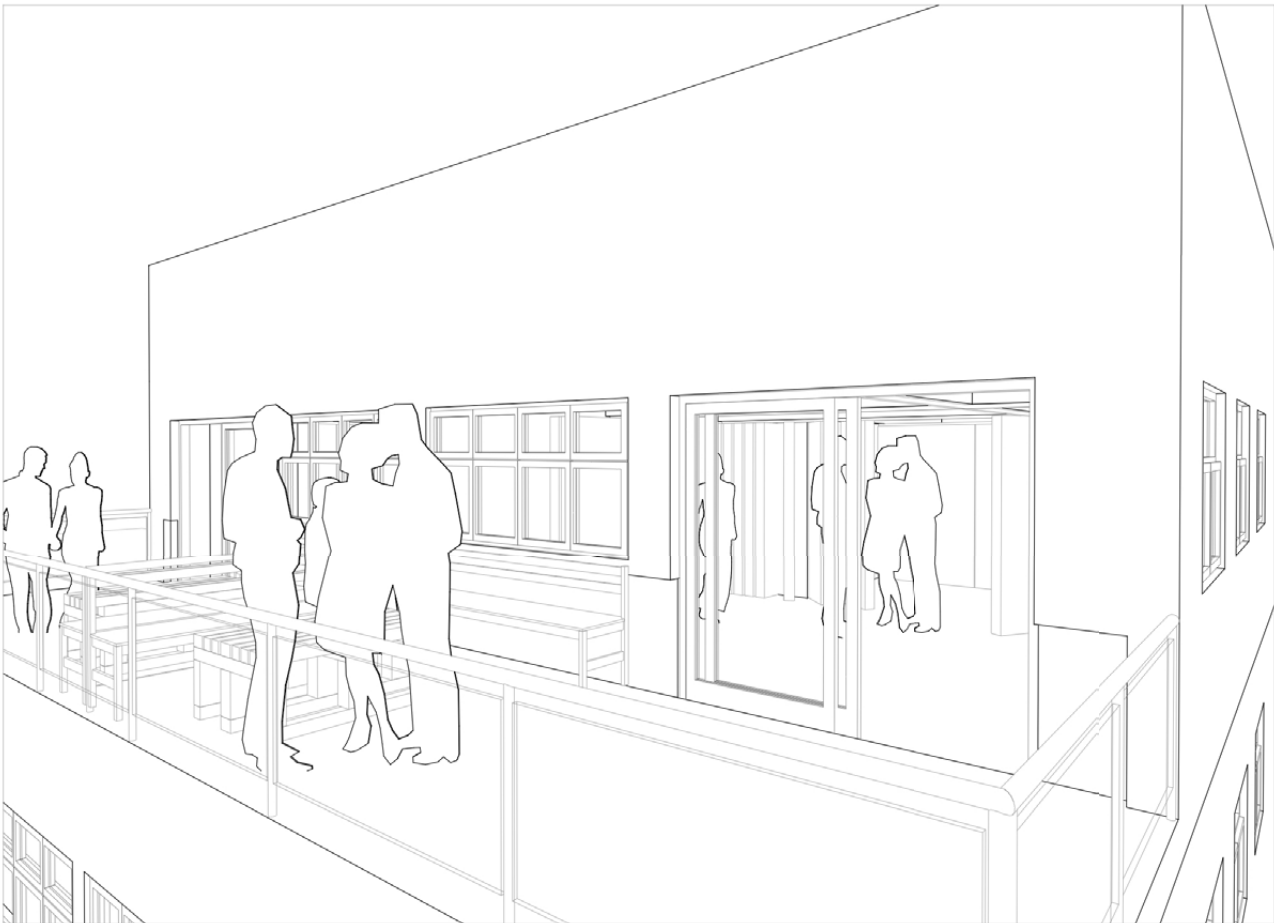
Reconstruction 3, 5 and 7 Storey

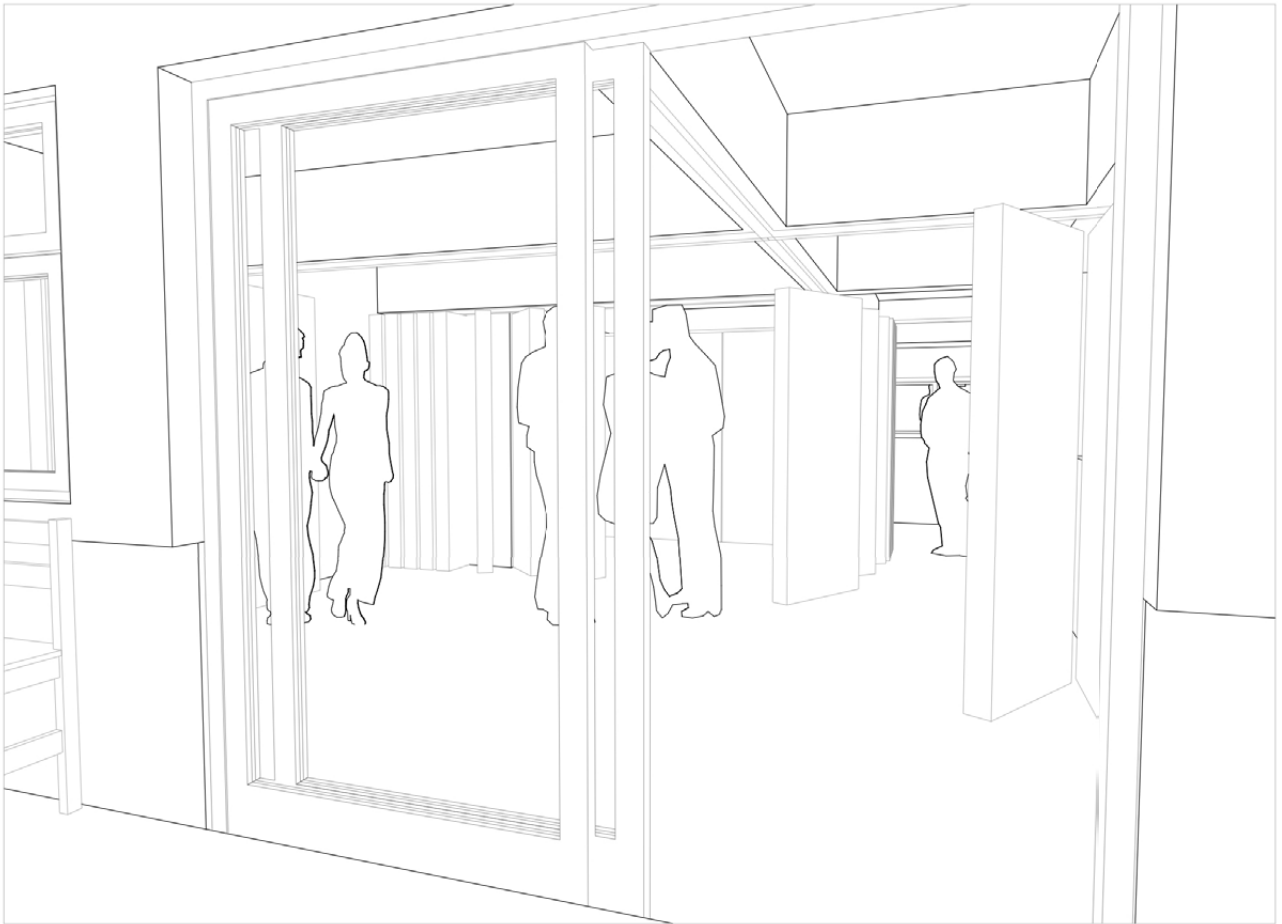


3, 5 and 7 Storey

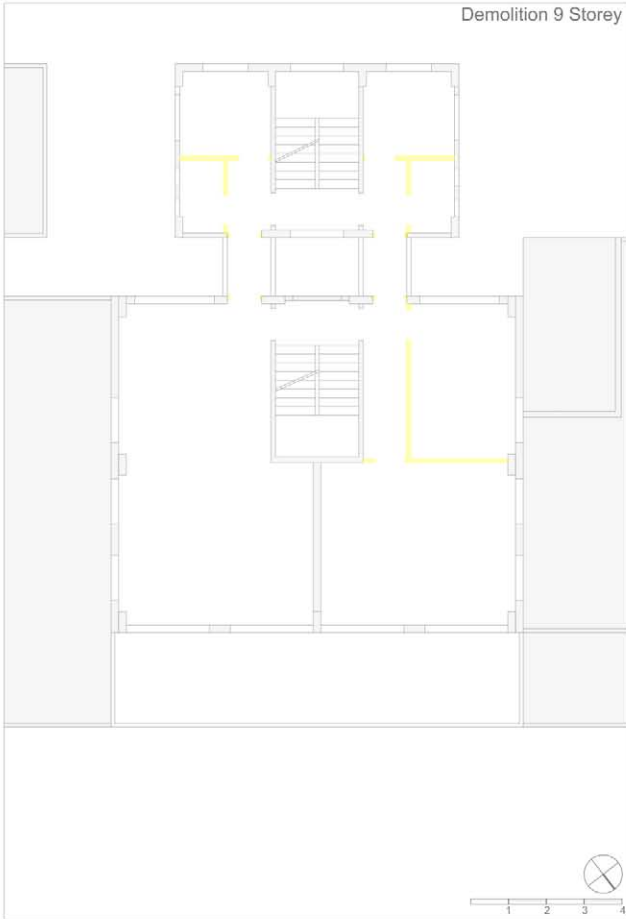




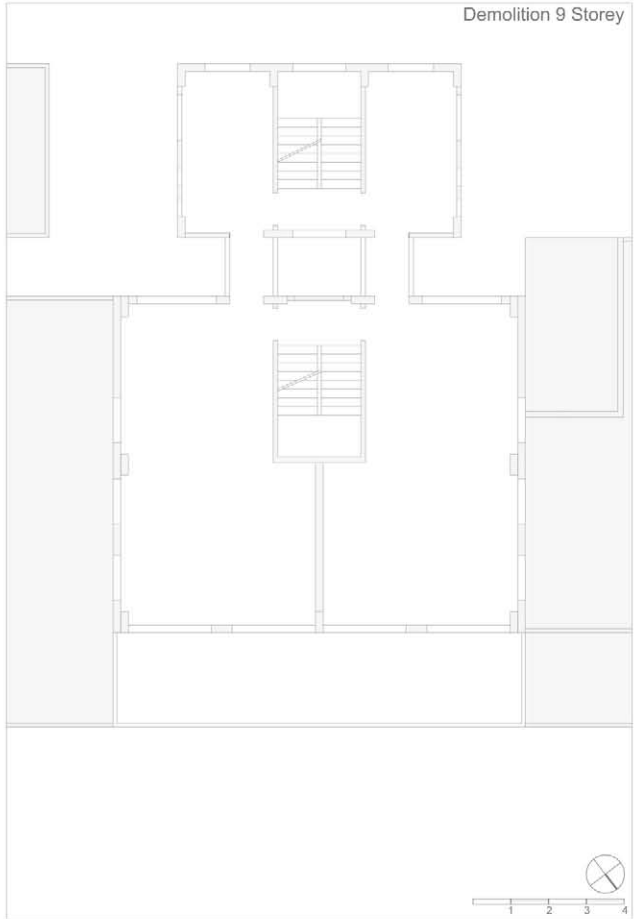




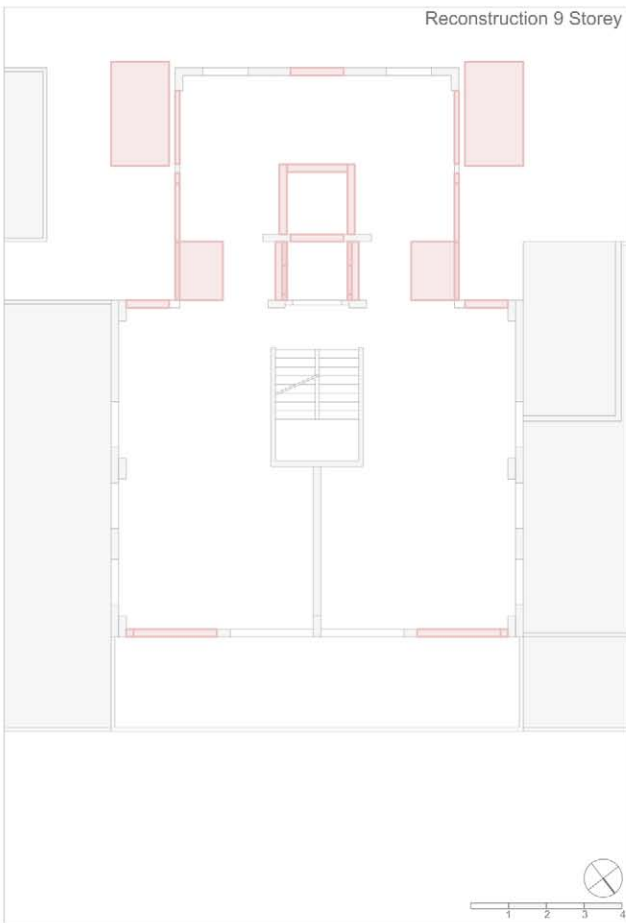
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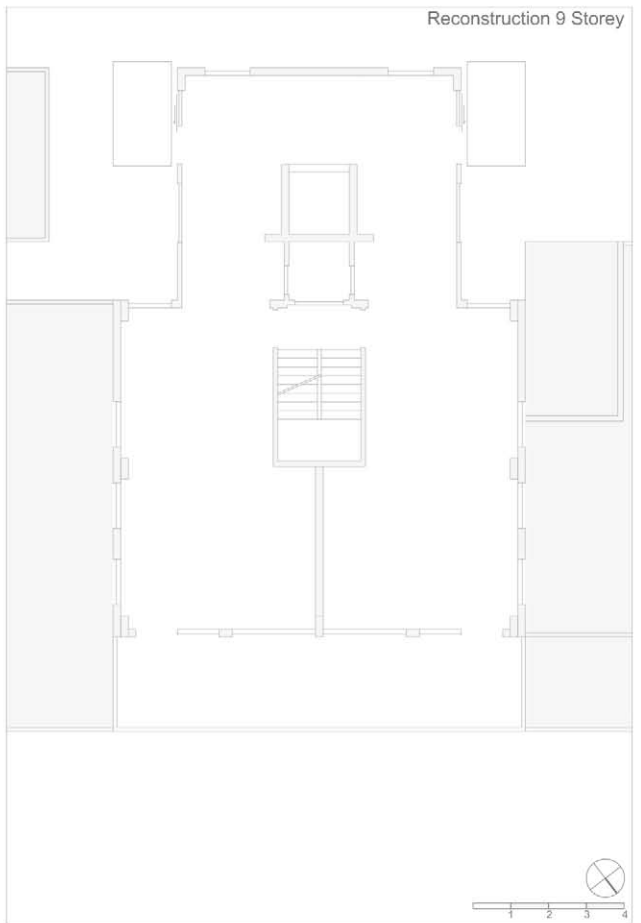
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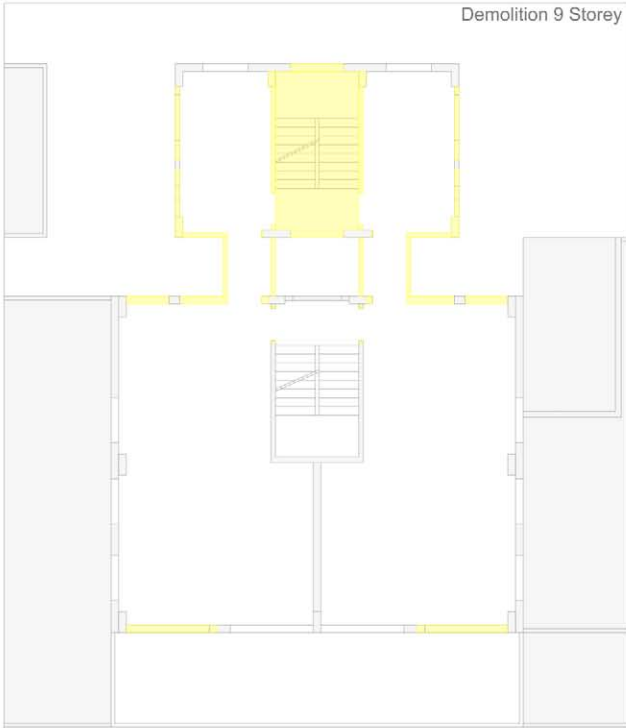
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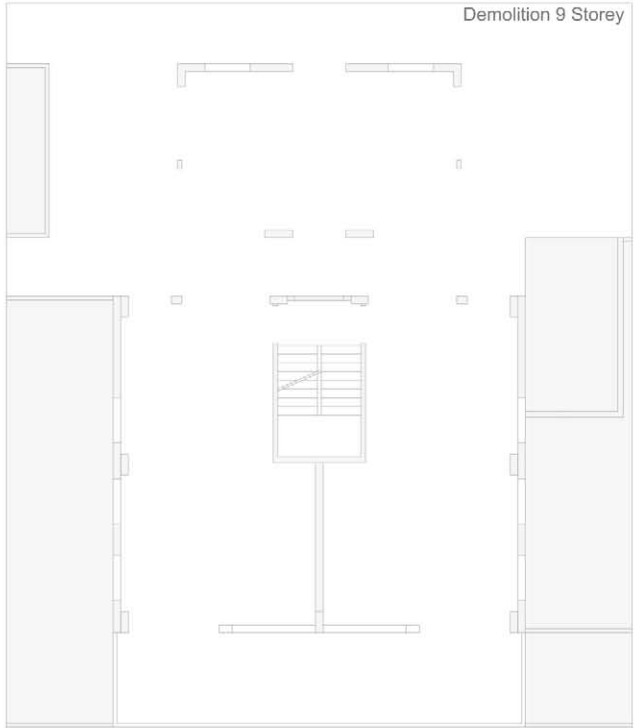
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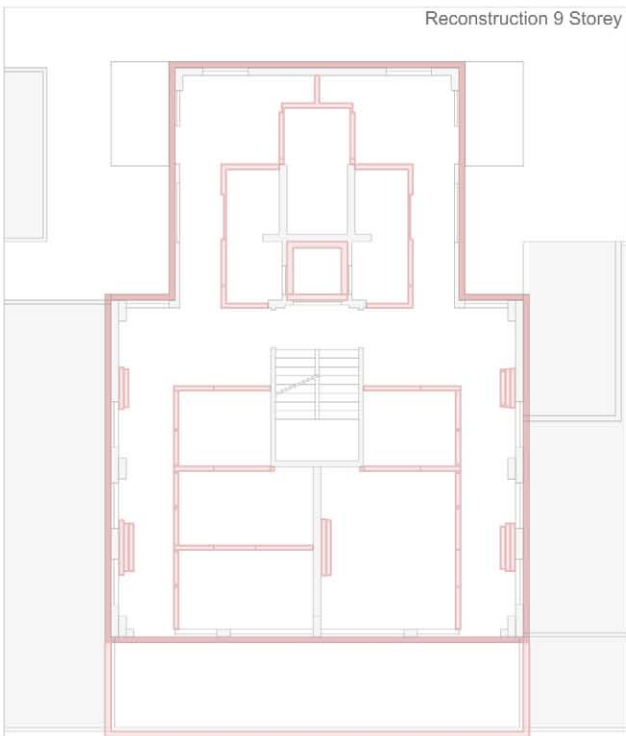
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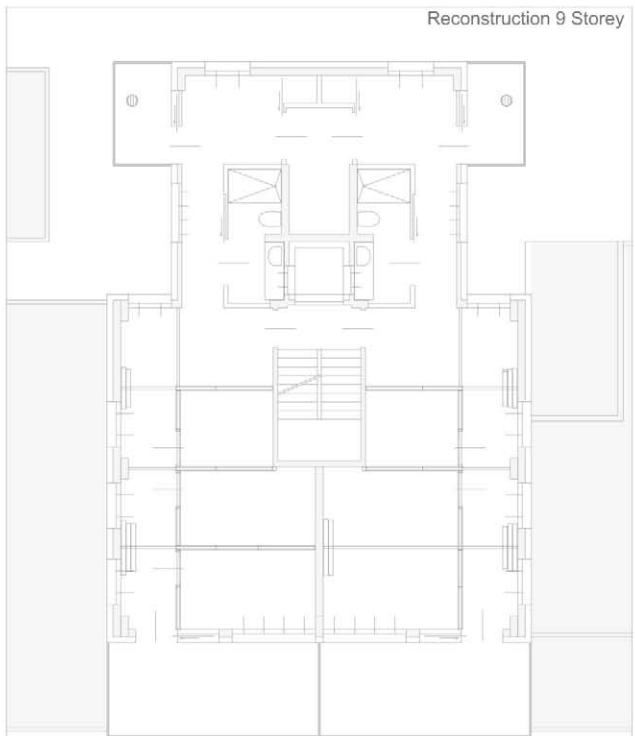
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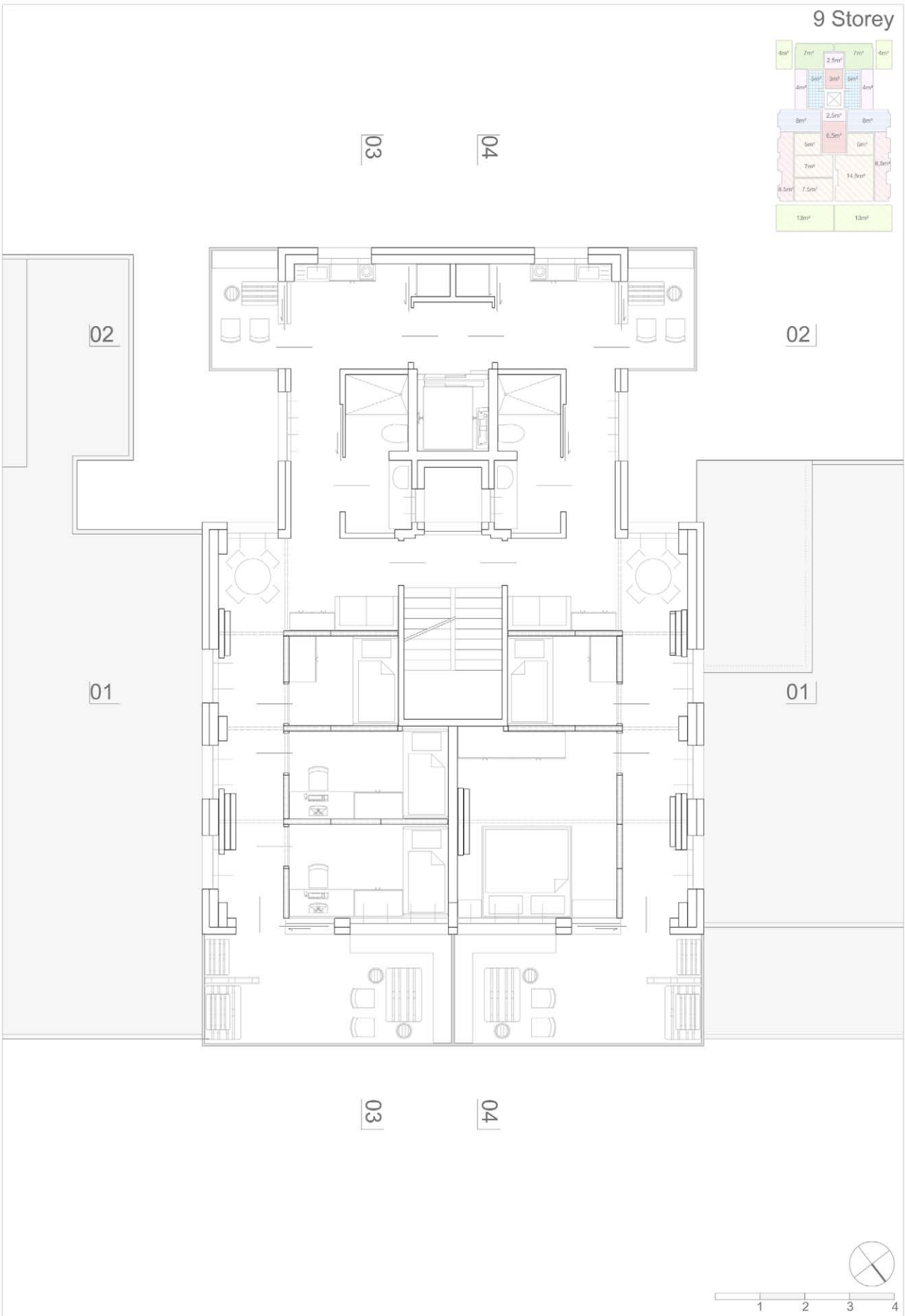
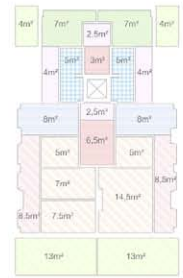
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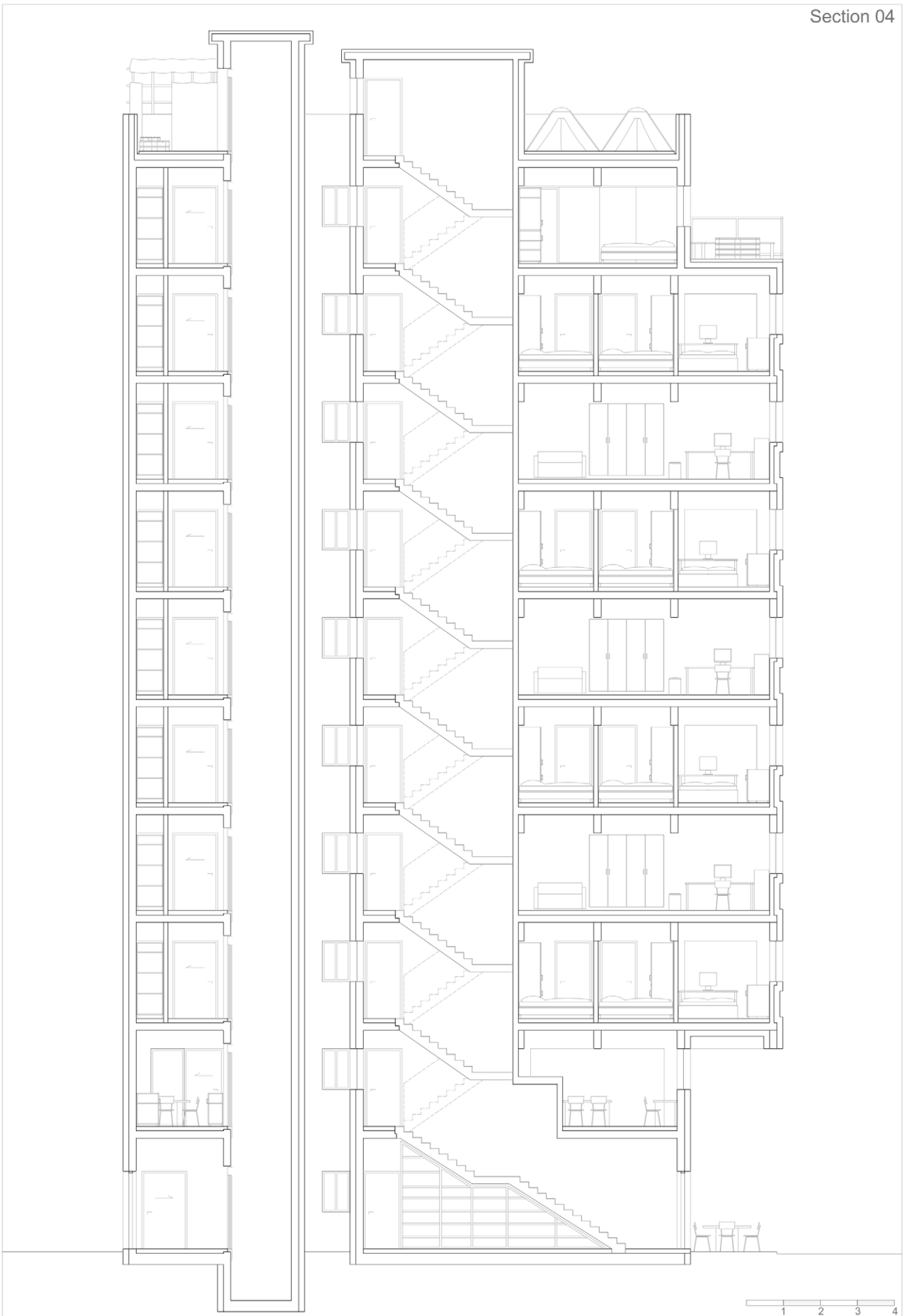


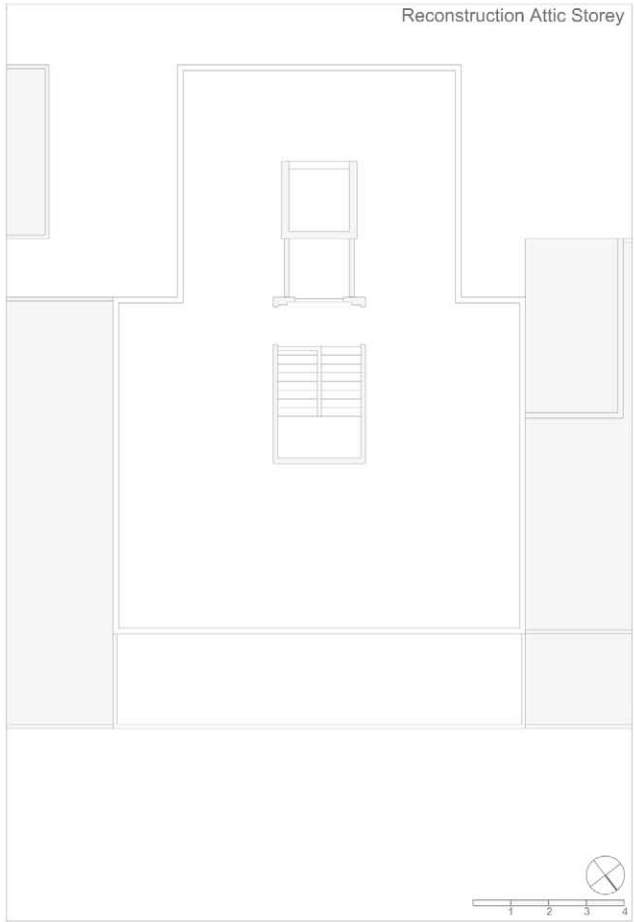
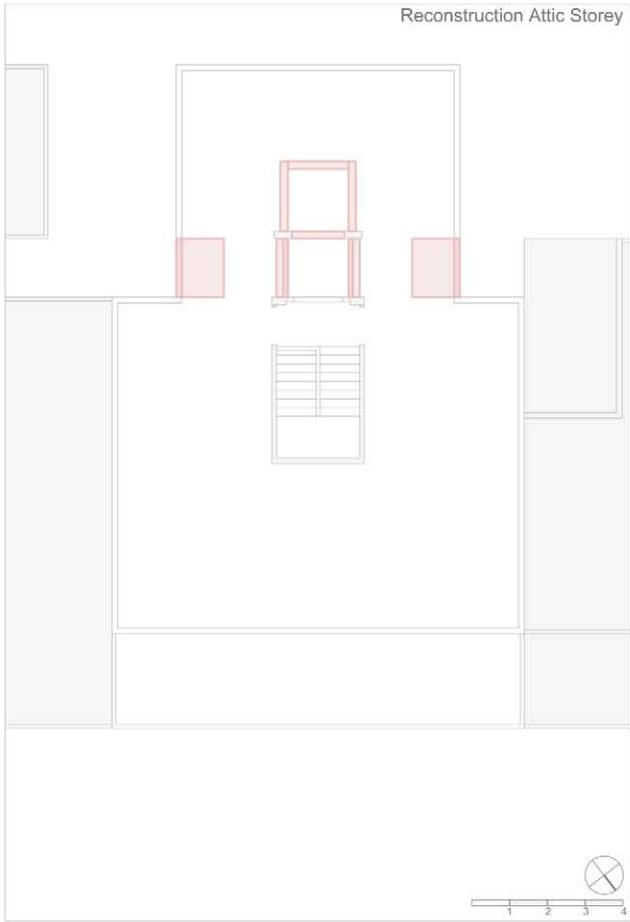
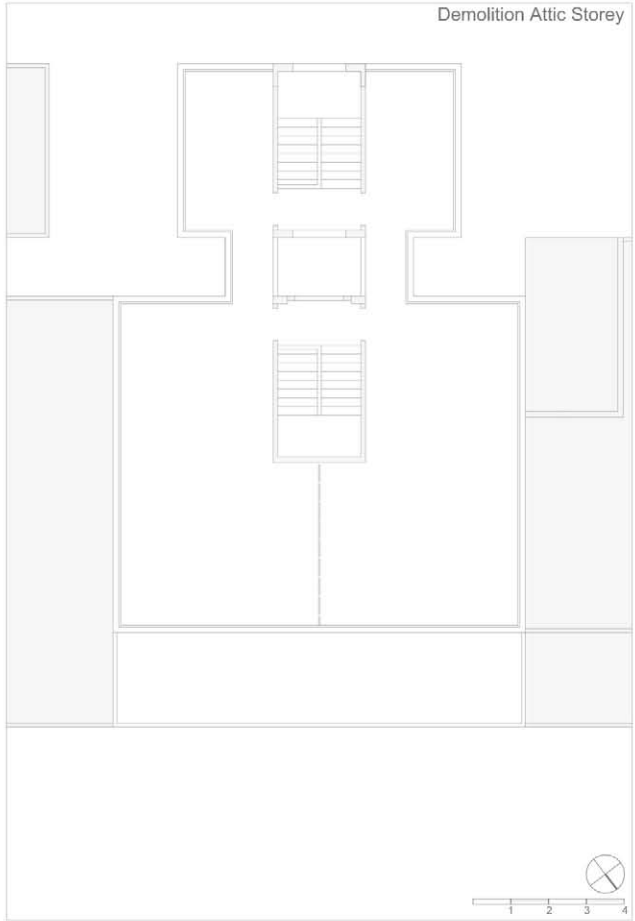
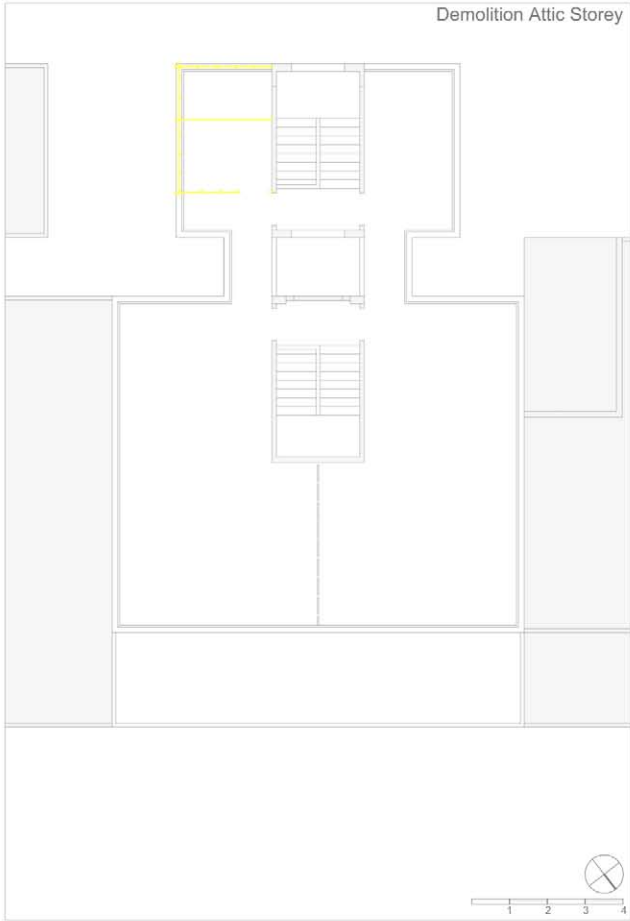
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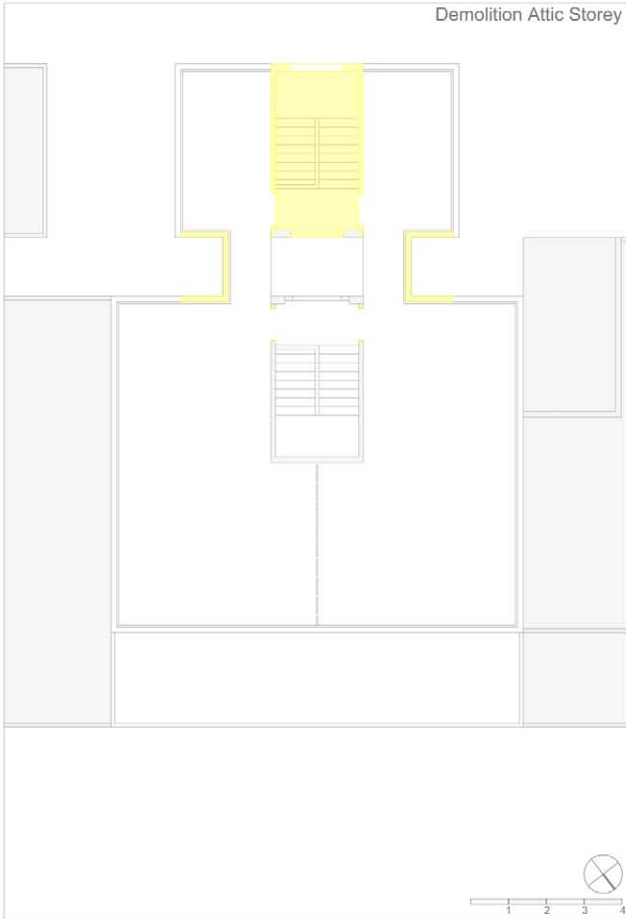
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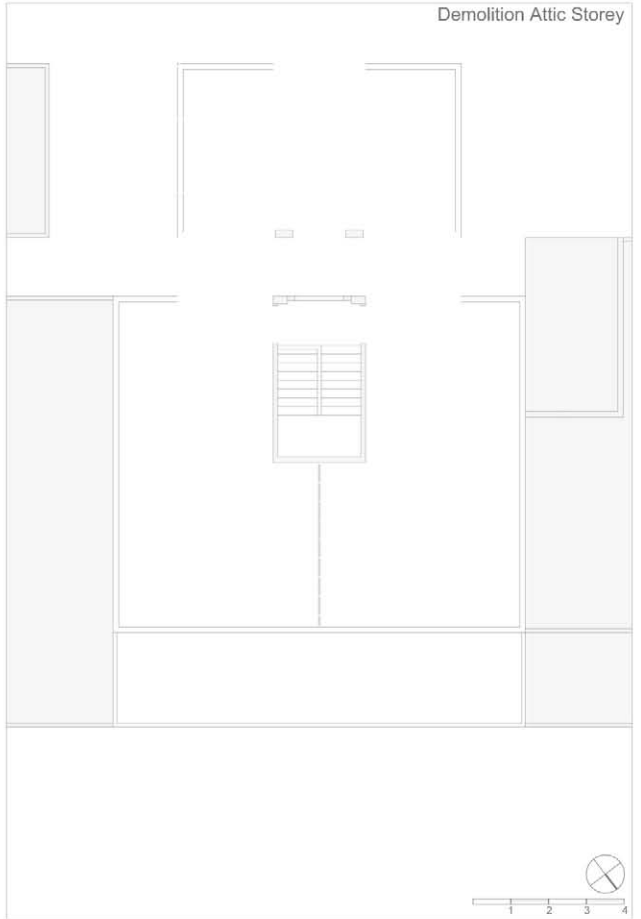




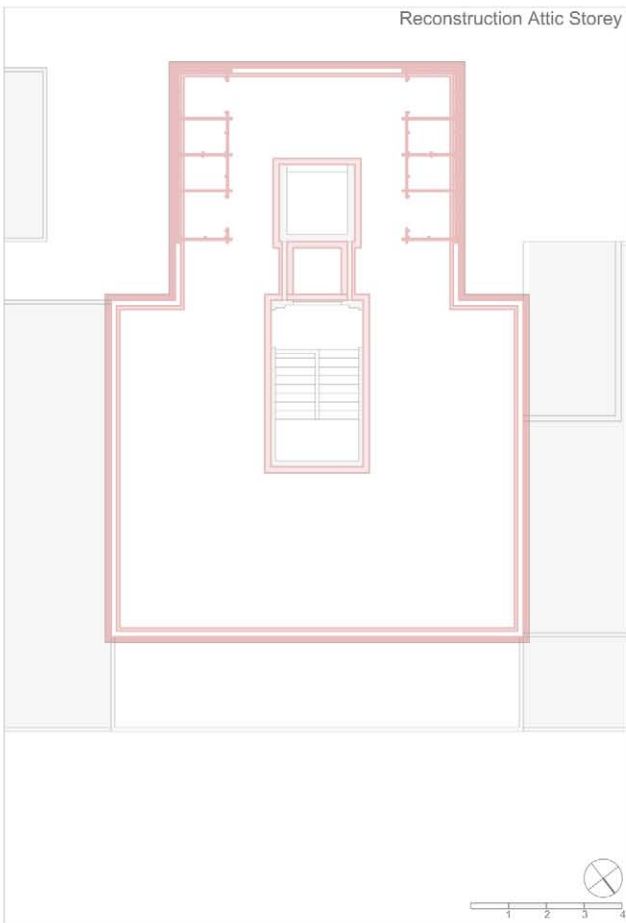
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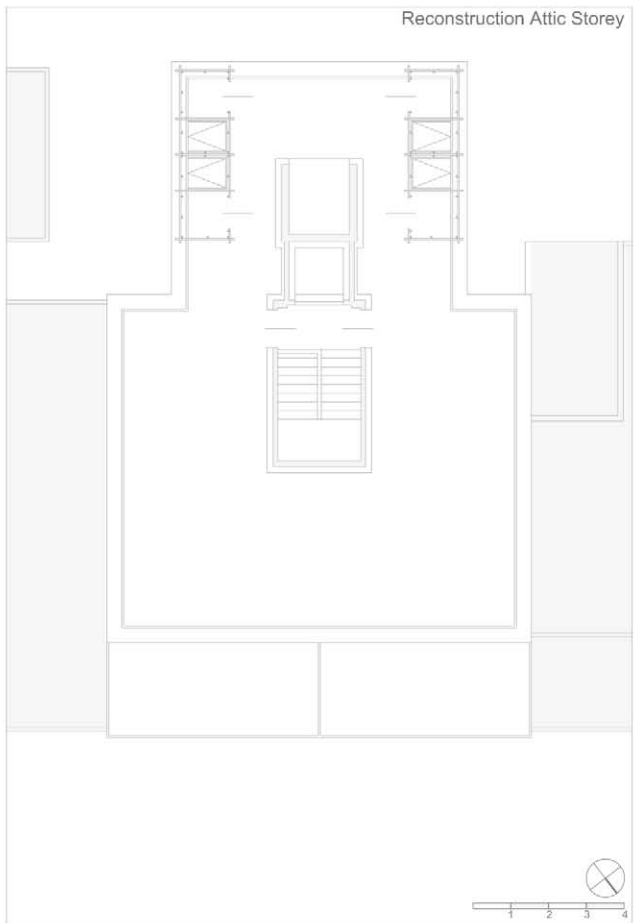
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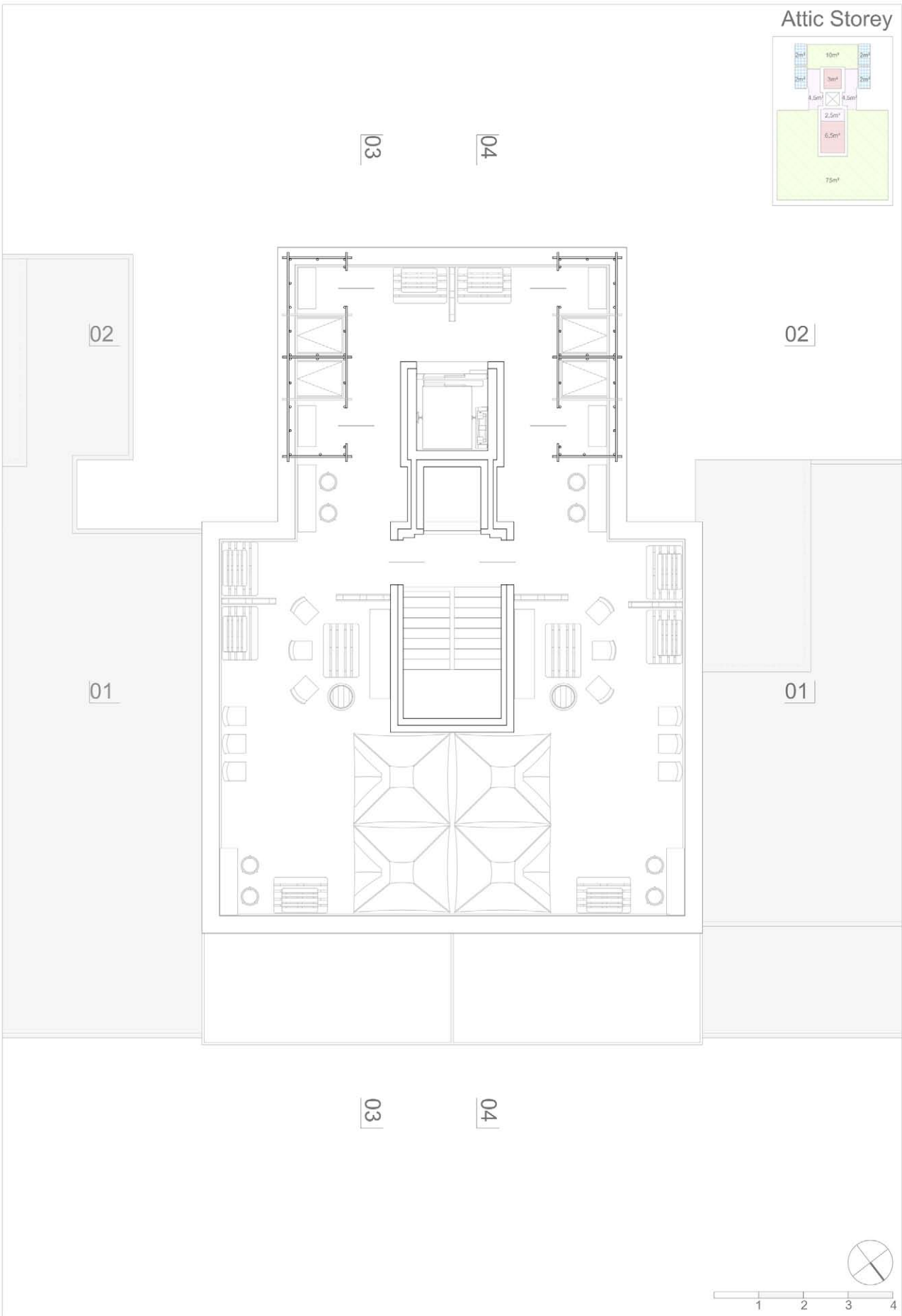


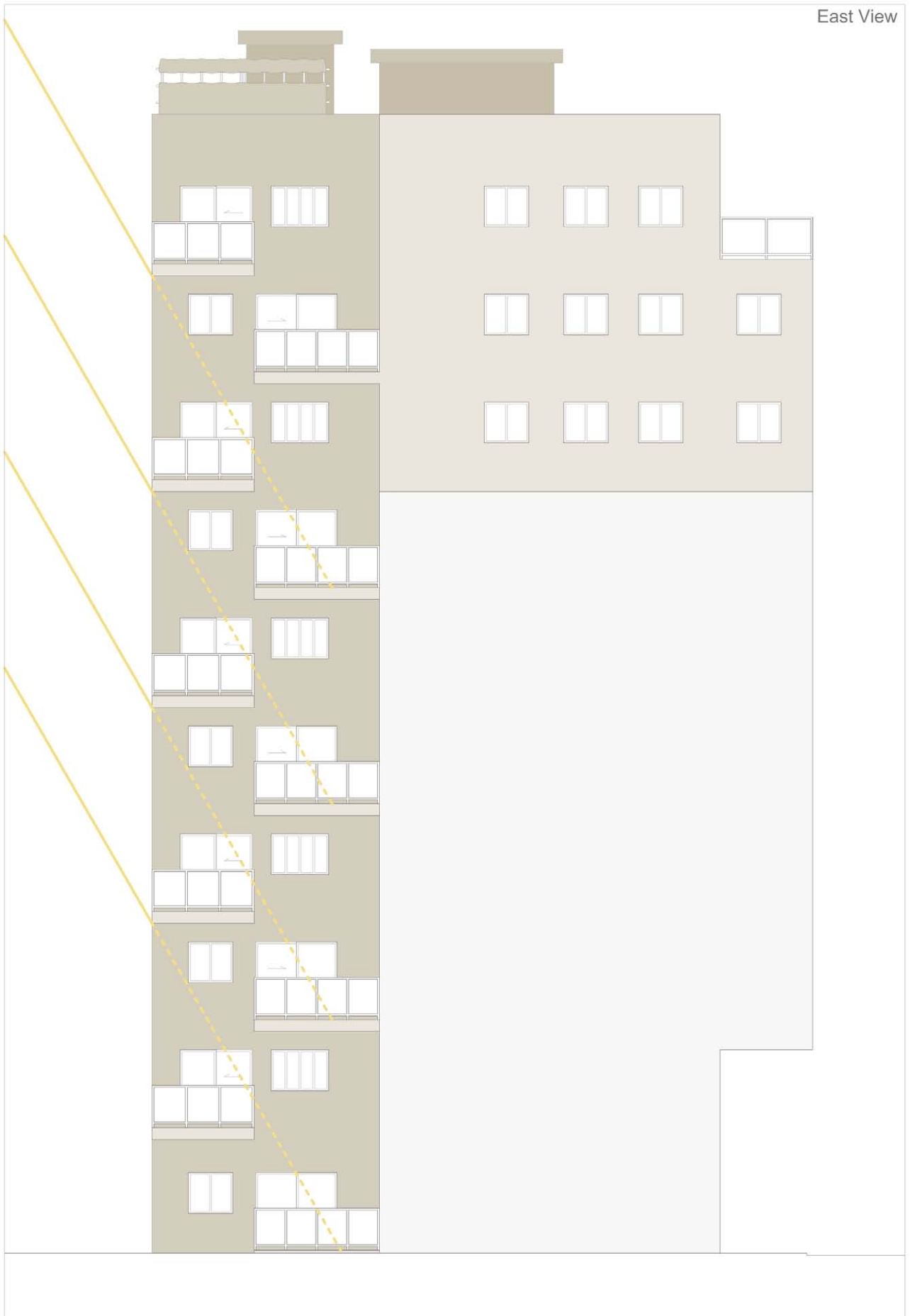
Reconstruction Attic Storey



Reconstruction Attic Storey









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