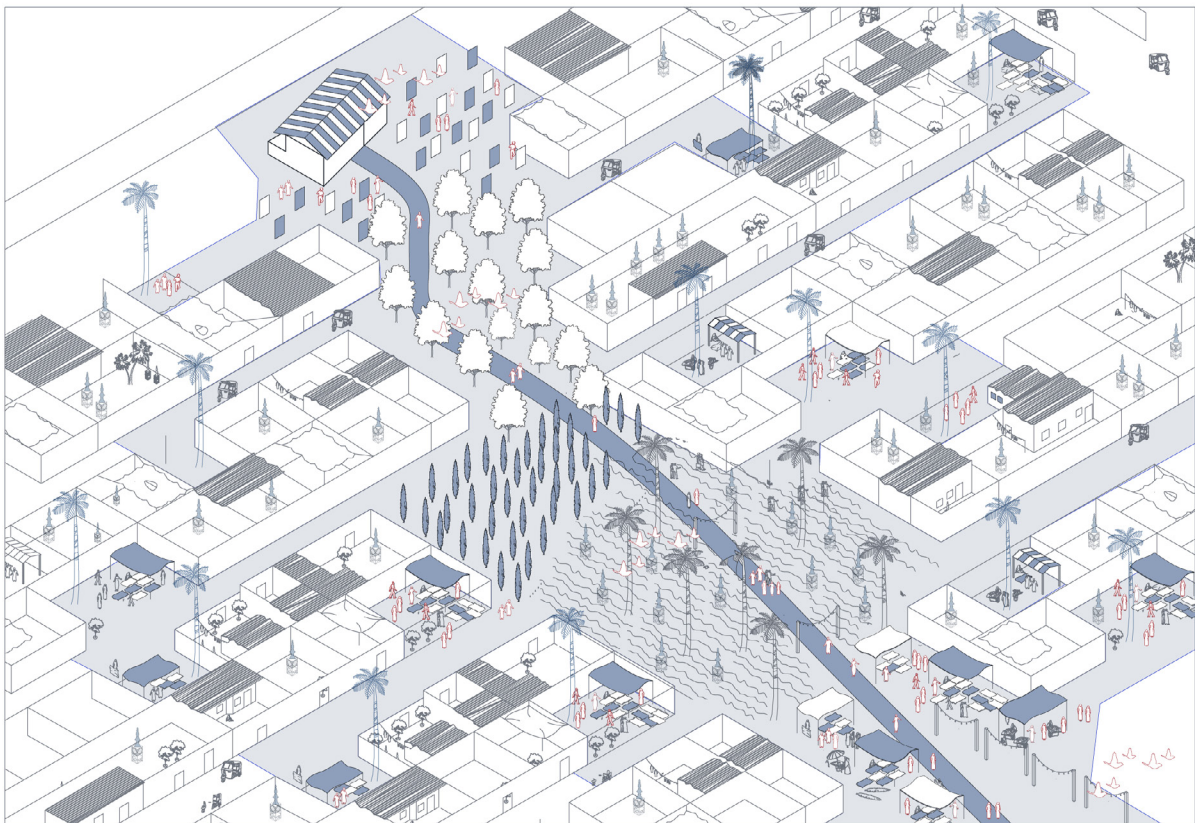# City of the Dead

"We are neither living nor dying, we are something in between"

Mahmoud Abdelaal
Supervisor: Francesca Savio
TRITA-ABE-MBT- 23207
Degree Project in Urban Planning and Design, Second Cycle 30.0 hp

"We are neither living nor dying, we are something in between"

Since the beginning of history, the living and the dead have been separated. This has made it almost impossible to co-live together under one roof. We, 'the living', have even created "deathscapes" which has set a clear boundary between us and them, 'the dead'. In every society, with its own cultural norms and rituals, they act with the dead in their own way - some are buried, others are burnt, but what is common across all societies is that they are not evident in our lives anymore. Looking at it from an urban perspective, the dead occupy a big patch of land in every city. This acts as a burden, as it makes "forbidden spaces" where the living are not able to be part of it.

However, in each topic, there is a lesson that can be learned from it. In this case, it's a 6km stretch informally and formally built, with a rich history and poor squatters who have no choice except to dwell with the dead.. This is City of the Dead, located in Cairo, Egypt. The extreme lack of housing has pushed a part of society to live informally in cemeteries, where they have learnt to co-live in the same room as the dead; they've embraced the idea of sleeping next to the dead, working and playing on those deathscapes.

But ever since the government announced that they will demolish those deathscapes as a part of demolishing all informal settlements in Cairo, the time has come to make a stand against this decision, instead learning from their "life hack" and applying it throughout the City of the Dead – creating as society where the dead and living are not separated, maximizing the lost potentials in cases such as City of the Dead and making them not looked down upon and marginalized. This thesis aims to design the city and improve the lives of people living in these cemeteries, dealing with each case with care and compassion.

Content

Local realities

"We are neither living nor dying, we are something in between"

Play
Author: Tamara Abdul Hadi

Calm
Author: Reuters

Home duties
Author: Reuters

Privacy
Author: Business Insider

Social life
Author: Asmaa Waguih
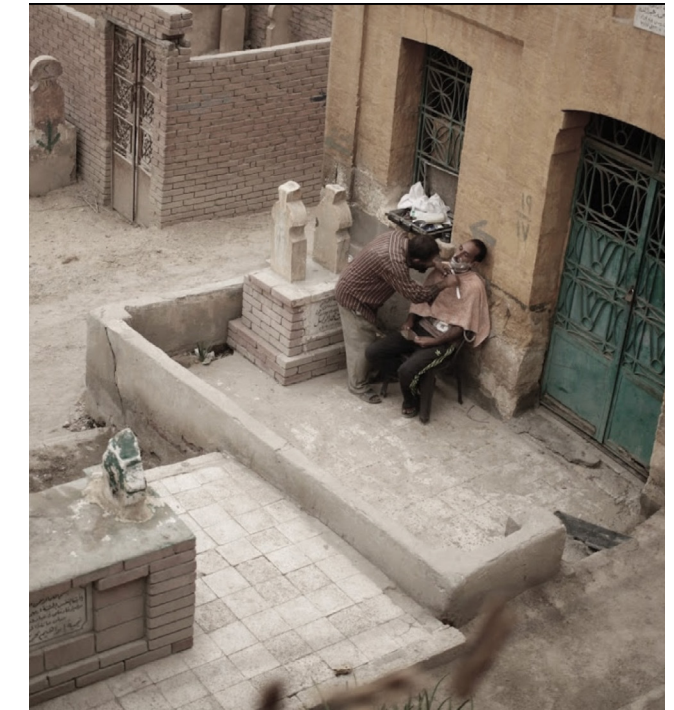

Family business

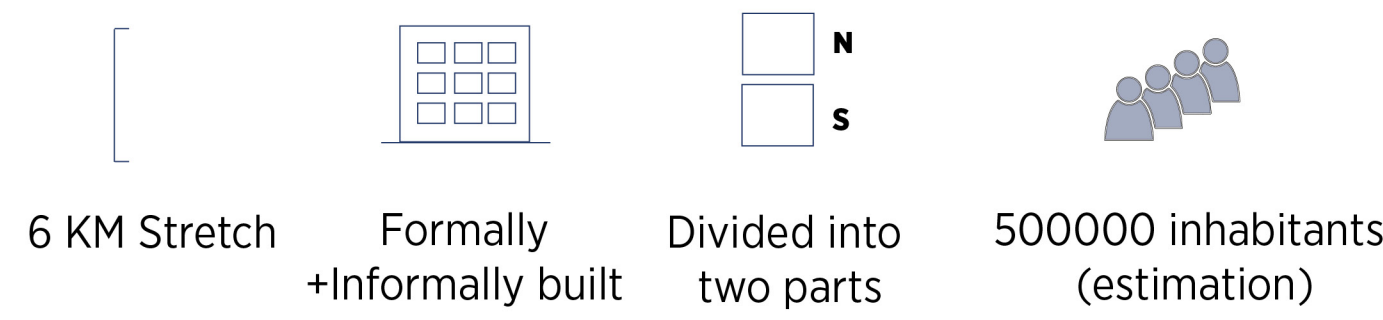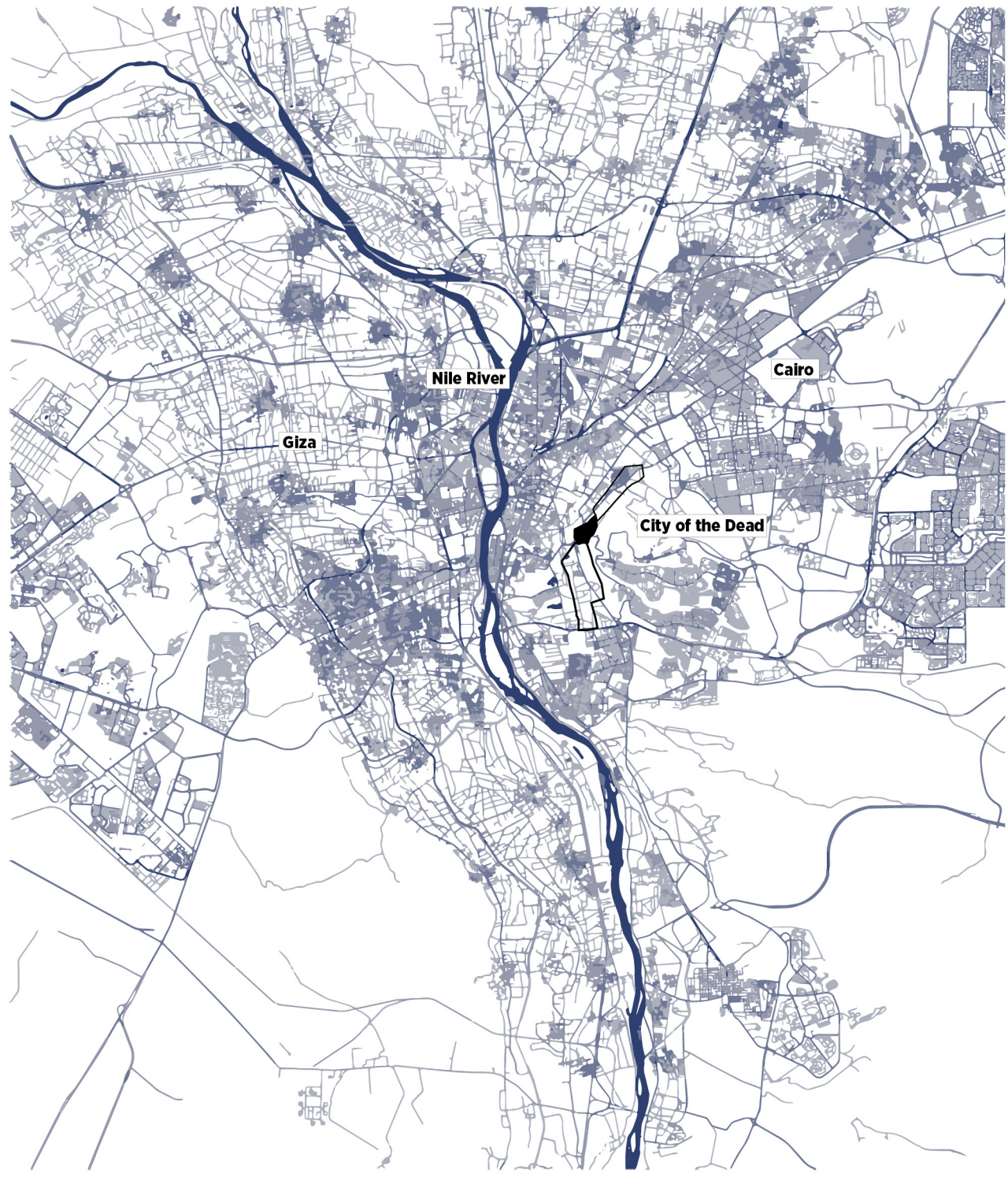Football against the dead

Dead

Cemtery or home?

Work within the cemetery
Author: Asmaa Waguih

City of the Dead

"We are neither living nor dying, we are something in between"

Large Scale Urban Analysis Location

6 KM Stretch
Formally +Informally built
Divided into two parts
500000 inhabitants (estimation)

60%
Around 60 percent of Cairenes live in informal settlements

2017
In 2017 Government stated to demolish all informal neighbourhouds
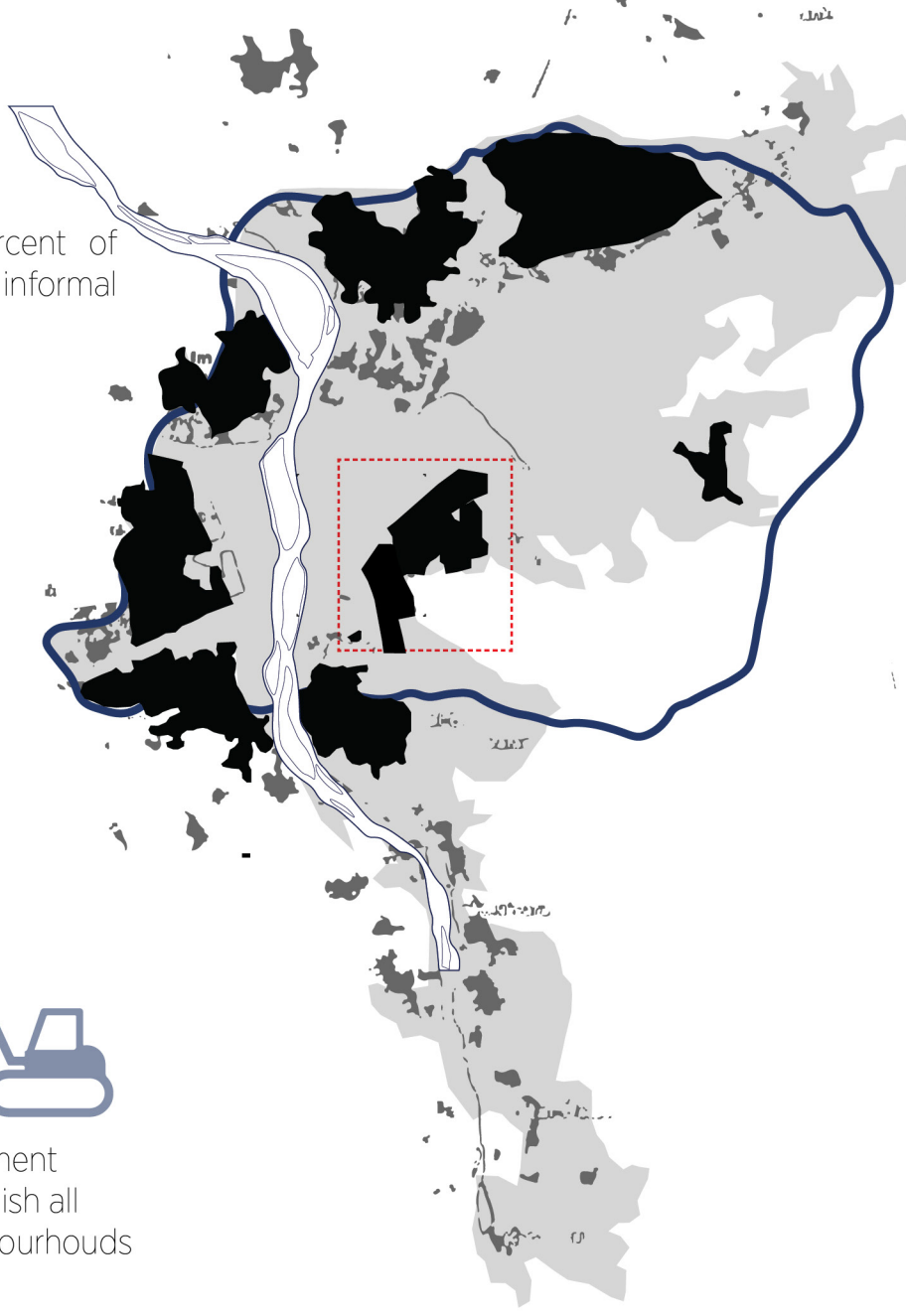
Informal Settlements in Cairo
Informal settlements in Cairo is almost 60% and is connected through a ring road - highway which is consistently busy and lack fresh air
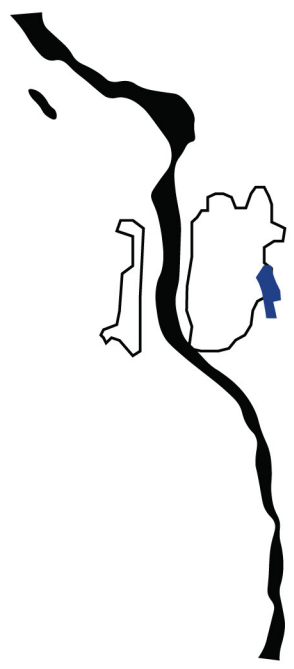
Most injustice

Best

Worst

Mapping Spatial Injustice
Lack of proper infrastructure and basic human rights Interms of access to tap water, sanitation, toilets and sewage system

Cairo Urban Growth Understanding the urban history of Cairo in relation to city of the dead

1400
Early Stages
Cairo abstract map in the 15th Century
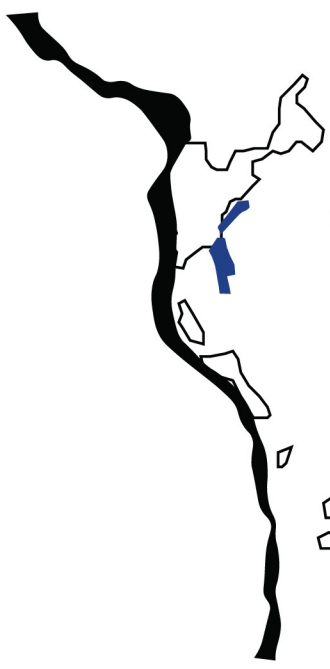
1970
War Times
War times against several nations
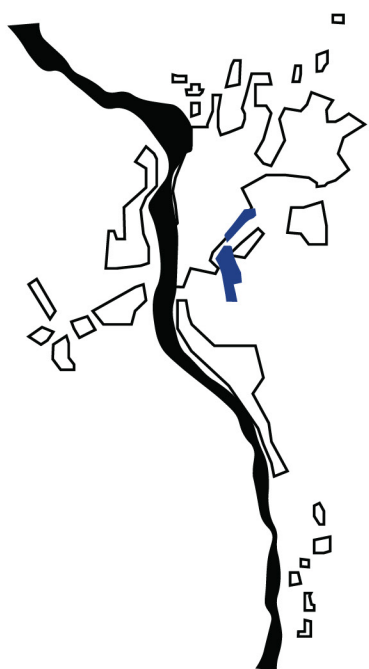
1980
Construction Boom
Post-war era and economic prosperity
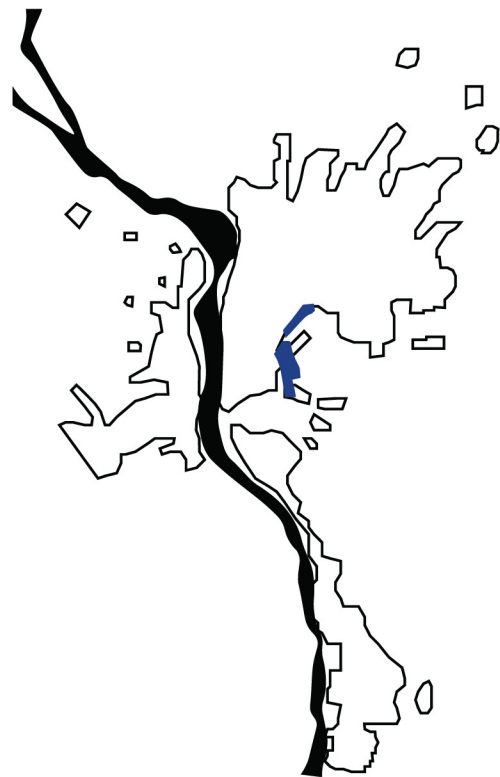
1985
Informal Urban Sprawl
Informal expansionand housing crisis
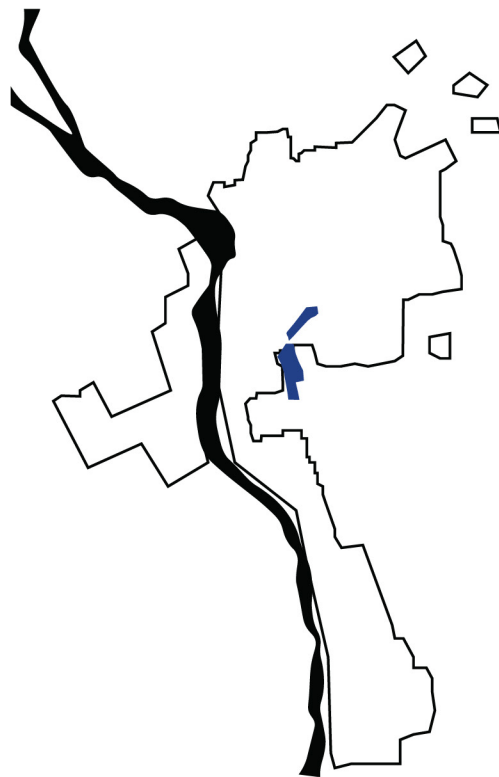
1995
Filling Urban Pockets
Loss of agriculture lands and urban expansion

Understanding History
Political Landscape + Showing Power + Mass imigrations shaped city of the dead
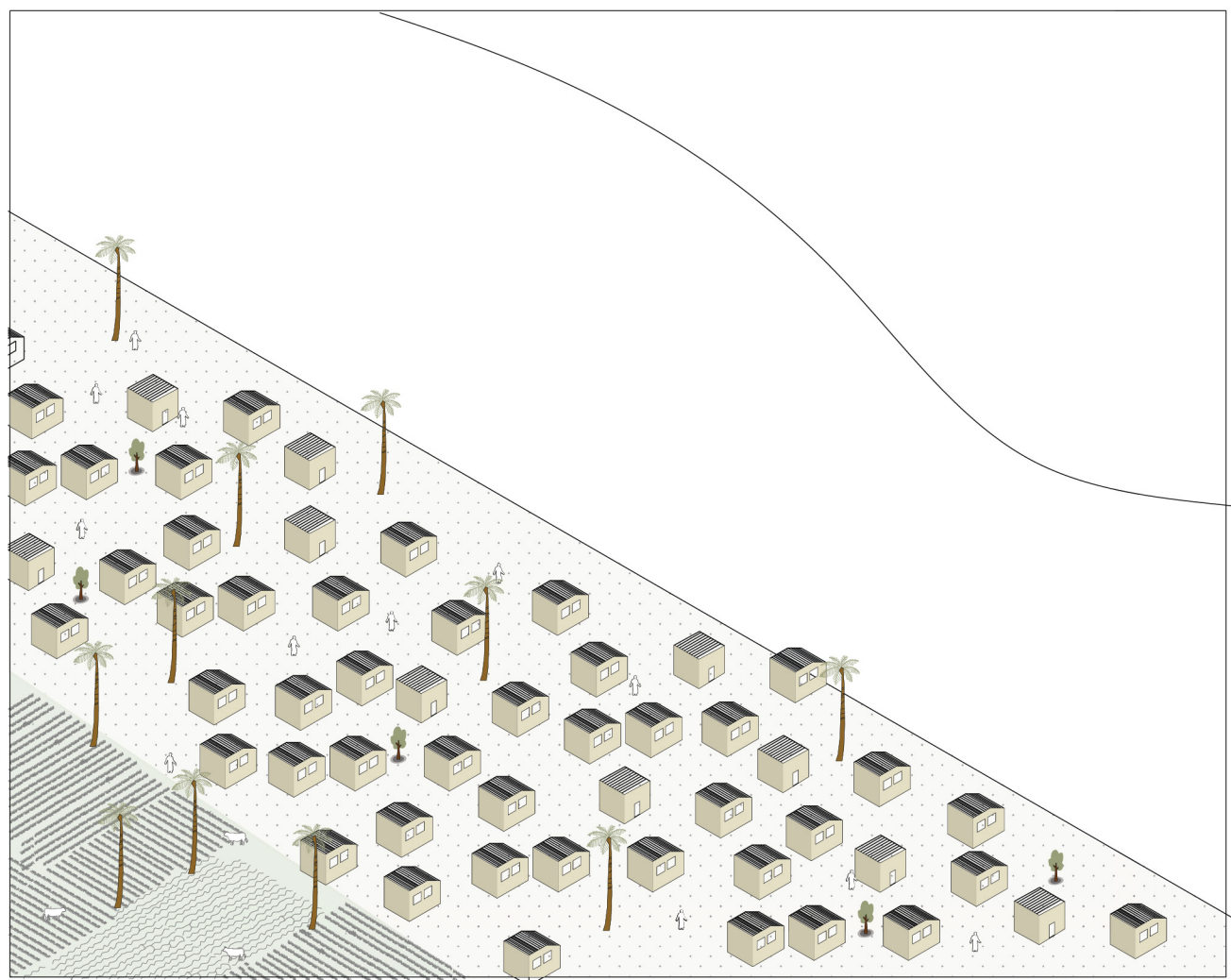
Cairo city edge during the 7th Century
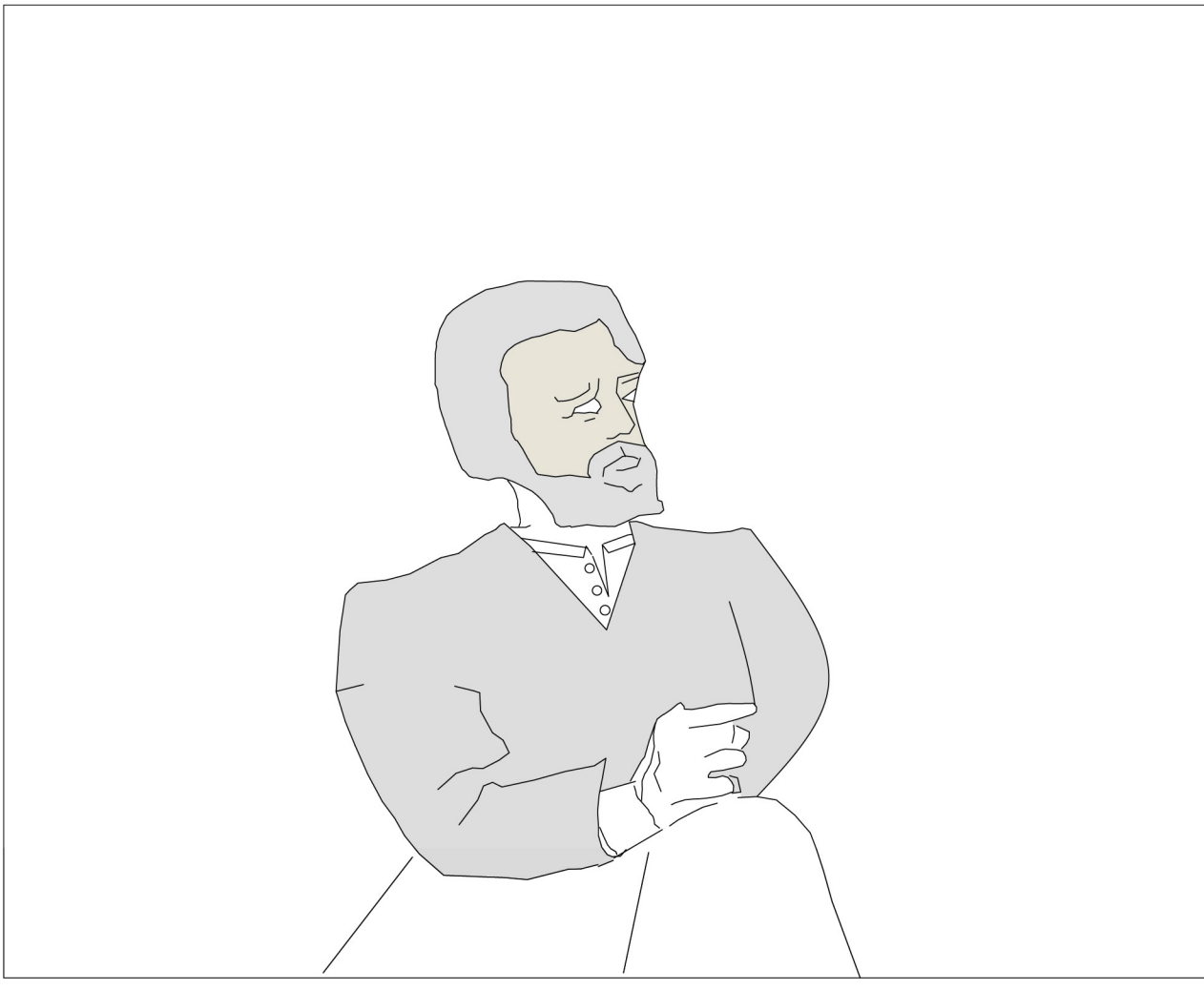
Death of Imam Al-Shafie
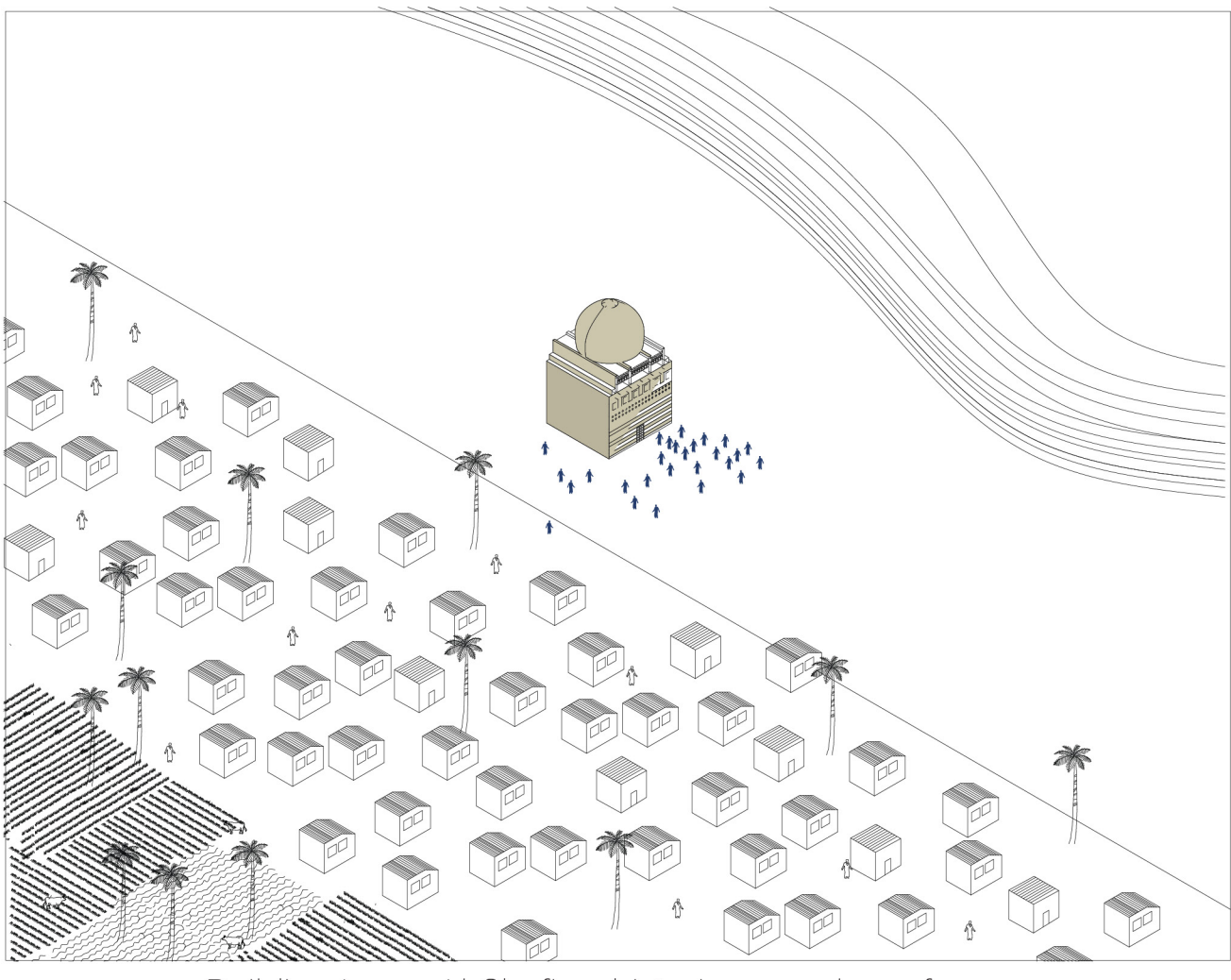
Building Imam Al-Shafie a historic mausoleum for praying and remembrance on the city's edge
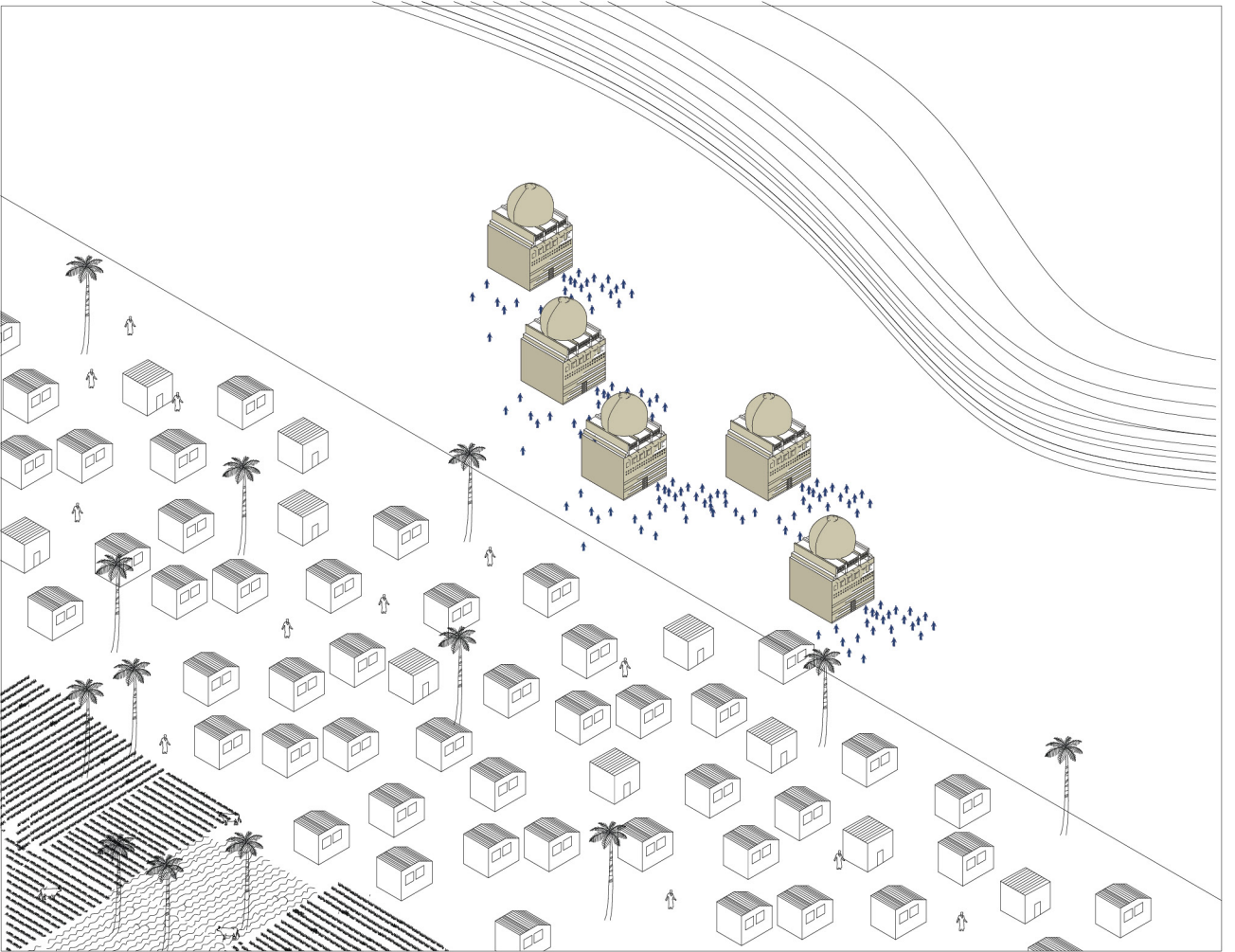
Fatimids conquered Egypt between 10th - 12th century, stated "Cairo" a capital, built new mauseloums for themselves
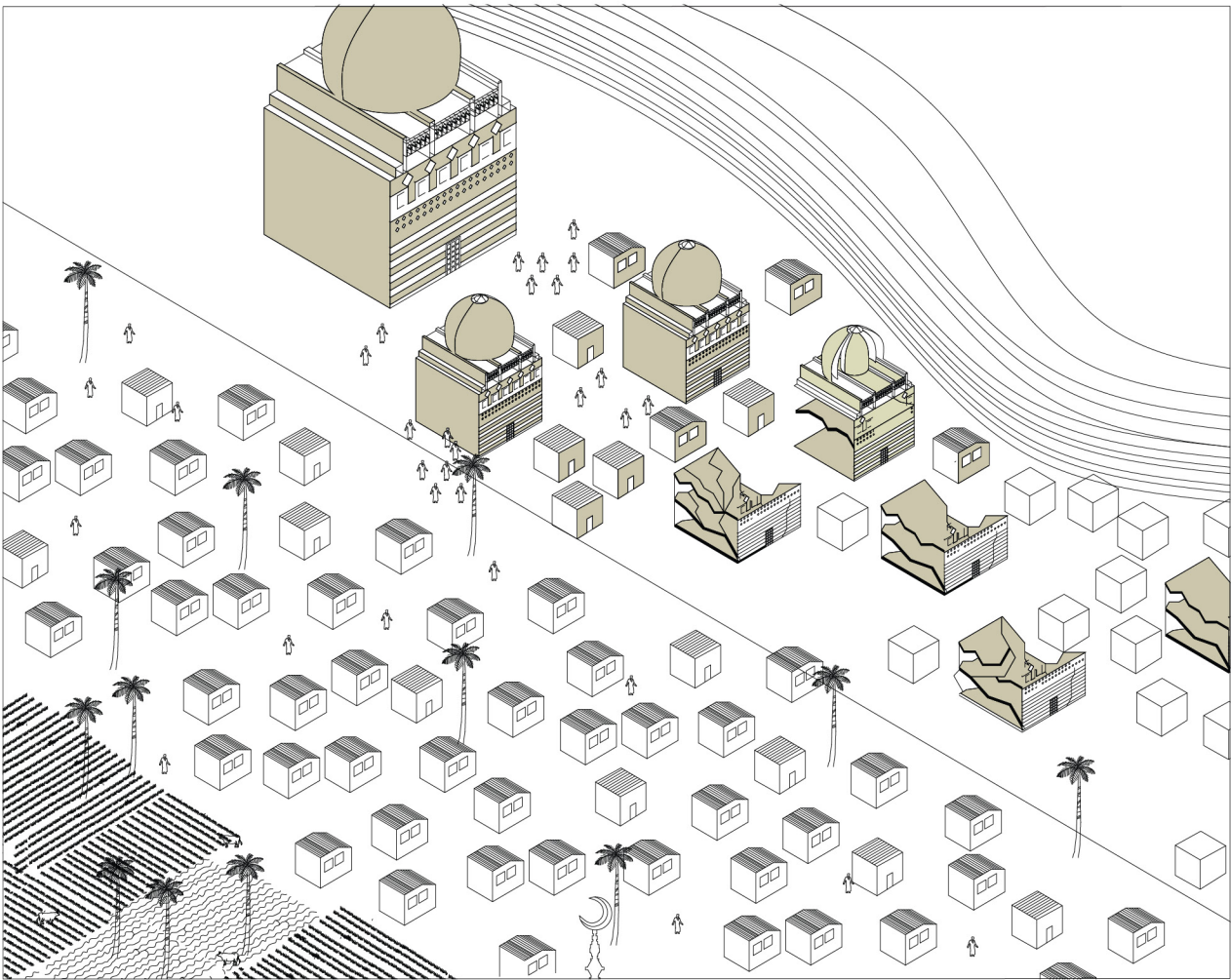
Ayubids (Kurds) took over during 1171-1250 - destoyment of royal cemeteries for fatimids, building a castle to show power
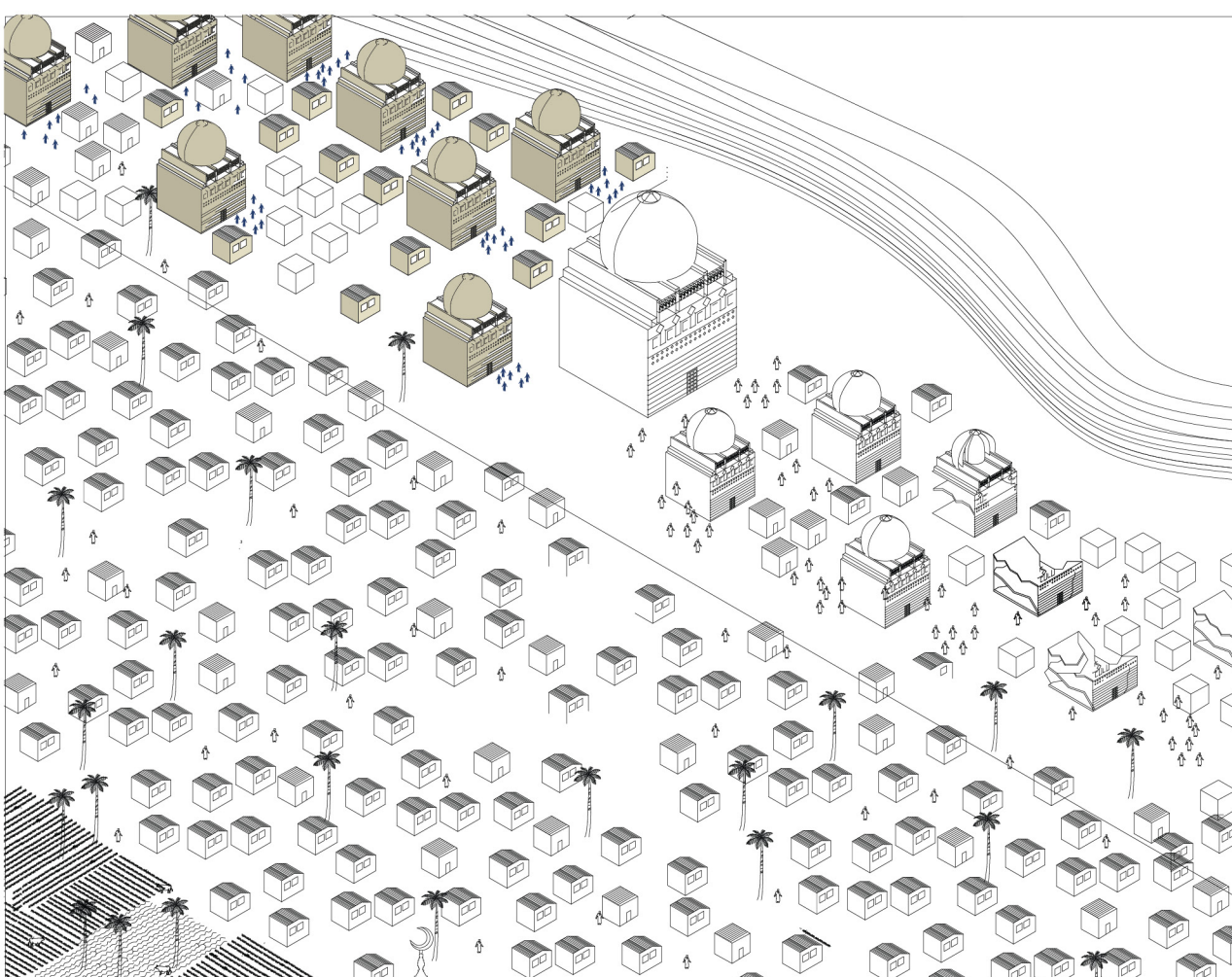
from 14th-20th century, era of plague and different political powers shifted the cemeteries from southern or 'old' cemetery to new northern area of the castle.

Understanding History - Political Landscape + Showing Power + Mass imigrations shaped City of the Dead

Lack of housing

Royal Cemeteries

City of the Dead
Consists of a castle, royal mauseloums, cemeteries and informal housing

Islamic Cairo
Established in the islamic era, the city is well designed in relation to the human scale

City of the dead of today where royals resting with the poor under one roof
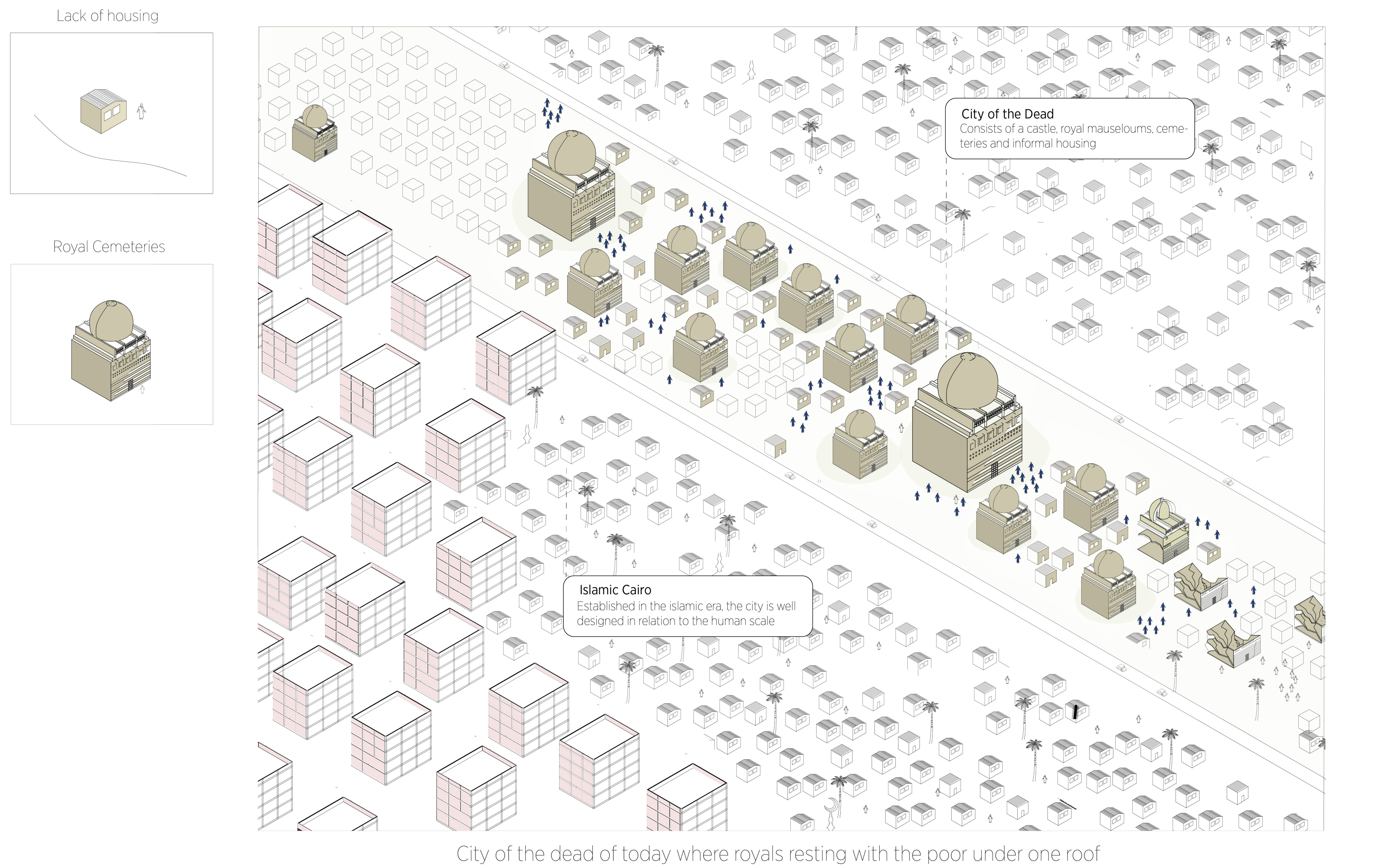
Large Scale Urban Analysis

Current Sitution Analysis - A clear edge/blank paper in the middle of the metropolis

Islamic Cairo

City of the Dead

Garbage City

1:5000

N

Pesetrians + Roads
Walkable Streets with side walks that are inviting to the residents

New Highway - 2021
Government announced a highway to cut through City of the Dead

Highways + Roads
Existing Highways isolating City of the Dead
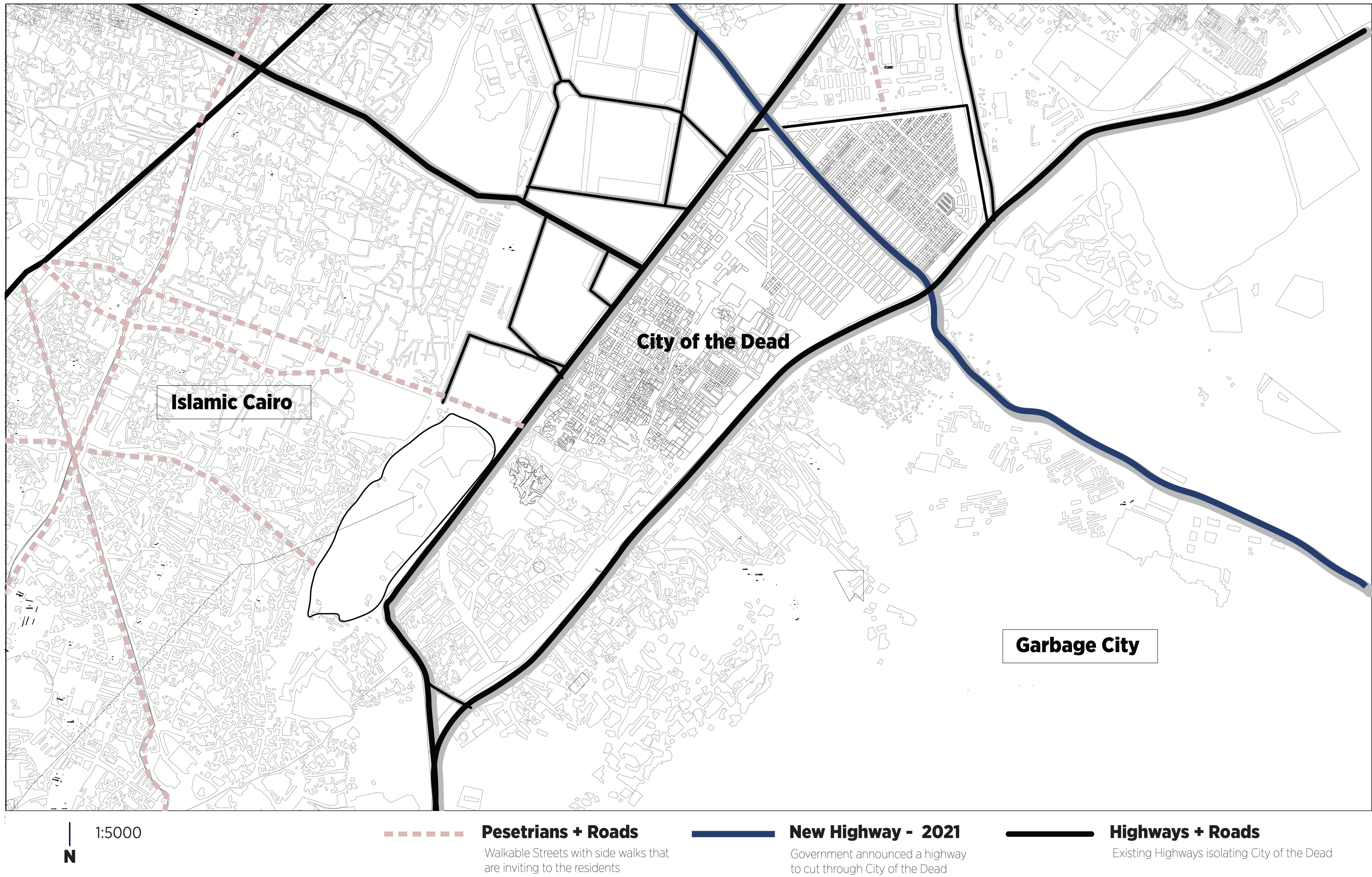
Middle Scale Analysis - Understanding urban fabric
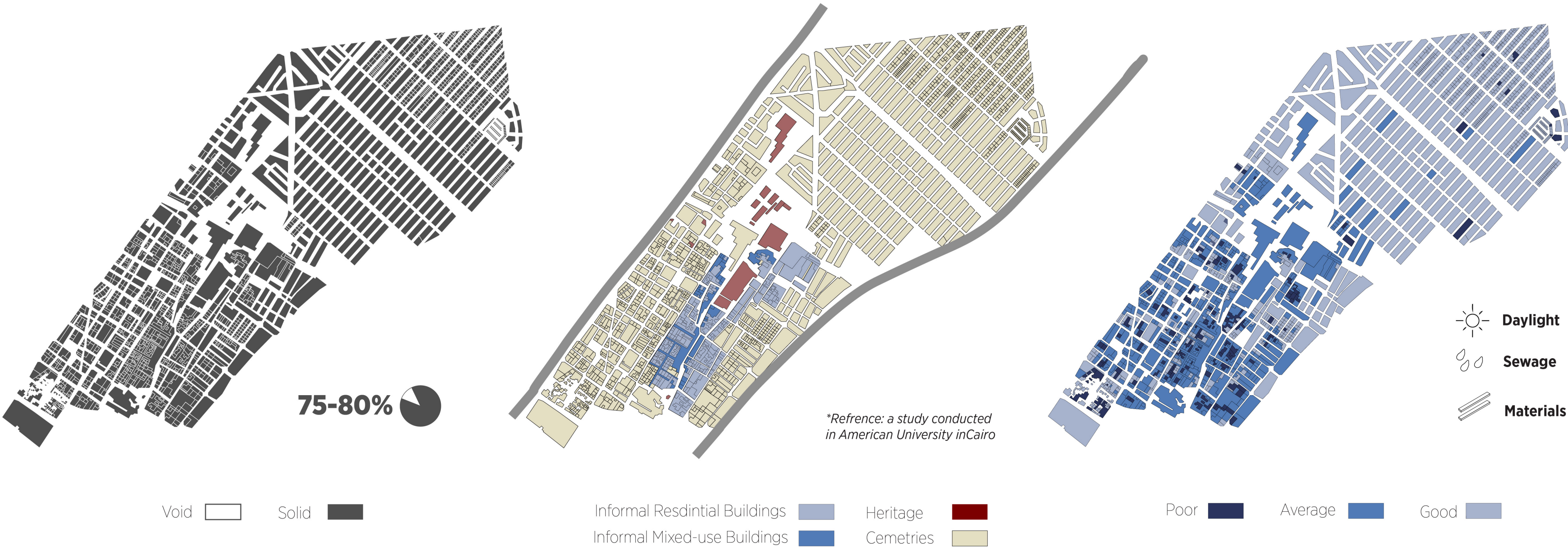
75-80%

Void ☐   Solid ■

Solid + Void

solid occupies 75-80 of the land which makes it so hard for the locals to interact and socialize

*Refrence: a study conducted in American University inCairo

Informal Resdintial Buildings   Heritage
Informal Mixed-use Buildings   Cemeteries

Type of Buildings

Mainly the city is shaped by cemeteries and the heart/core area of the informal housing

☀ Daylight
Sewage
Materials

Poor   Average   Good

Buildings Condition

Conditions are based on the quality of buildings, access to sewage, sunlight, quality of materials and connectivity

*Refrence: a study conducted in American University inCairo

1 storey   2-4 stories   5+ stories
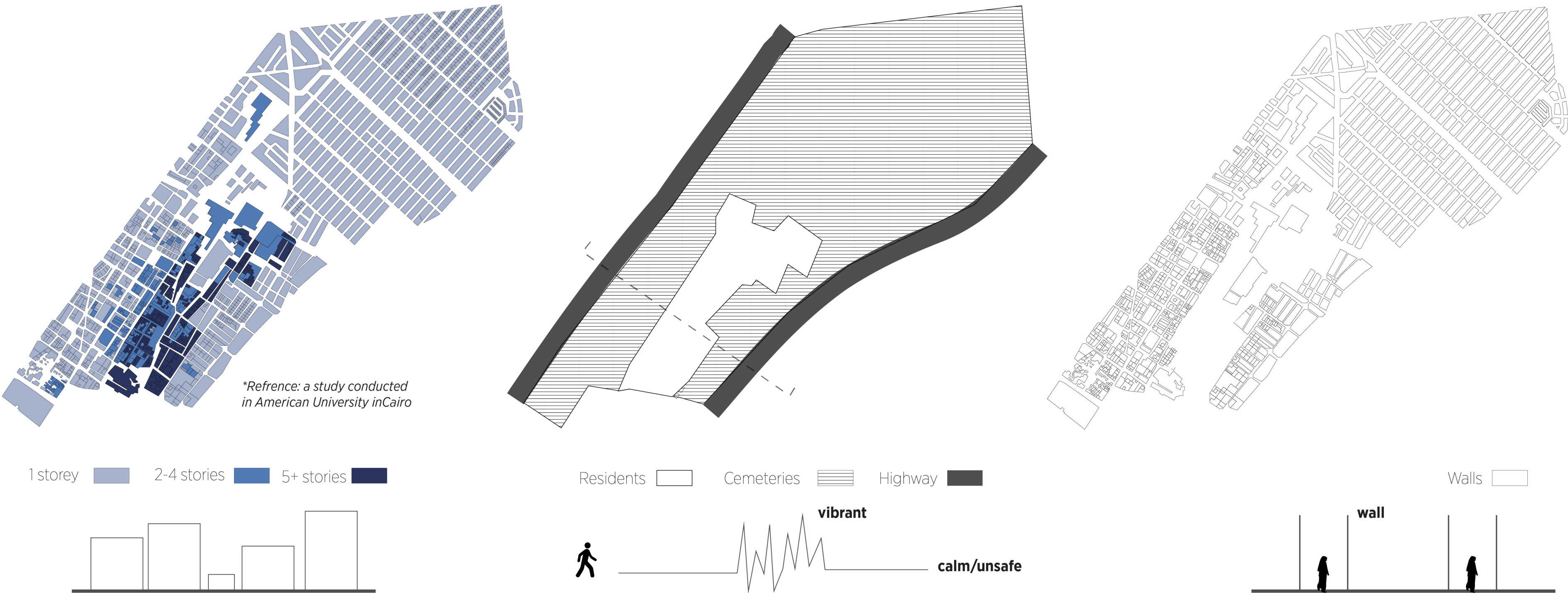
Building Heights

Lack of system in building heights which makes it hard for the daylight in some areas

Residents   Cemeteries   Highway

vibrant
calm/unsafe

Phsyclogical Barriers

The core is the most vibrant; however, near the cemeteries, it is unsafe or calm with no one outside

Walls

wall

Physical Barriers

This map illustrates the human scale in relation to the city which full of walls of the cemeteries

Low
High

*Refrence: a study conducted in Cairo University

High   Low
Dwellers
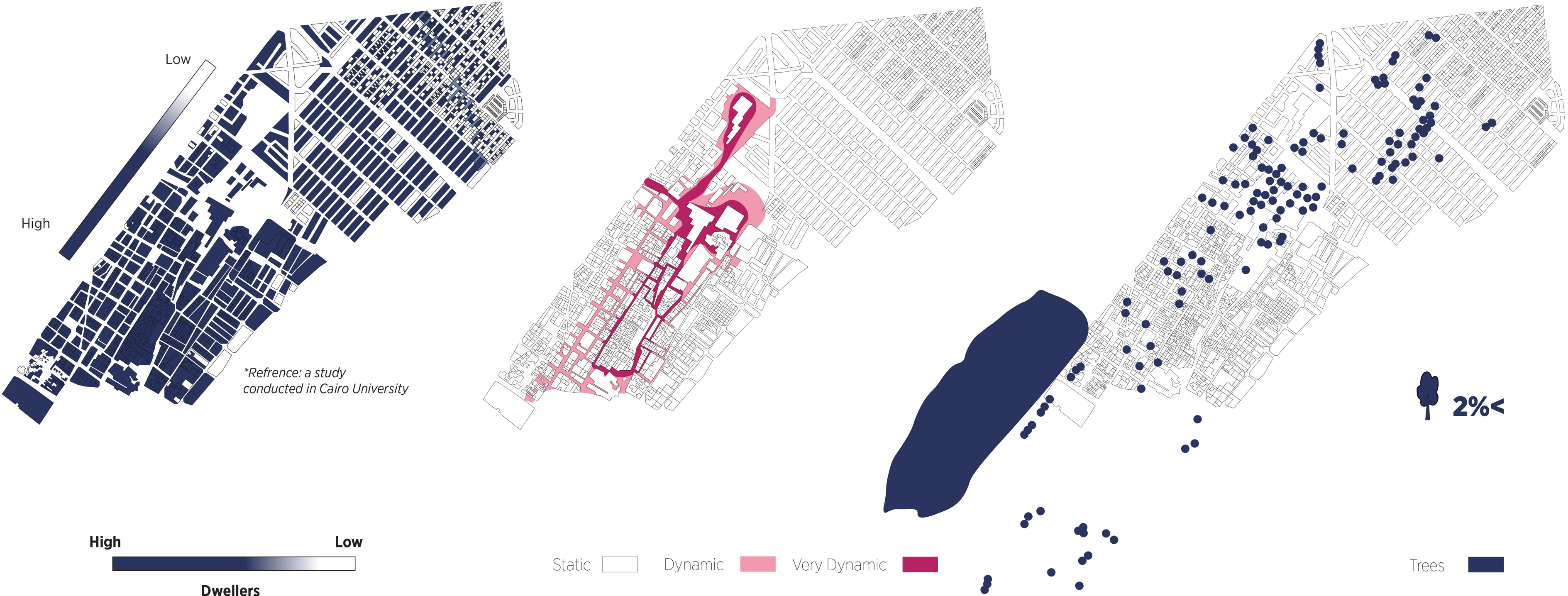
Occupied Cemeteries + Buildings

Cemeteries that squatters moved to and formed their own way of living

Static   Dynamic   Very Dynamic

Dynamic Areas + Public Spaces

Vibrant areas mainly exist in the core and next to the mosque and markets

2%<

Trees

Green Infrastructure

Lack of greenery is one of the biggest challeng-es in the area with no room to plant new trees

Small Scale - Architectural Elements - What is there?

General Appearance
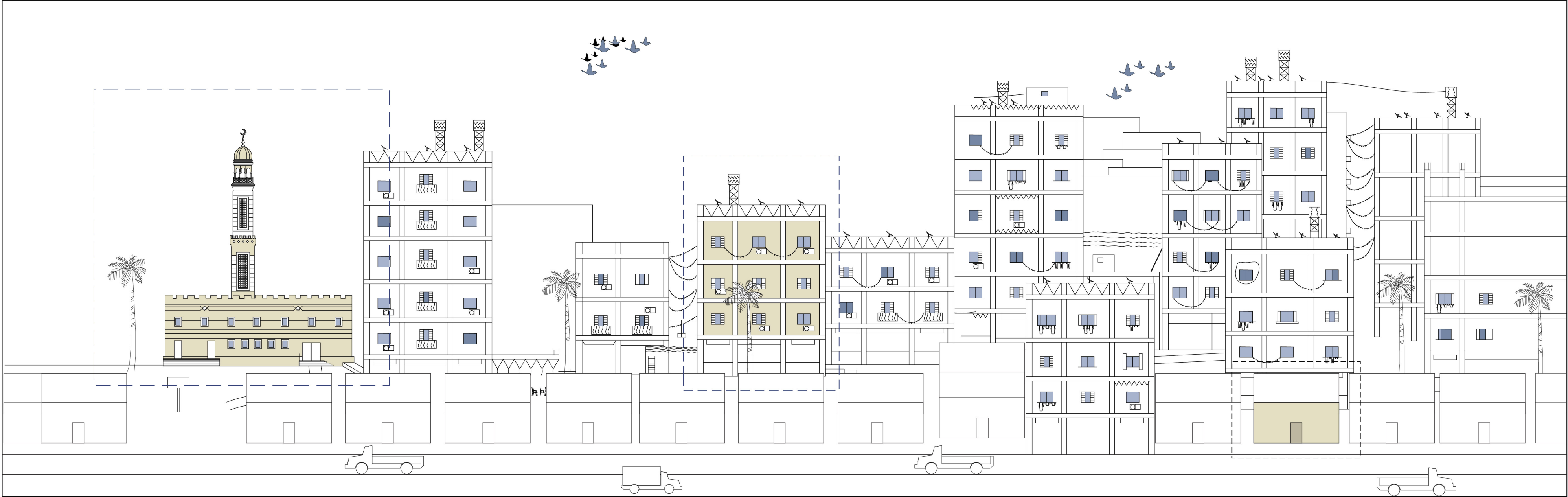
Mosques - Heritage
Plenty of historical mosques exist in the area

Informal Residential Buildings
Red bricks and concrete residential buildings

Cemeteries
Cemeteries where squatters are living with the dead

Architectural Elements - **Informal Residential Buildings**

Keymap
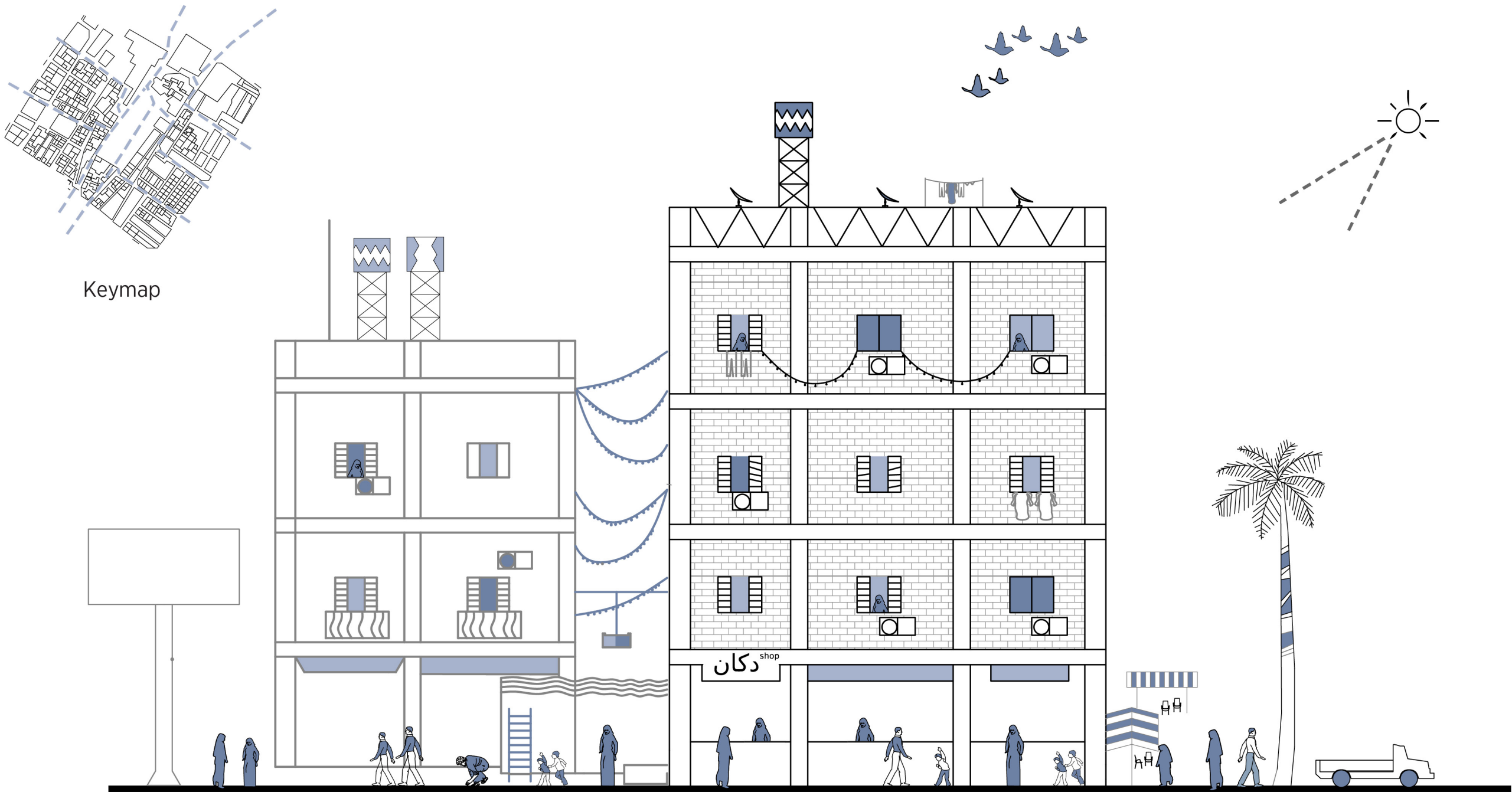
Informal Residential Areas
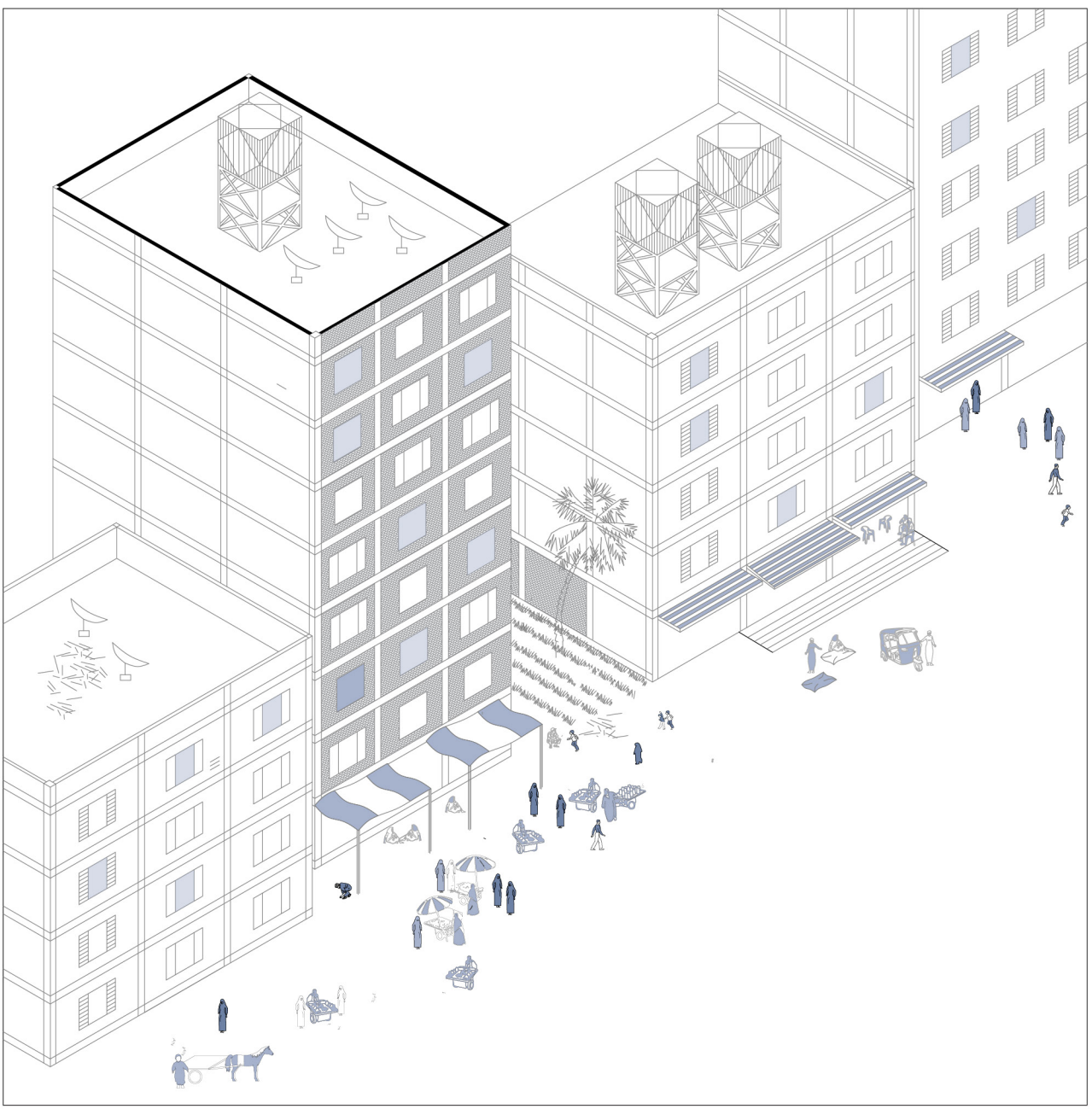
Life happens outside

Architectural Elements - **Mosque - Heritage**
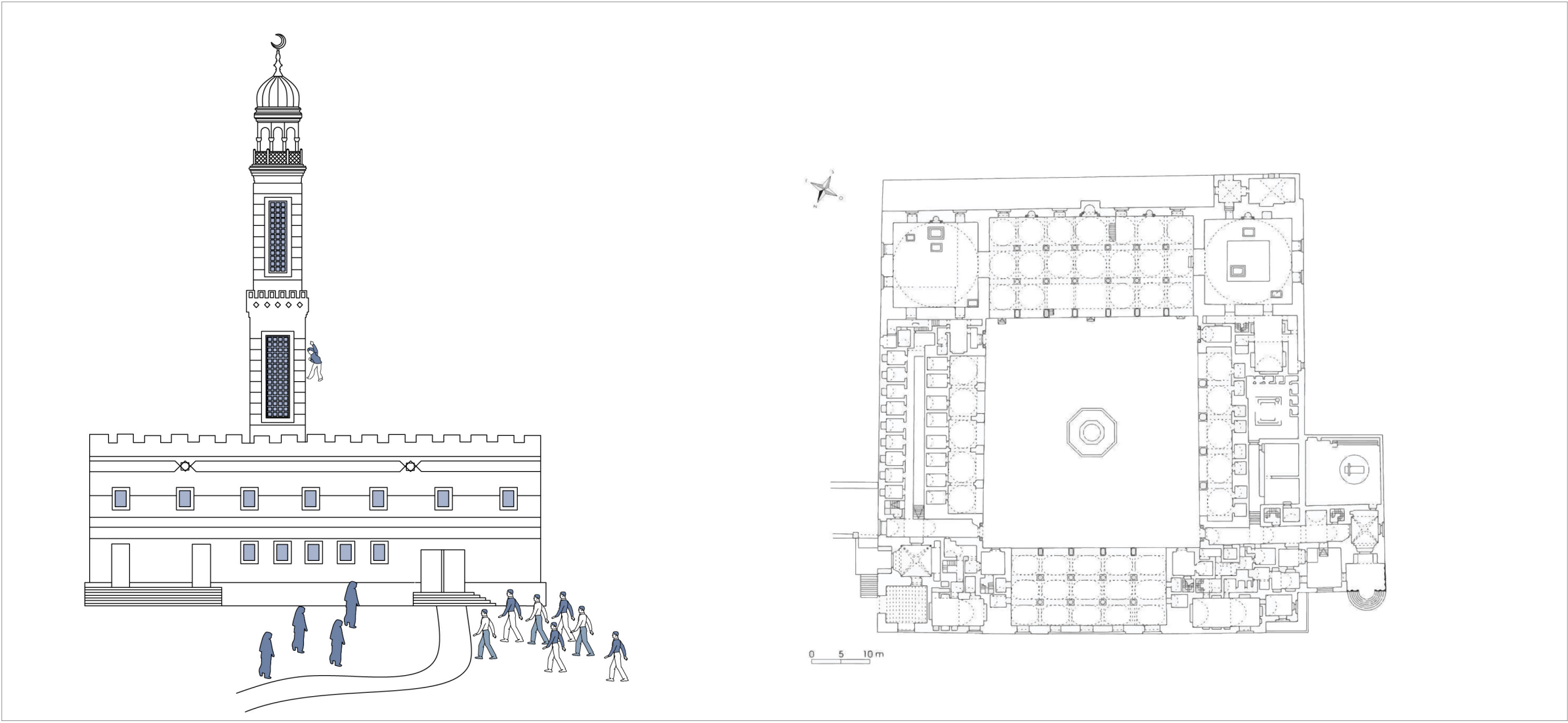
Historical Mosque
Mosque & Khanqah of
Al-Nasir Faraj Ibn Barquq

Used to have

Management	Mausseloum/Cemetery	Library	School
Water for animals	Water Tanks for animals	Prayers	Public space

Who are the people living there? Urban Investigation
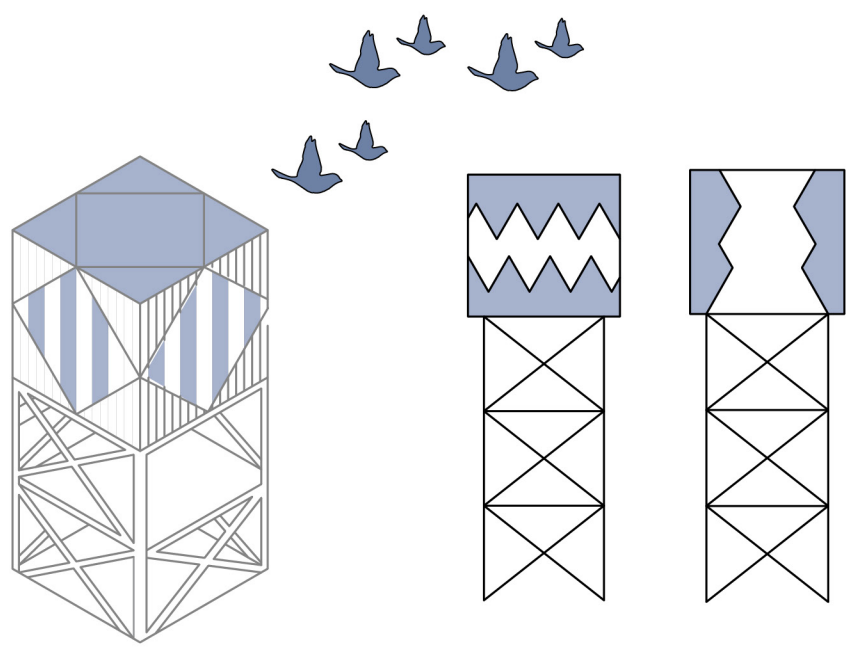
Birds Houses (Family Business)
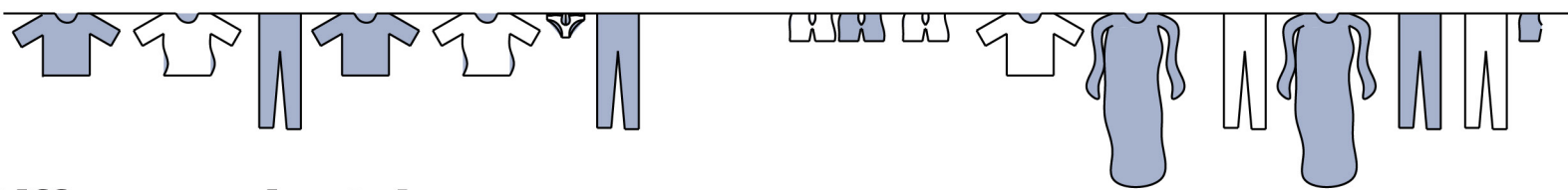
Differences in styles

Keymap

Type 1

Life happens inside

Type 2

Dead

Dead & Living

Dead

Dead & Living
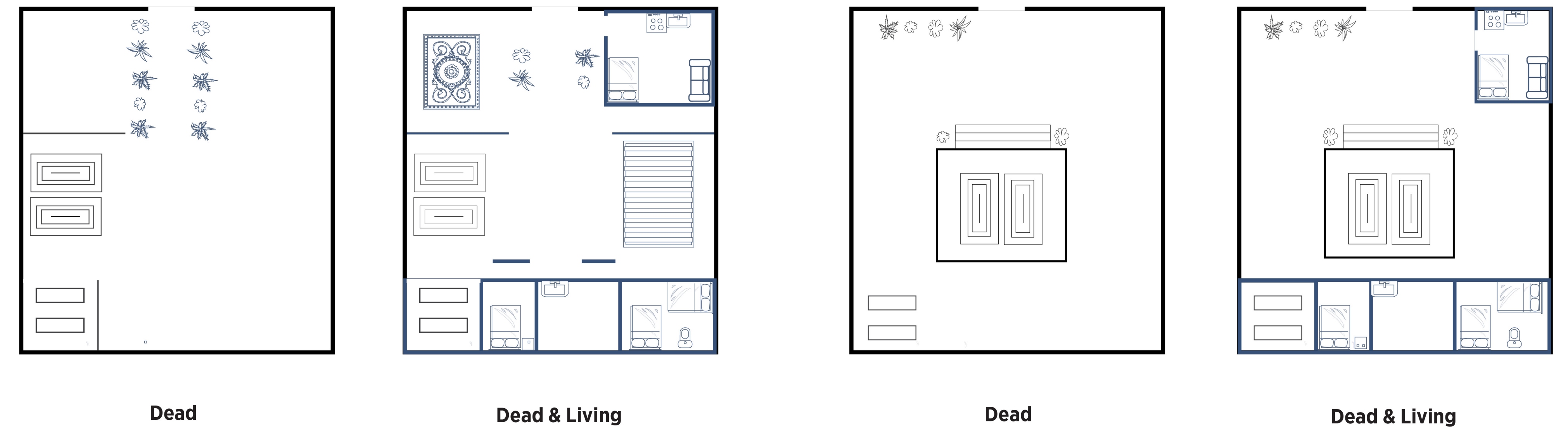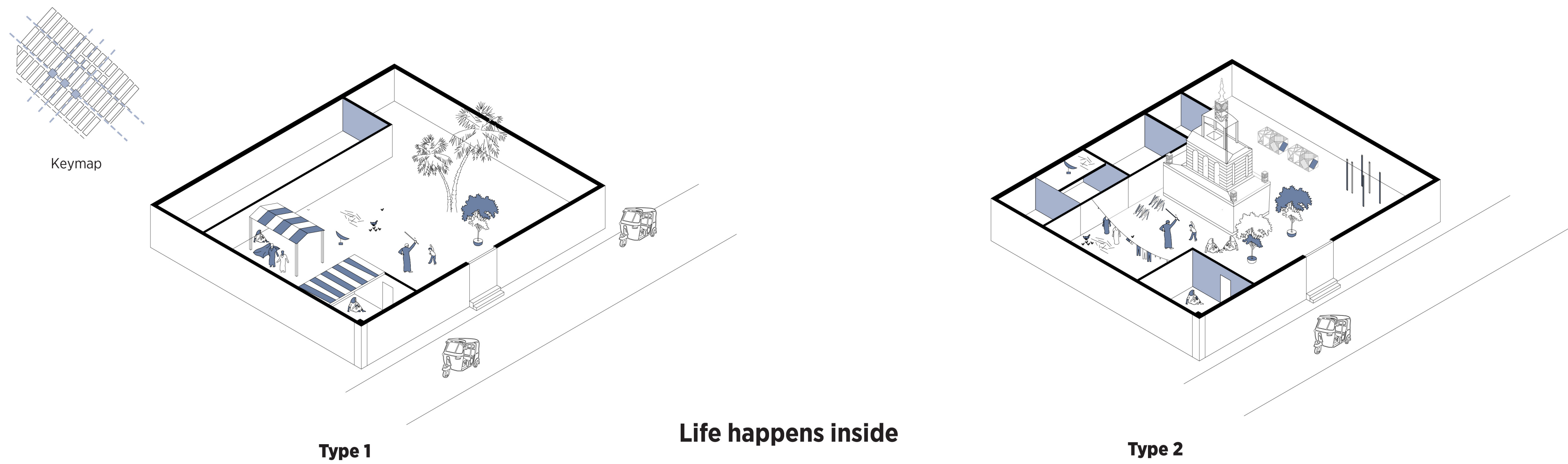
Who are the people living there? - Interviews Investigating local realities

Mohamed

Lack of sewage system and sanitation problems and lack of services in general as schools, etc.

Mohamed: Usually the problems here are related to sewage systems and access to clean water. Also, there is a problem with sanitation in the whole area.

Youssef

50%

Are you upset? you dont have a place to play?

Youssef: There is no play to play football, we play on the asphalt sometimes, and I get injured because of it. I want to play with my friends and have a place to play. We even have our weddings and funerals between the cemeteries

Ahmed

I work in the constructing graveyards, I am content

Ahmed: I have been living here for over 40 years now. I am not scared of the dead they are calm and they don't talk. So I sleep easily and even rest next to them.

Om Ahmed

"We are neither living nor dying, we are something in between"

Om Ahmed: I moved here around 60 years ago. I was very afraid in the beginning, then I got used to it. But this doesn't mean we are living here, but we aren't dead like the dead here, we are something in between.

Khadija

It is unsafe, I cant walk alone at night, I have to take a tuktuk

khadeega: It is not that safe here during the night. There is no anything happening outside. Only people appear in the market and qahwas during the night.

Mina

I wish there is more flow to sell my products. But I don't have a problem here

Mina: We are isolated from the world, sometimes we have tourists, but I wish we can have more flow to sell more and be connected to life a bit!.

Fatma

We are not scared of the dead, we are used to it, they are quiet. But we need life

Fatma: Me and my children play and sleep here, we are not scared of the dead-bodies, they are quiet. Even the kids got used to them. But we are tired, very tired we need a better life outside home (cemetery).

The Dead

Am I forgotten?
Imaginative question

My family is not visiting me anymore, am I forgotten or maybe not? anyways, I am here with another family.

Potential Areas of Intervention - Stitching the city by connecting adjacing neighborhouds
through City of the Dead + Expanding the city's potentials through three pivotal areas

Islamic Cairo

City of the Dead

Garbage City

1:5000

N

Schematic Scope of Affected Areas	Schematic Scope of High Affected Areas	Areas of Intervention
Affected areas with the interventions (abstract) based on walkable distances	High affected areas with the interventions (abstract) based on walkable distances	Three chosen areas with highest potentials to intervene

Areas of intervention -Potential Areas
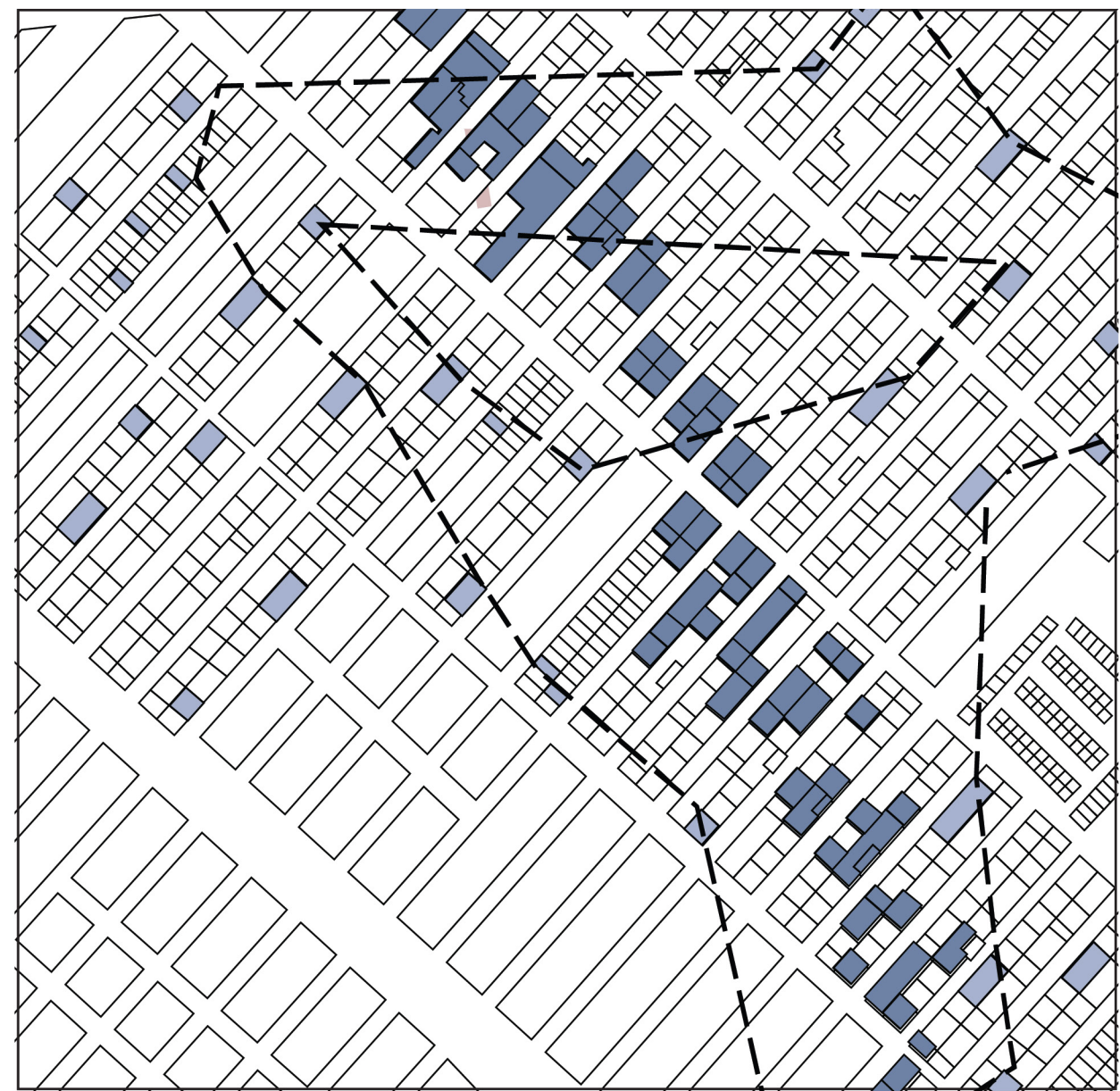
Grid Cemeteries 1
Reviving urban life

Informal Settlements Inner Cores 2
Prevention of massive urban cores
Infrastructure and sewage enhancement
Creating breathing pockets

Adaptive Reuse of Mosques 3
The existing mosques do not serve the place
as it used to do, so why not re-establish the old
services in the mosque?
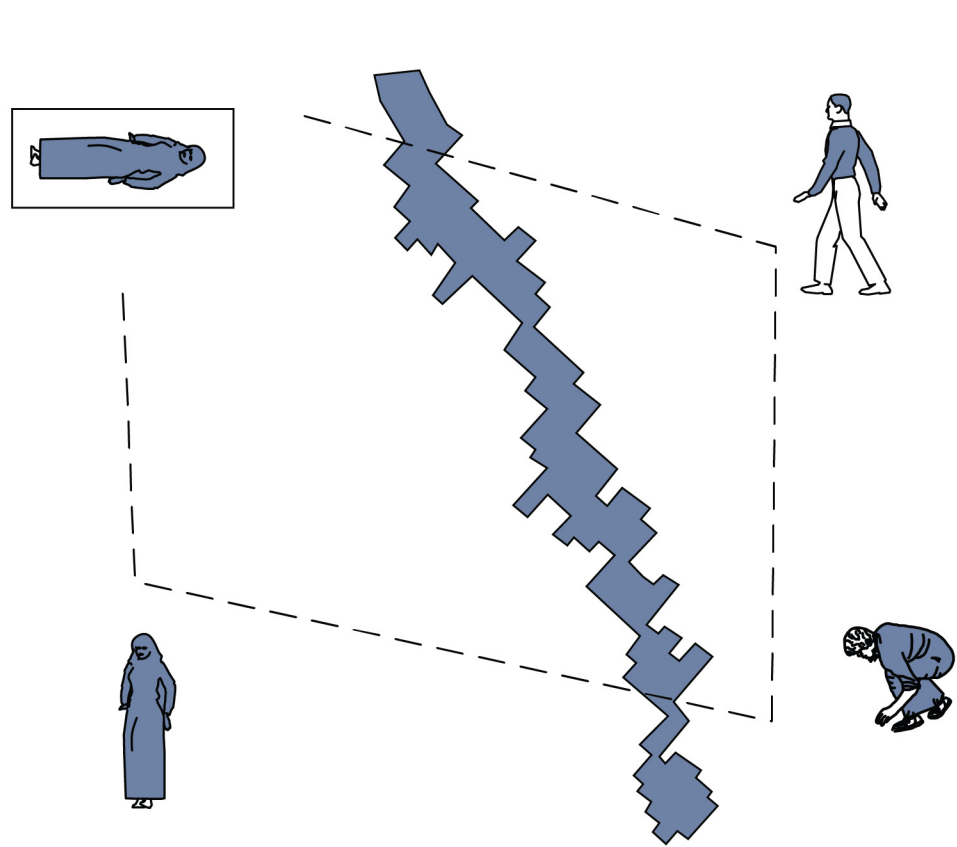
Spine of Life and Death Rembrance
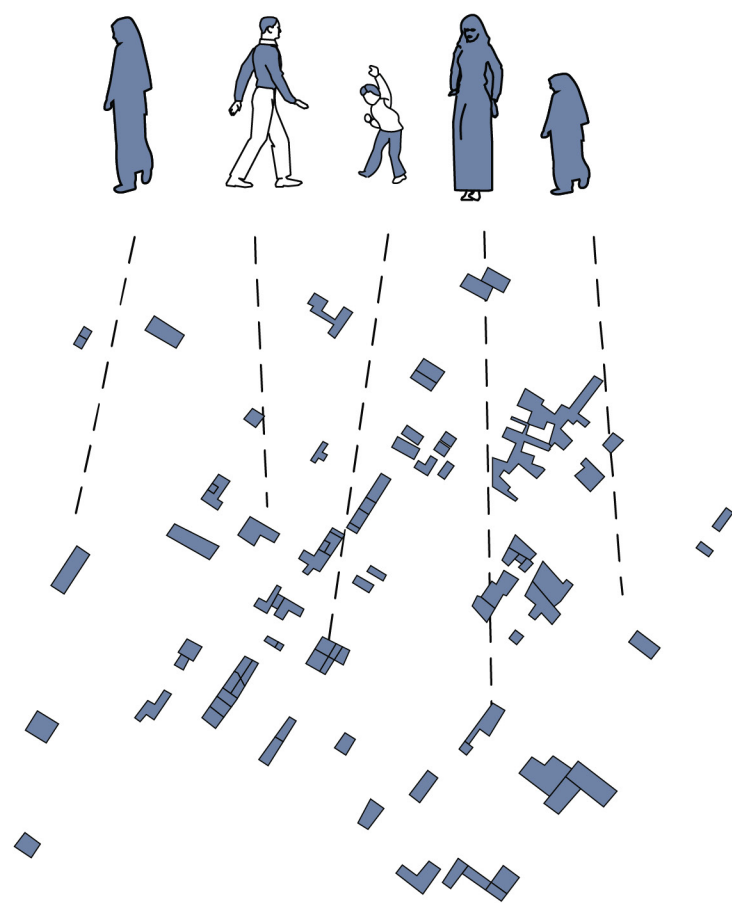
Overlapping Realities
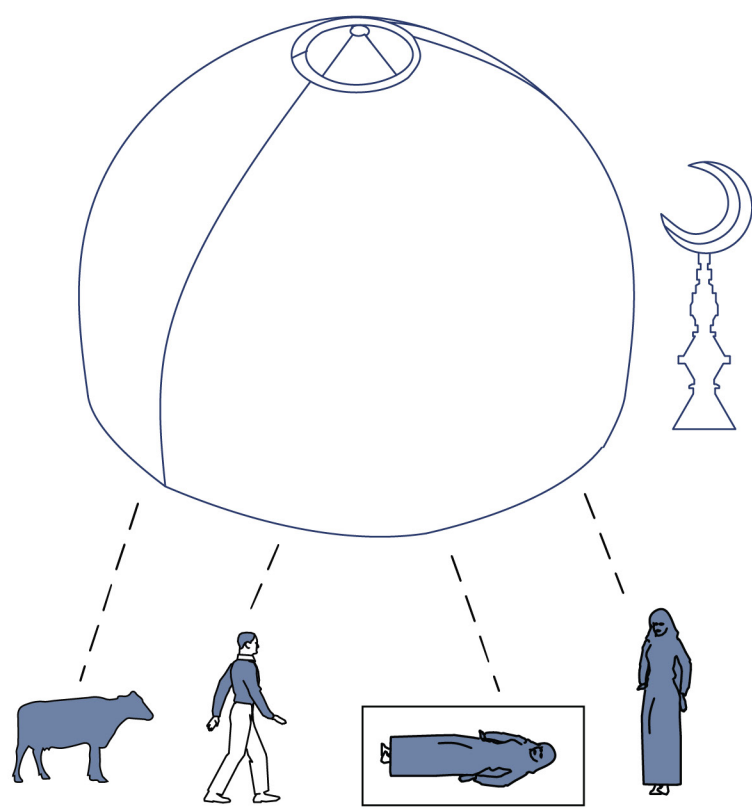
Memories of the Future

Spine of Life and Death Remembrance - Inbetween spaces giving life to the northen area
through landscapes and 'deathscapes'

❶ Entrance Area
Including 'qahwas' cafes, 'dead boards' and a place to buy flowers for the dead

❷ Landscapes & Deathscapes
Landscapes and deathscapes to serve both the living and the dead

❸ Market Area
A place for the dwellers to sell their products and interact
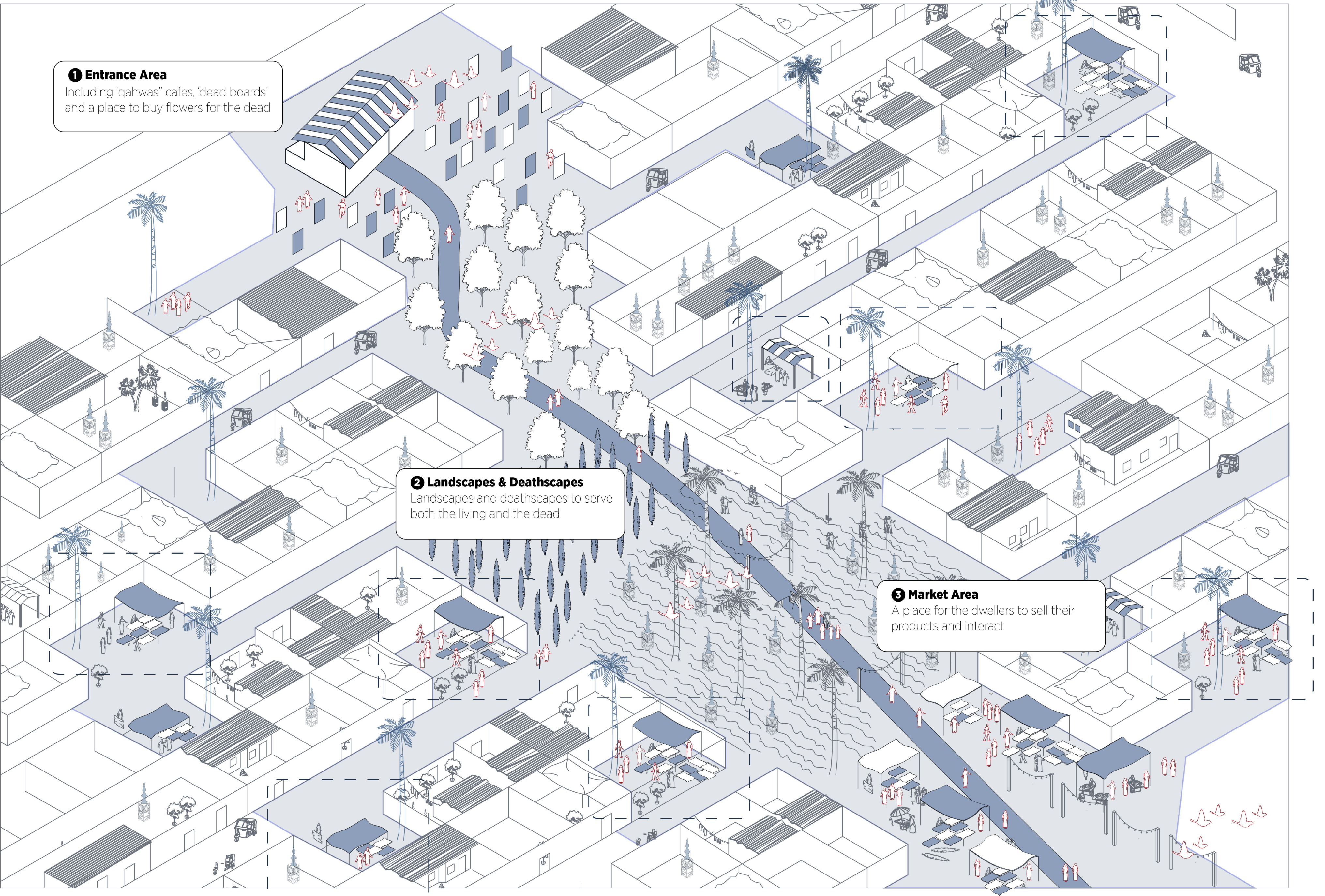
Voids as Commons *Main Journey of Life and Death*

Commons

Shelter

Calm
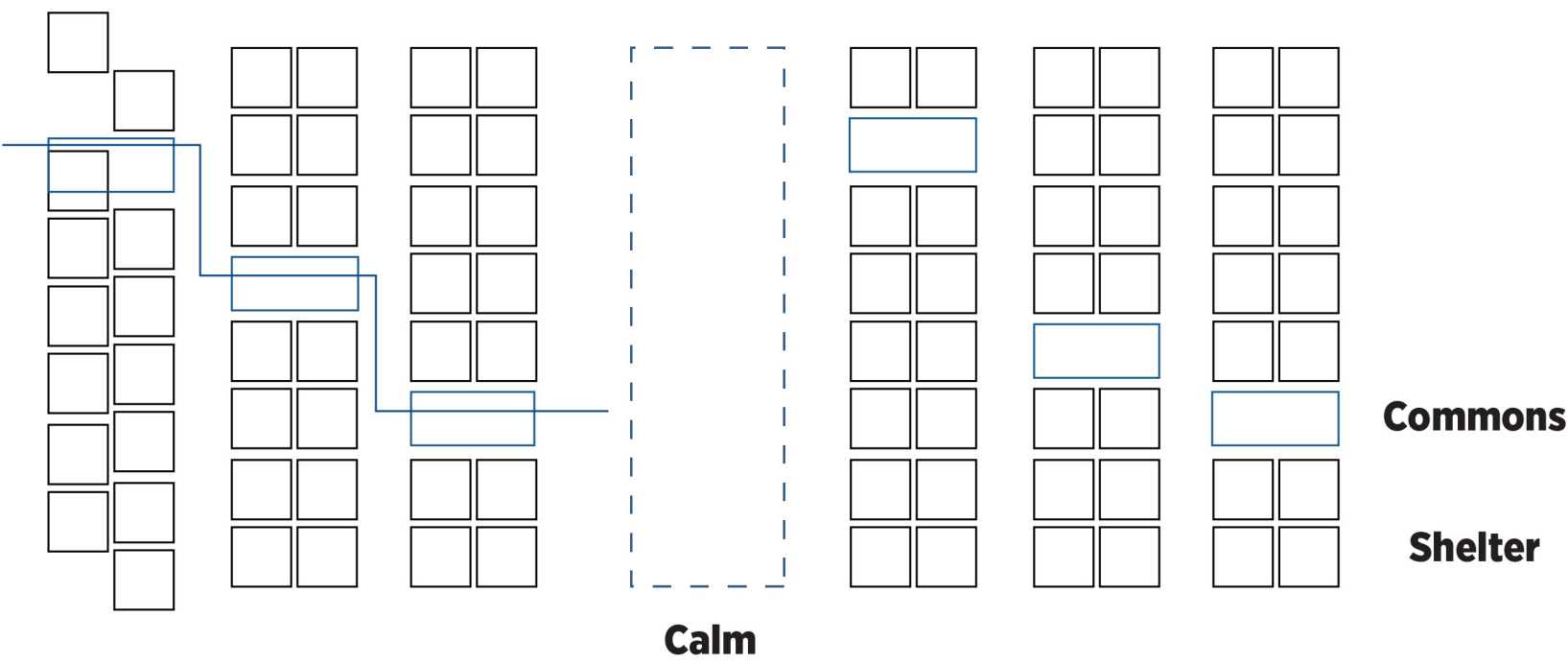
Palm Trees as a main visual Communication *Diagramatic Section*

Market | Cemetery/Shelter | Spine | Cemetery/Shelter | Market
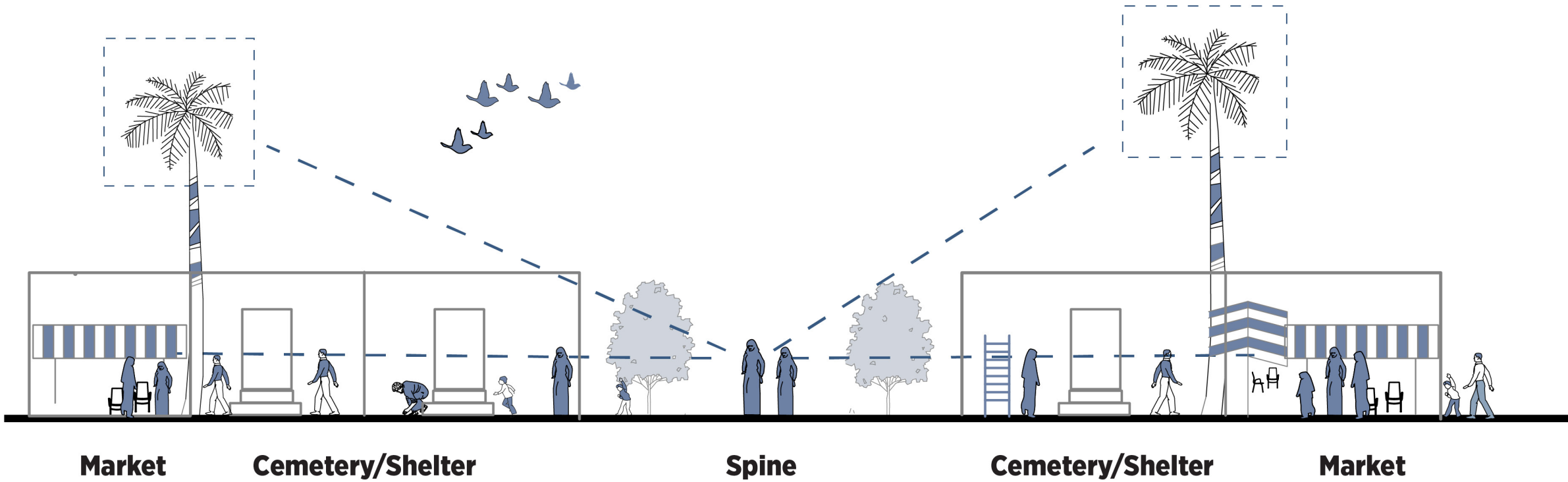
Journey - Applying the **smaller life hack** of the people in the cemeteries to the **bigger picture of the city**
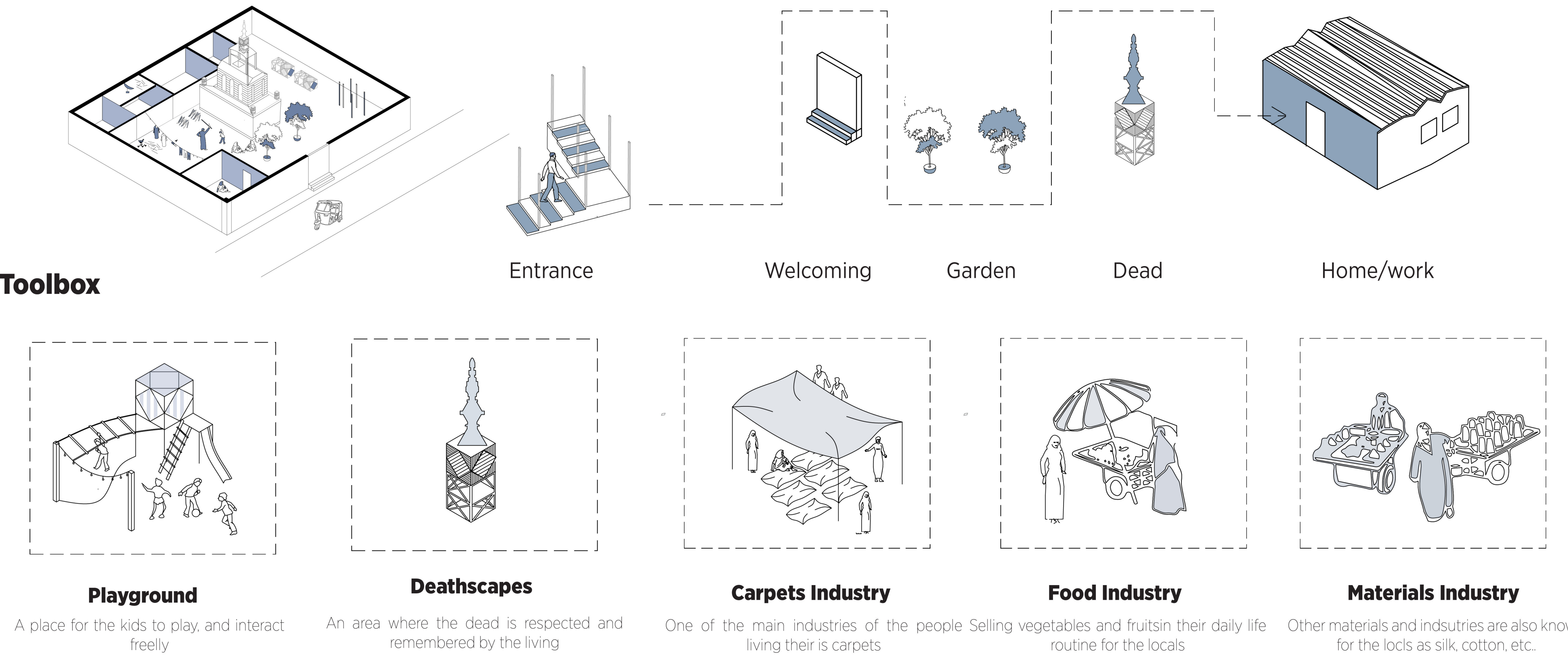
Toolbox

Entrance | Welcoming | Garden | Dead | Home/work

Playground
A place for the kids to play, and interact freelly

Deathscapes
An area where the dead is respected and remembered by the living

Carpets Industry
One of the main industries of the people living their is carpets

Food Industry
Selling vegetables and fruitsin their daily life routine for the locals

Materials Industry
Other materials and indsuties are also known for the locls as silk, cotton, etc..

Spine of Life and Death Remembrance - Inbetween spaces giving life to the northen area through landscapes and 'deathscapes'

List of Trees
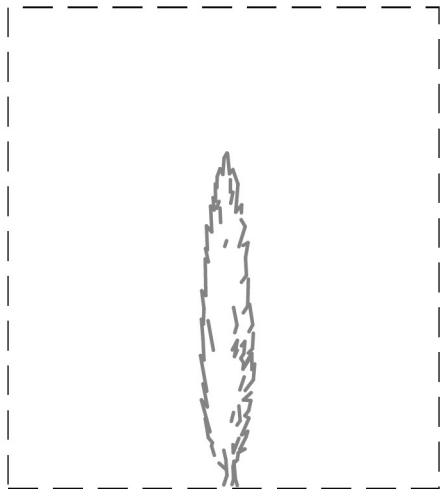
Morus sp.
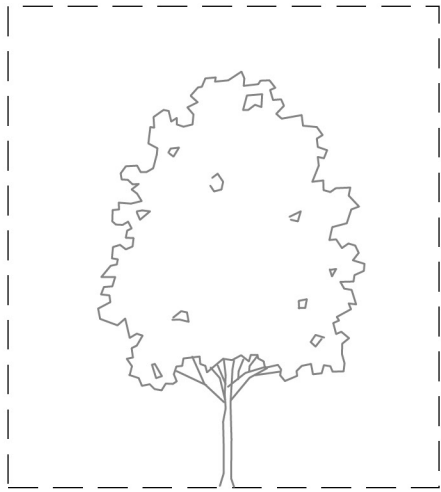
Cupressus sp.

Palm - Date Tree

Palm Tree

Dead and living Scapes
An area where the dead can rest and the living can sit, enjoy or even play.

Am I forgotten (space)?
Listing the names of the dead on the concrete panel so people would remember them

The living point
where the living can meet and interact, buy food, and necesseties

Cemeterial/Carpets Market
Embedding the cemeteries with the spine through cemetery markets
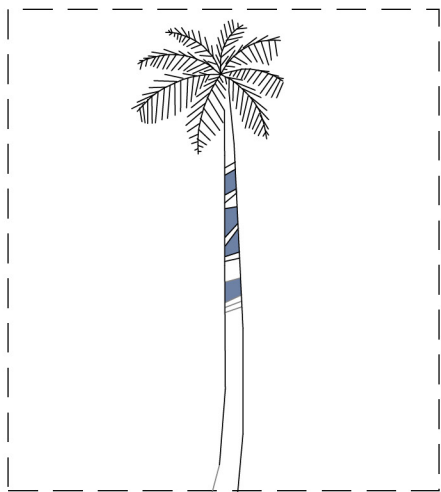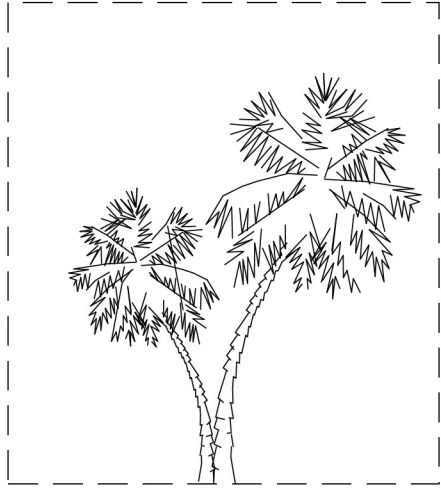
Creation of Breathing Pockets - Demolition of the bad quality buildings - inner cores to enhance sewage system, infrastructure and public spaces.

Network of Pockets

Blocks

connectivity

Creation of pockets

Diagramatic Section Removal of Blocks

Building
↓

Public Space

N

■ Top down Interventions   ■ Possible Outcomes of bottom-up processes
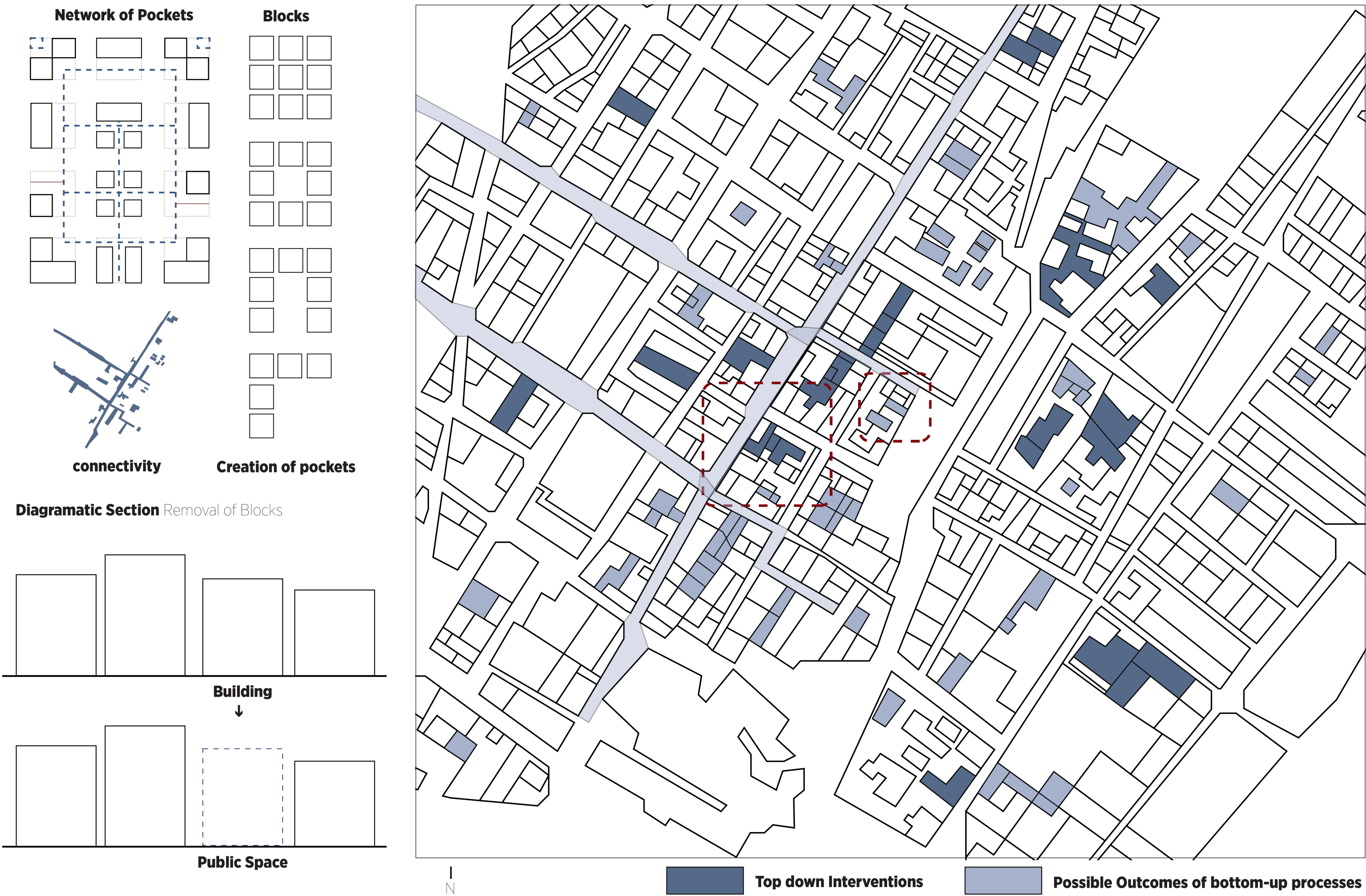
Overlapping Realities -Creation of a pocket with multifunctional facilities and rooftops utilizaion for the residents with respect to the local realities

Market + Football Field
Multifunctional facilities that fit different generations and boost their economy

Rooftop Vegetation
Expanding the potential of the rooftops with vegation and green-roofs

Birds Market
Establishing a network of birds roof market and safer network for women
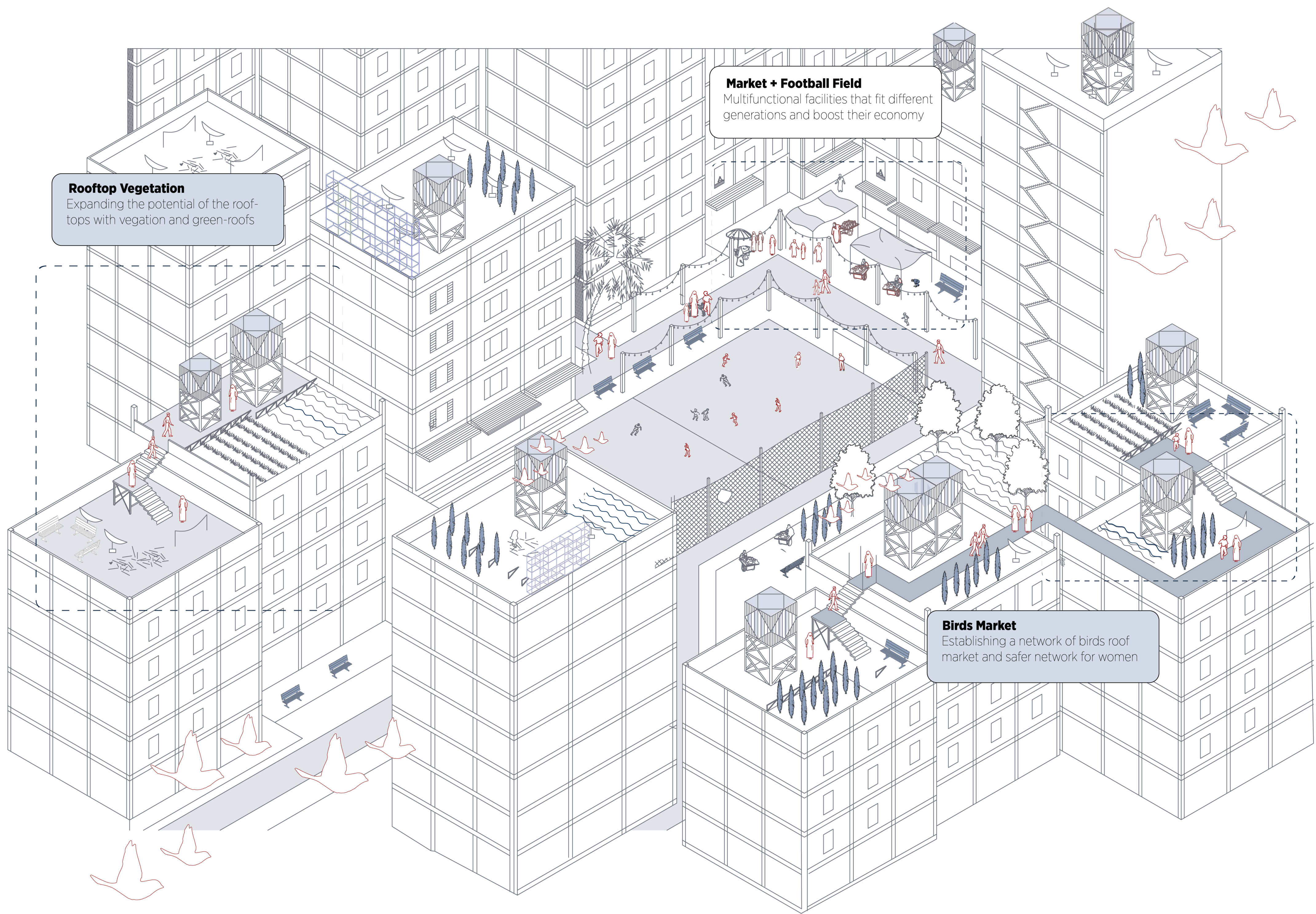
A Place for all - Possible outcomes of bottom-up processes that fit the local realities

A Place for Celebrations
An area where they can have their weddings,funeral etc..

Expanding the potential of the rooftops

Vegetation

Birds Market

Safety

Rooftops Connection

Potential places that the locals might utilize in their own ways as (Weddings, funerals, etc..)

Wedding

Funerals
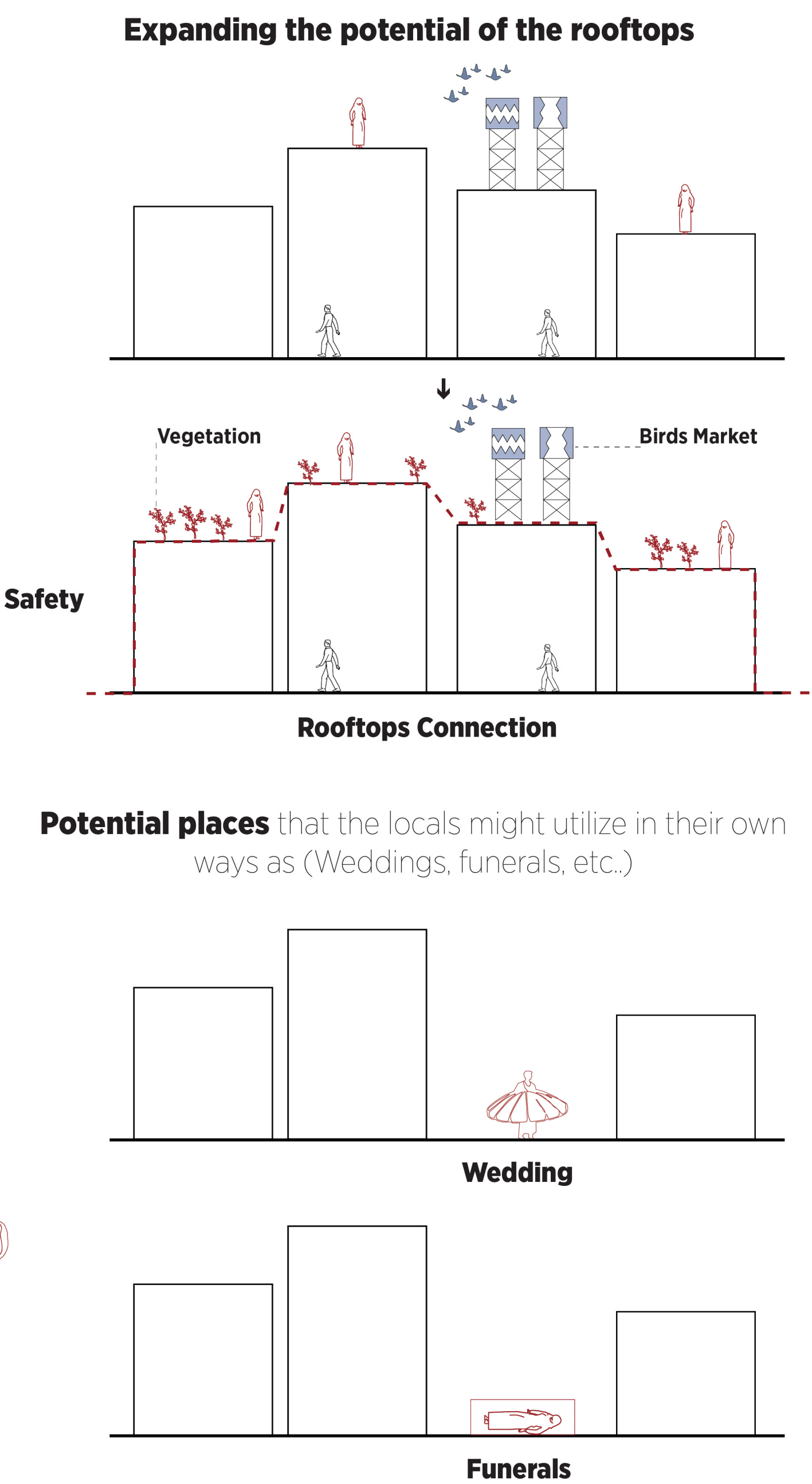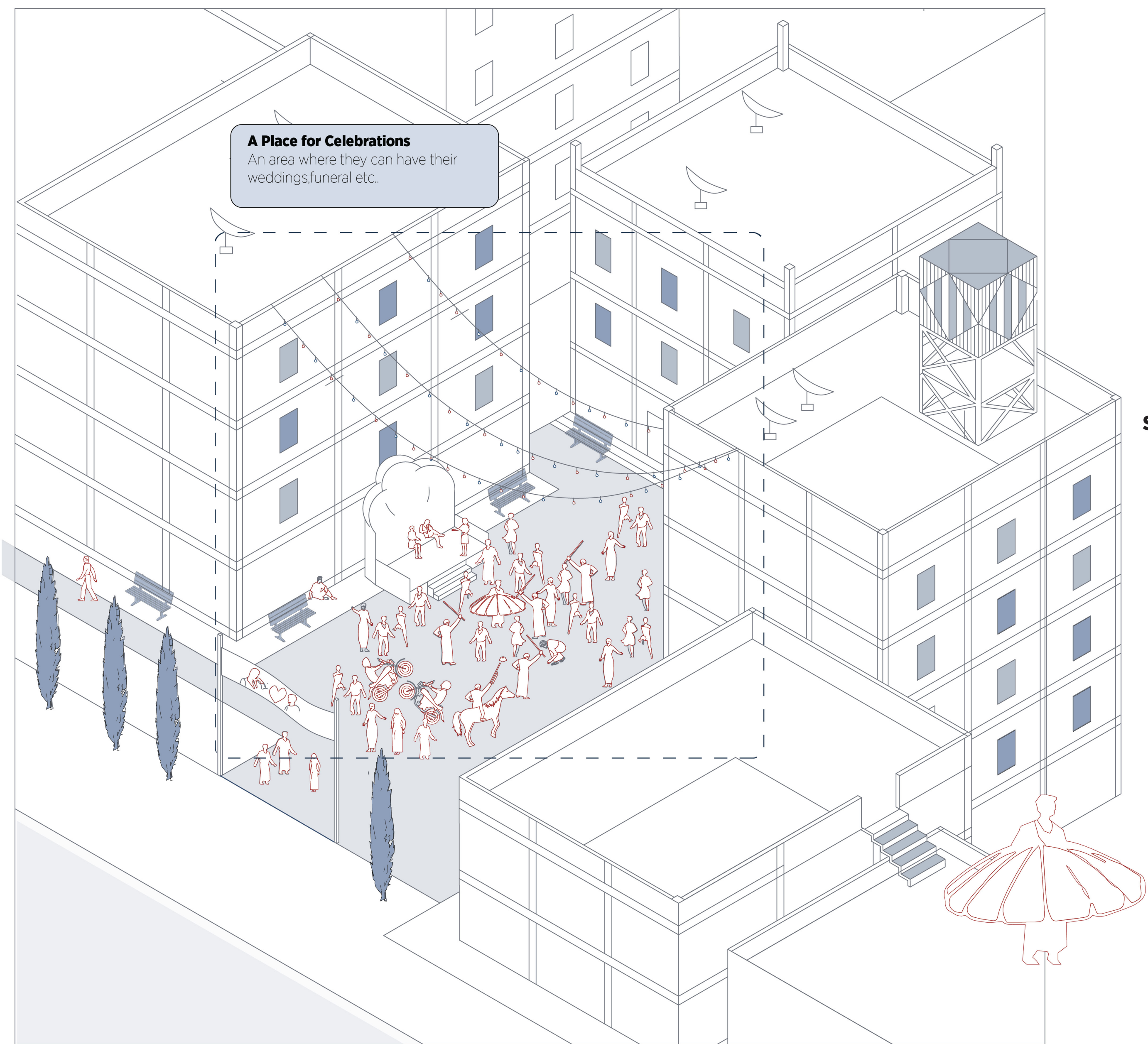
Memories of the Future is the Only Way to Reincarnate City of the Dead - Giving back
to the residents the public facilities that used to serve them back then

❶ School + Kutab +Library
Bringing back education facilities where people can learn and study.

❷ Prayers Area
Openning fully prayer rooms for the prayers once again.

This is the mauseloum, where the dead body is buried

❸ Public Space +Public Water
filling up fountains back again for people and animals to drink and enjoy..
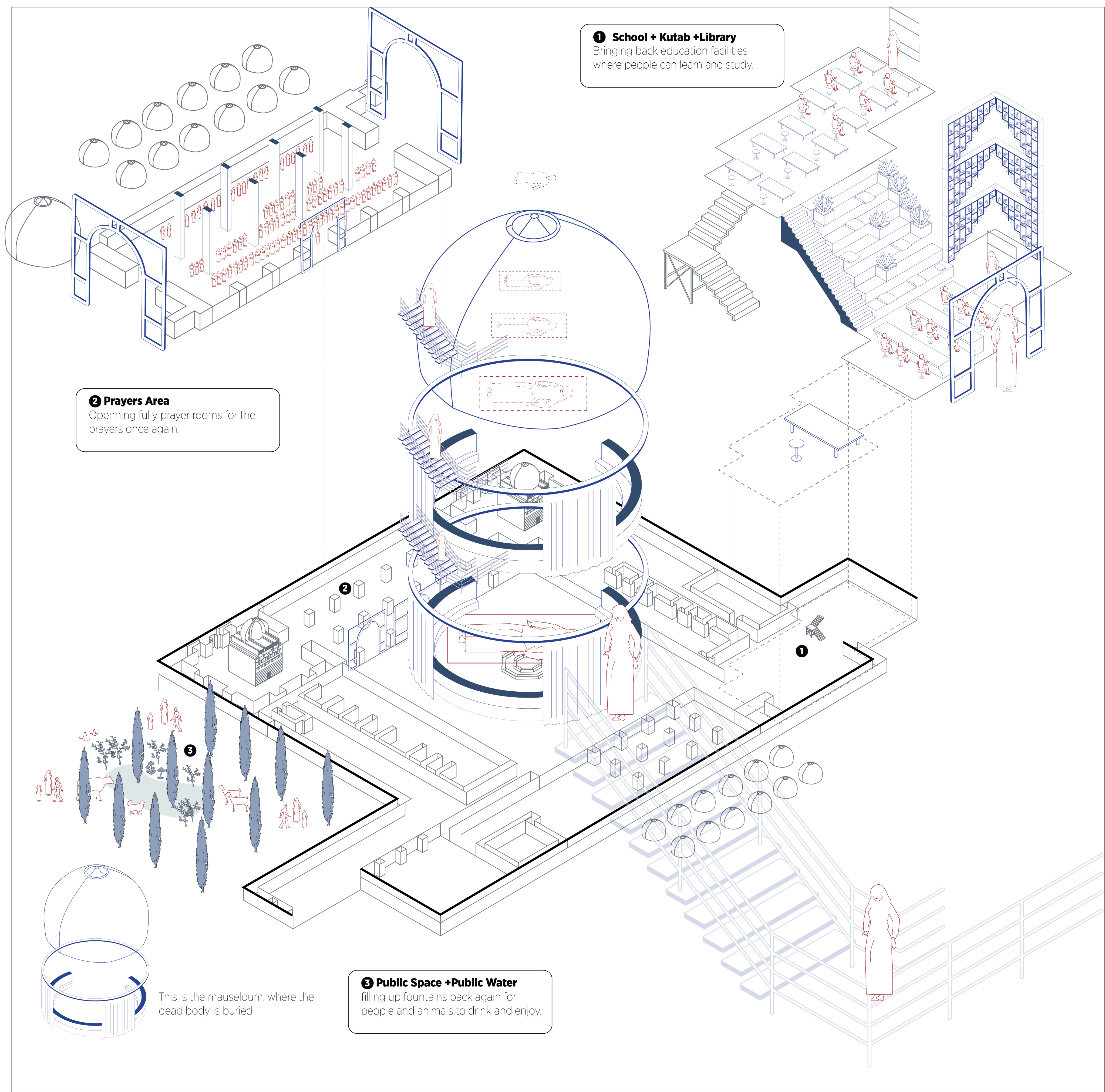
**Architectural + Political Illustration that conveys
the power of mosque in reincarnating City of the Dead**

0   5   10 m

City of the Dead
"We are neither living nor dying, we are something in between"

Since the beginning of history, the living and the dead have been separated. This has made it almost impossible to co-live together under one roof. We, 'the living', have even created "deathscapes" which has set a clear boundary between us and them, 'the dead'. In every society, with its own cultural norms and rituals, they act with the dead in their own way - some are buried, others are burnt, but what is common across allsocieties is that they are not evident in our lives anymore. Looking at it from an urban perspective, the dead occupy a big patch of land in every city. This acts as a burden, as it makes "forbidden spaces" where the living are not able to be part of it.

However, in each topic, there is a lesson that can be learned from it. In this case, it's a 6km stretch informally and formally built, with a rich history and poor squatters who have no choice except to dwell with the dead.

This is City of the Dead, located in Cairo, Egypt. The extreme lack of housing has pushed a part of society to live informally in cemeteries, where they have learnt to co-live in the same room as the dead; they've embraced the idea of sleeping next to the dead, working and playing on those deathscapes.

But ever since the government announced that they will demolish those deathscapes as a part of demolishing all informal settlements in Cairo, the time has come to make a stand against this decision, instead learning from their "life hack" and applying it throughout the City of the Dead – creating as society where the deadd and living are not separated, maximizing the lost potentials in cases such as City of the Dead Gnd making them not looked down upon and marginalized. This thesis aims to design the city and improve the lives of people living in these cemeteries, dealing with each case with care and compassion.

"We are living we are not dying"
Reincarnation of City of the Dead
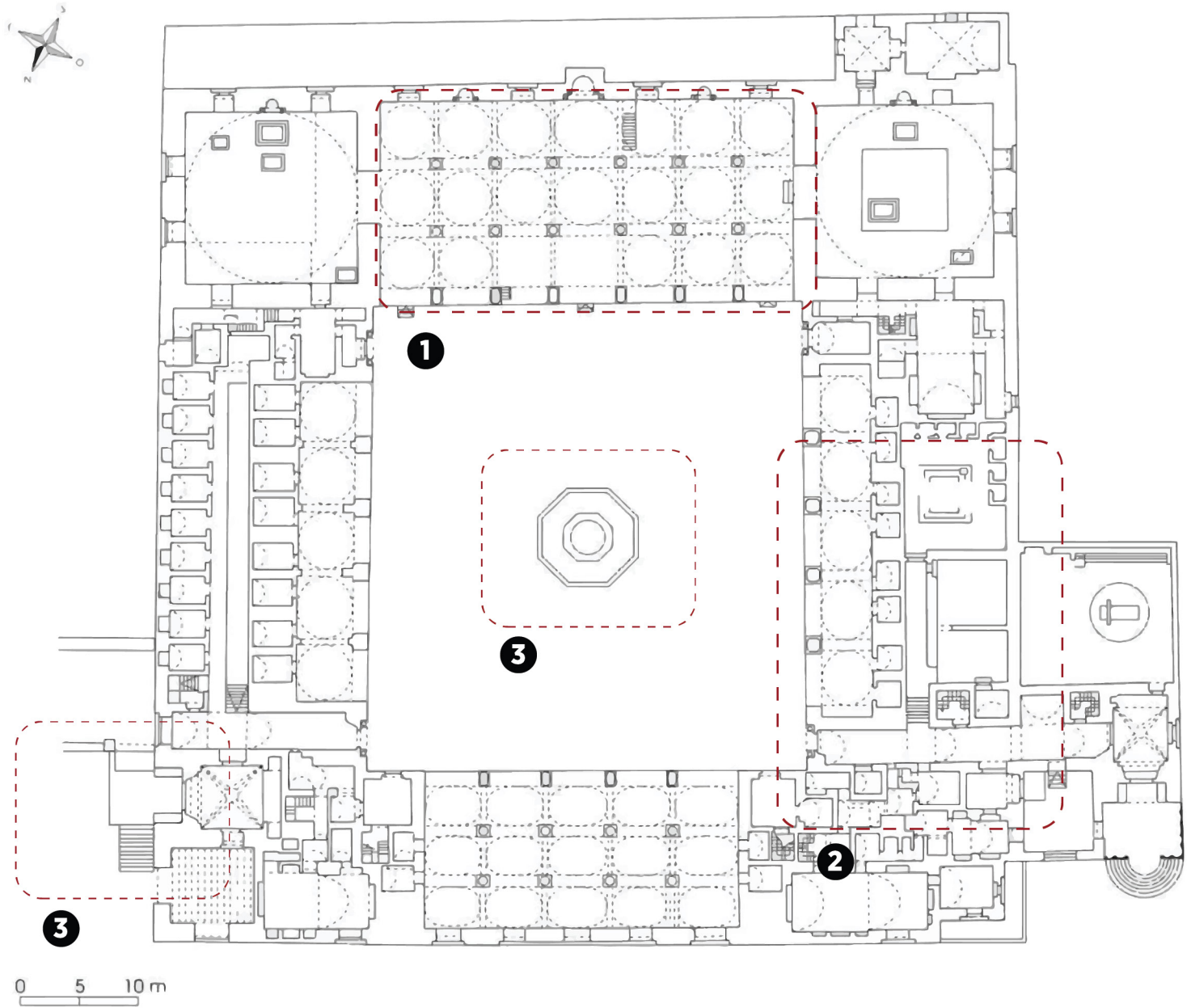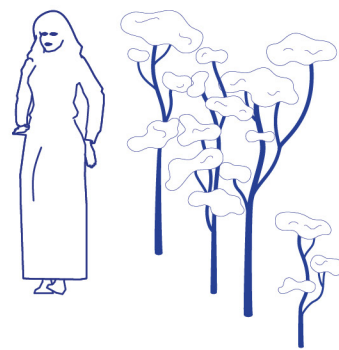
Apendix

Booklet

Overview

Author: Reuters

City of the Dead, also known as the 'Eastern Necropolis,' stretches over 6 kilometers along the eastern bank of the Nile River in Cairo, Egypt. It is a unique enclave characterized by a combination of formal and informal structures, estimated to house around 500,000 inhabitants. Divided into the northern and (old) southern areas, this vast expanse encompasses a multitude of Islamic cemeteries, mausoleums, and makeshift residential edifices. The informal dwellings, constructed haphazardly within the city, feature red brick and concrete slabs.

The origins of the City of the Dead can be traced back to the construction of a mausoleum honoring the renowned Islamic scholar Imam Al-Shafi'i following his passing in the 7th century. Situated on the outskirts of Cairo, in the desert, this mausoleum was deliberately located away from the city itself. At that time, the inhabitants of Cairo would visit the mausoleum to pay homage to Al-Shafi'i, in accordance with Islamic beliefs surrounding the afterlife. Subsequently, during the 10th to 12th centuries, the Fatimid dynasty conquered Egypt and designated Cairo as the capital of the country. They also erected mausoleums and cemeteries within the City of the Dead for prayer and remembrance. Later, the Ayyubids, a Kurdish dynasty, assumed power in Egypt, demolishing some of the royal cemeteries established by the Fatimids while constructing a Citadel in City of the Dead.

Throughout the 14th to 20th centuries, marked by periods of plague and shifting political forces, such as French colonization, new cemeteries were mandated to be constructed in the northern or 'new' area of the citadel, displacing the focus from the southern or 'old' area. In recent history, City of the Dead has become a refuge for individuals facing severe housing shortages and seeking opportunities. Forced by circumstances, these citizens have resorted to cohabiting with the deceased within the cemetery grounds, erecting informal residential structures in vacant spaces. These makeshift rooms serve as places to live, work, and even sleep in close proximity to the deceased.

Architectural Elements

Three primary architectural components define the City of the Dead. The initial illustration pertains to the cemetery, which has been occupied by the homeless and individuals in search of improved prospects. An examination and depiction of various cemeteries were carried out during the site visit. In Cairo, cemeteries are typically built in a distinctive manner, featuring a compact area enclosed by four walls to provide privacy. These spaces incorporate a hospitable section, burial grounds, and a few plant arrangements.

On the site, there are two distinct types of residential housing. The first type is represented by the building depicted in the image, which used to accommodate workers and constructors involved in the construction of mausoleums and cemeteries, as well as other locals. The second type consists of informal residential buildings, which were thoroughly examined in panels composed of red bricks and concrete slabs. These informal structures can either be mixed-use or purely residential. However, they typically suffer from inadequate infrastructure and face challenges related to accessibility and sanitation.

The third category corresponds to the mausoleum, which serves as a distinctive marker indicating the burial of a renowned figure within its walls. The fourth element is represented by the mosque, a place where people used to gather for prayers and engage in Quranic teachings and Islamic classes, known as 'Kuttab.' The City of the Dead is the final resting place for numerous royals, kings, former prime ministers, and ministers. It is a complex neighborhood characterized by a diverse range of architectural styles, where the deceased and the living coexist in a single location.

Cemeteries

Residential

Mausoleum

Challenges

Lack of public spaces

how to make public spaces within the cemeteries while at the same time respecting the rituals and the values of the dead? This challenge can be related as well to the lack of accessibility.

Insufficient work and study environments

City of the Dead faces significant challenges concerning employment and education for its residents. The lack of adequate spaces and the informal nature of neighborhood-scale planning and design are among the primary reasons contributing to these issues.

Lack of accessibility

How to connect city of the dead to the surrounding areas by removing the phsyclogical borders of the cemeteries. How to turn cemeteries into livable dynamic area for strangers and locals. How to Increase the flow of people?

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Preserving the rituals

How can the design of public spaces in cemeteries strike a balance between preserving the rituals and values of the deceased and enhancing accessibility, considering the current challenges?

Demolishments of all unsafe/unplanned settlements

Is the demolition and relocation of residents from the affected houses the appropriate solution to address the problems associated with informal settlements?

Mobility of Individuals

How can we effectively convert cemeteries into thriving, habitable environments that cater to the needs of both local residents and visitors? Lastly, how can we improve the movement and mobility of individuals within these areas?

Project aim

embracing death and life

Taking care of the local community while respecting the dead

The project focuses on developing three key aspects. Firstly, it aims to eliminate the psychological barriers of cemeteries and transform them into livable spaces where the deceased and the living can coexist. This involves preserving and respecting the rituals of the deceased by maintaining a serene atmosphere in certain areas, while also creating dynamic spaces that encourage interaction for the living. Where places can intervene and design public spaces in the northern area specifically for the local community (cemetery dwellers). These spaces should allow for children to play respectfully near the deceased, while also facilitating social interaction among people.

Secondly, the project aims to improve the overall quality of infrastructure and public spaces within informal residential areas, with a particular focus on enhancing the neighboring buildings distribution. Currently, these concrete blocks lack properly designed spaces that cater to the needs of the local community.

Lastly, the project aims to utilize identify and design areas within the area where the locals can work and access various services such as schools and healthcare centers. Additionally, it aims to create well-designed multifunctional spaces and diverse types of markets.

Every challenge tackles a certain SDG.
However, I believe all the goals are overlapped in the end

Insufficient work + study environments	Accessability + Infrstaracture enhancement	Public spaces
DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	NO POVERTY	SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
Introducing new places or adaptive reusing old buildings to study/work.	City of the Dead has a lot of lost potentials. Starting from the 21 historical monuments presence in the site to the royal and other cemeteries. By connecting the neighborhood and make it accessabile, the flow of people will increase which will help the locals to gain value from this flow.	Social interaction within the cemeteries remain a huge obstacle, specially at night. By dedsigning a decent place to interact it will enhance the sense of community in the area.

Author: Tamara Abdul Hadi

Methods

First method
Site visit (qualitative)

Second method
Site analysis through mappings (qualitative)

Creation of the toolbox for the design process

Lack of Accessibility	Public Spaces	Lack of a decent place to work + study

1

The presence of   Cemeteries
the Dead

Type of cemeteries in terms of
- Religion
- Gender
- Levels of privacy

1

Informal public spaces

Mapping of the surround-
ing services they created
for social interaction

1

Housing   Cemetery Dwellers
urban pockets

1- Functions of the existing housing
Is the ground floor left for work and upper
floors for living?
2- Quality of the buildings
3- Buildings Height

2

Connectivity
informal mobility +
Modes of transportation

- Transportation hub
- Tuktuk lines
- Microbuses lines on the small
and large scale connecting city
of the dead to the rest of Cairo

2

Social interaction

- day   - night

2

Associations and Services

- cultural centers   - schools
- relegious centers   - universities
- vocational centers   - places of work

3

Historical monuments

- Functions

Third method
Follow-along participant observation FAPO and Interviews (qualitative)

In order to gain in-depth understanding of how they
live, work and socialize

Cemetery dwellers

Woman/Man

Boy/Girl

What do you think
of the Dead?

what does it feel to
live with the dead?

Do you work?
Where?

What are the main
challenges that are
you facing?

What are the
main problems/
challenges are you
facing?

What do you hope
for the future for
City of the Dead?

Play?

What do you think
of the Dead?

what does it feel to
live with the dead?

Do you social-
ize/play with ur
friends?

during the day and
night?

What are the
main problems/
challenges are you
facing?

What do you hope
for the future for
your neighbor-
houd?

Timeline + Reference Literature

	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12	W13	W14	W15	W16	W17	W18	W19	W20	W21	W22
literature reiew																						
site visit+analysis																						
IFAPO Interviews																						
Search for reference projects + mappings																						
Strategies +deaign					preliminary																	
Midterm																						
finalize drawings																						
Greenlight																						
final present																						
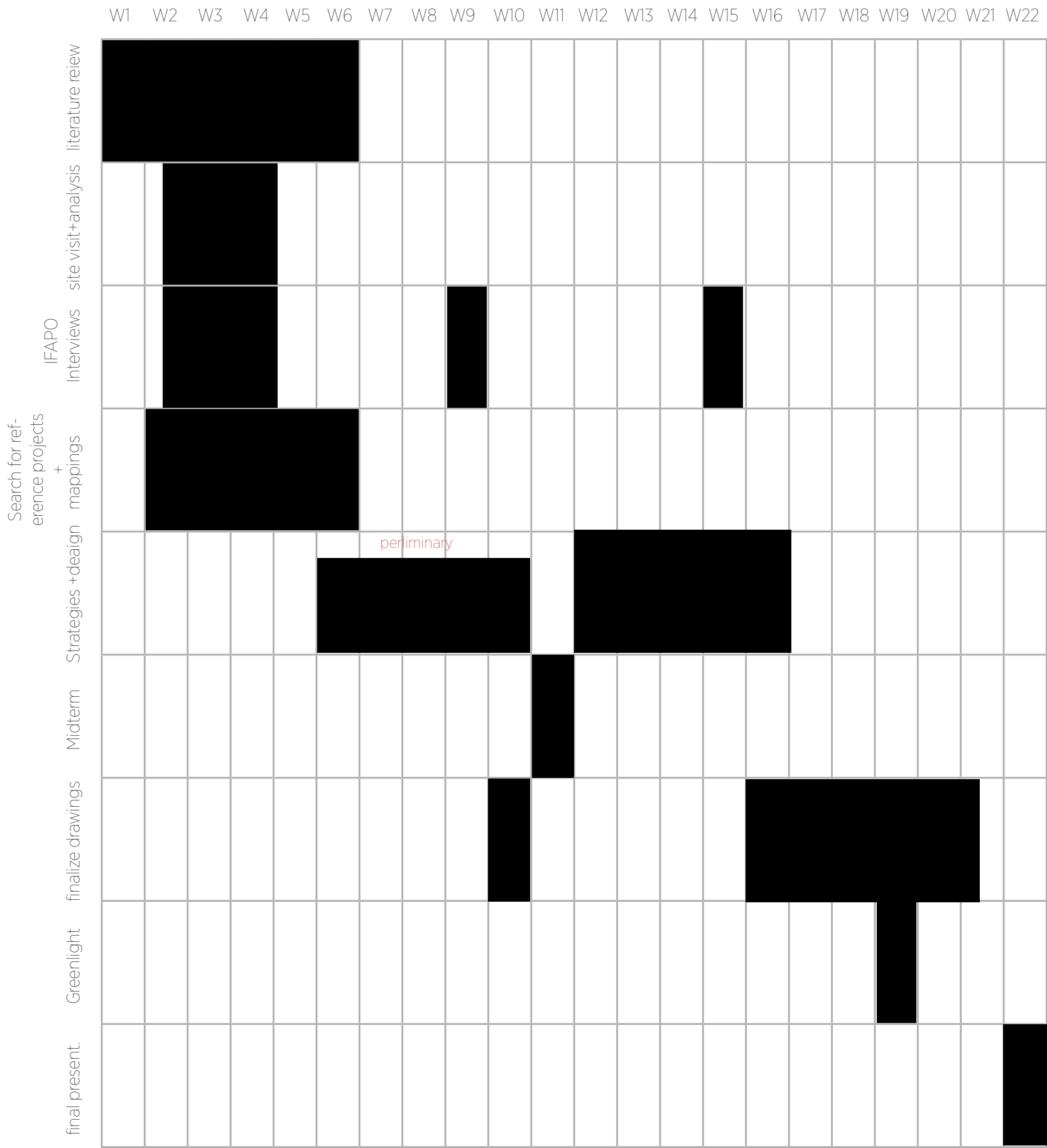
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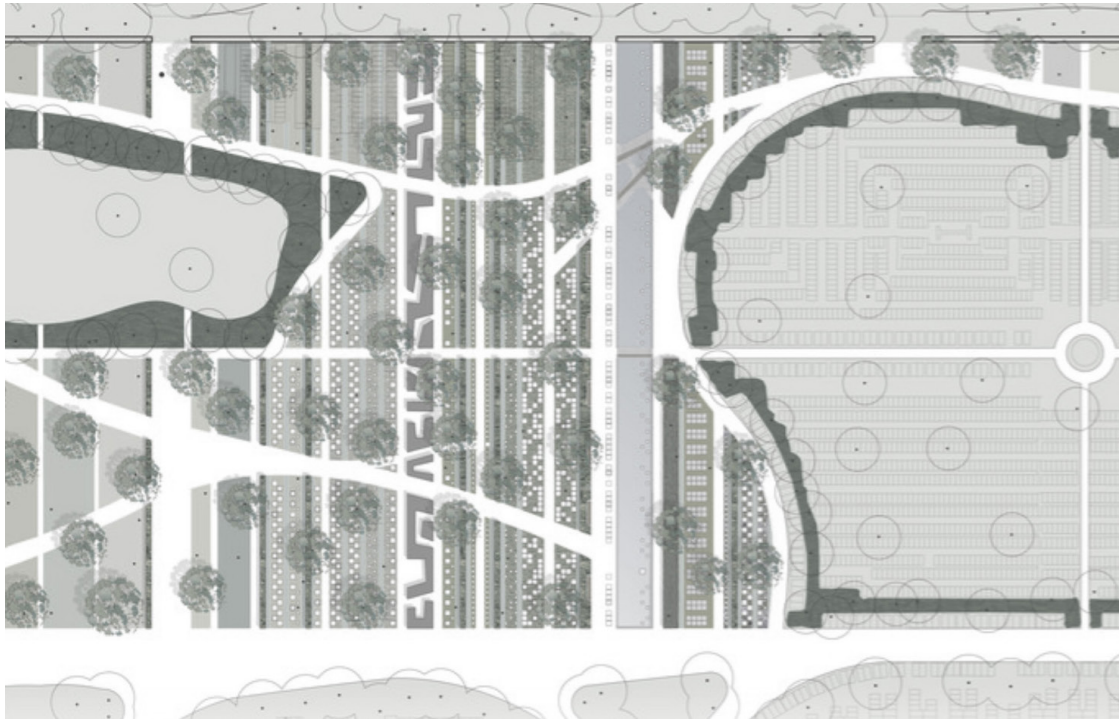
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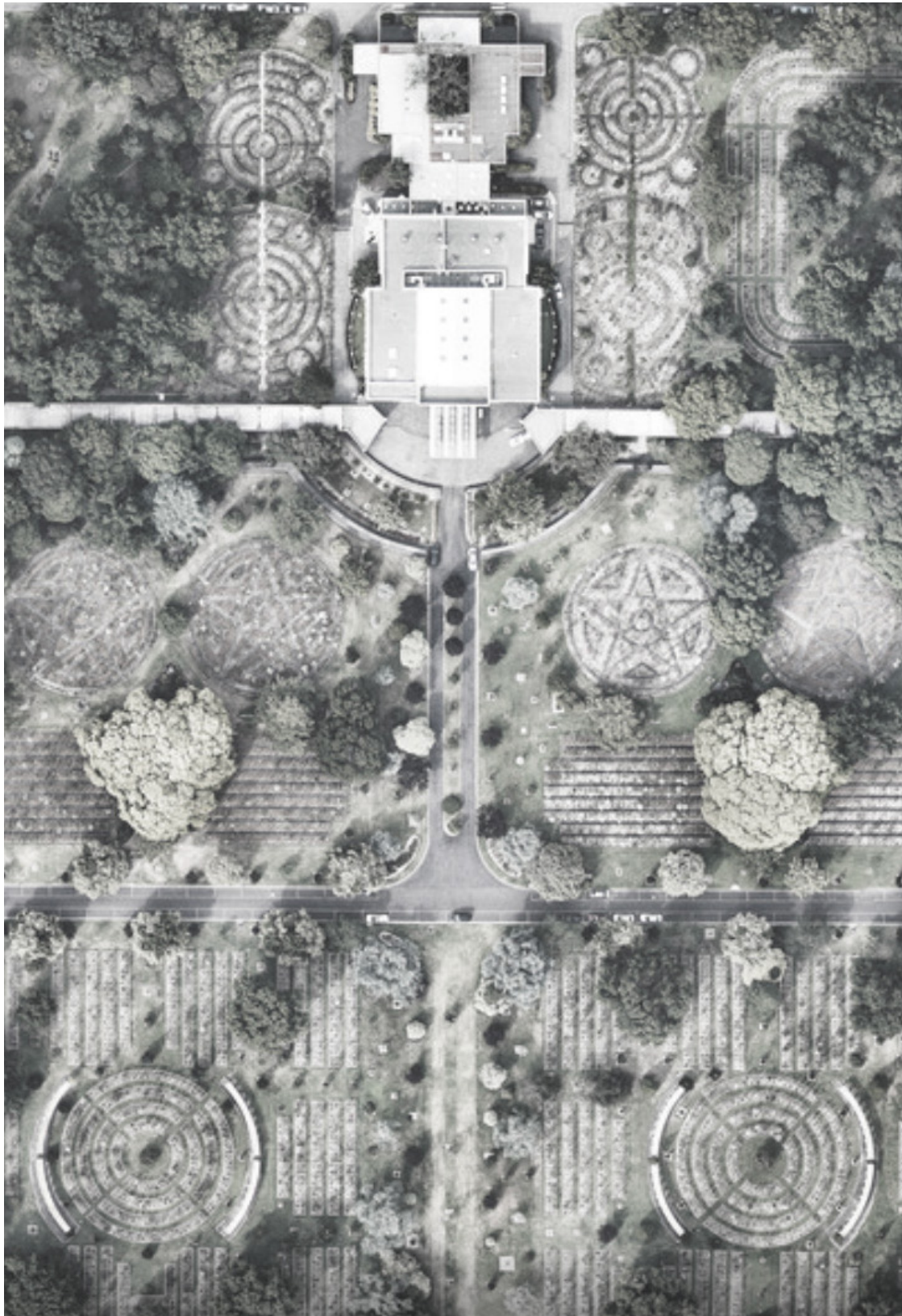
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Dawar El Ezba Cultural Center, Cairo Egypt

No More Room for the Living or the Dead: Exploring the Future for Burials in Asia