

THIS

TIME

TOMORROW



This Time Tomorrow

an Alternative for Thurgauerstrasse

Anna Clocchiatti
Diploma Project HS20
Topic B - Thurgauerstrasse
Prof. Adam Caruso
Assistants: Emilie Appercé, Claudio Schneider,
Benjamin Groothuijse

www.thistimetomorrowwww.com



Introduction

The very first approach to the site was a bike ride through Thurgauerstrasse and Grubenackerstrasse. The neighborhood of Grubenacker seemed, at first sight, to be a very detached reality from what the other side of the street looked like: on the one hand, six to seven-story buildings constitute a staggered scenography made of shiny facades, panoramic terraces and hot fitness studio members; on the other hand, the single-family neighborhood inhabited by older couples with their old trees, fresh eggs and weekly live concerts offers apple juice and friendly chats.

The physical mediator between those two realities is the second-largest “empty” buildable lot owned by the city of Zurich. This piece of land is subject to the regulation of the *Gestaltungsplanpflicht*. Based on a *Testplanung* made in 2014, the city developed a much-discussed public *Gestaltungsplan*, whose explicit aim is to “create a good urban transition between the central zone Z6 along Thurgauerstrasse and the adjoining residential zones W3 and W2 as well as the guarantee of appropriate access” (Öffentlicher *Gestaltungsplan* «Thurgauerstrasse Teilgebiete A und C–F Wohnen/Gewerbe», Zürich 19.12.2017), which means everything and nothing at the same time. Next to a new school and a park, facing an arrey of semi-empty buildings, 700 brand new apartments for 1800 people should be planned and built in the coming years. For different reasons that go beyond the height of the buildings, a referendum against the *Gestaltungsplan* was successfully submitted. At the end of November 2020, the population of Zurich has however voted yes to the planning. Nevertheless, the rather big disagreement (40% of the voters) with the

proposal of the city shows that the discussion on the topic is not over yet.

This master’s thesis attempts to question some of the planning aspects of the district around Thurgauerstrasse and proposes an alternative to the city’s intention and to the current regulations – keeping in mind that now is the time to act for society matters such as sustainability, solidarity, the right to affordable housing and to city spaces that allow appropriation.

Many questions followed the on-site analysis: could there be a way to develop a district that does not look at single longitudinal plots, but imagines a common future along Thurgauerstrasse by looking at the post-modern buildings in the same way as one looks at the *Quartiertreff*? What existing resources can play a role in the transformative development of the district? Is there a way that this last big unbuilt lot owned by the city could, together with the almost empty existing buildings that surround it, offer alternative public spaces? What benefits could there be, if one extended the *Gestaltungsplanpflicht* to the other side of the street? Or what alternative planning tools to the *Gestaltungsplan* can one come up with when looking at the place as a whole?

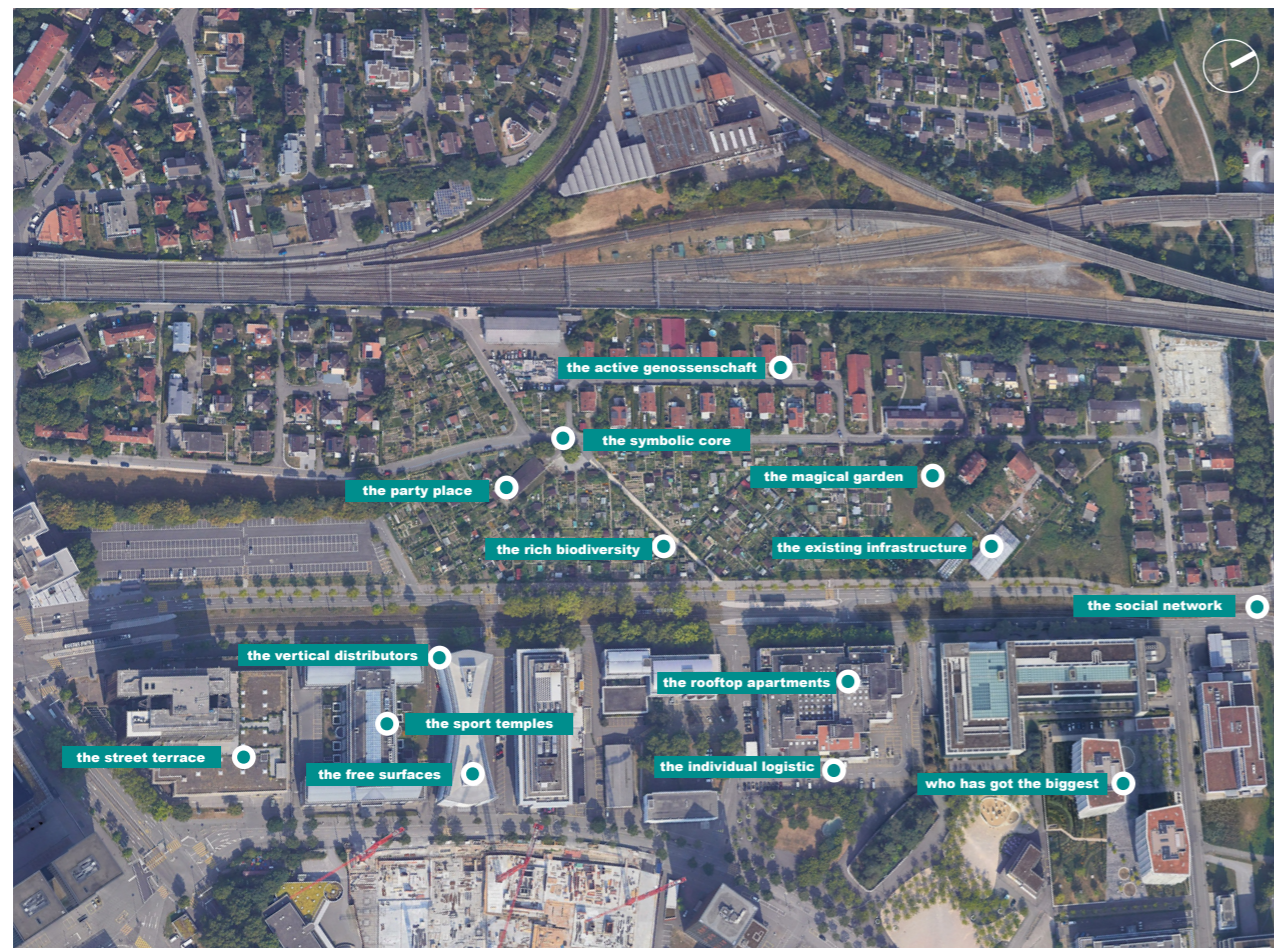
In order to try to give an answer to these questions, existing phenomena are observed, named, discussed with the actors and catalogued. These phenomena work as resources for intervention and the creation of a new public field (*das Thurgauerfeld*) which again, together with a set of rules, lay a basis for what could become an alternative future urban development of the site.

Catalogue of Potential

In order to understand which phenomena characterize the perimeter, define this perimeter, map those phenomena and see the full potential of the site, a catalogue of potential is created. This catalogue is based on observations, interviews and research both on-site and online, through confrontations with local residents, as well as with employees and passers-by. Residents of the Grubenacker district were met first spontaneously and then in an organized meeting with the board of the Interessengemeinschaft Grubenacker and of the Wohngeniessenschaft Grubenacker. In addition, an interview with Freek Persyn, professor for Architecture and Urban Transformation and

author with his office 51n4e of one of the Testplanungen for Thurgauerstrasse West, aimed to capture the site's potential from a different perspective and to understand through which strategies this potential could be exploited and/or improved. More generally, the catalogue aims to look for the site's hidden potential rather than for problems that should be solved.

The catalogue consists of 14 elements that are described through a text, a list of characteristics (such as ownerships, use, care,...) one or more pictures, a specific title and a bar that shows whether the potential is site specific or generic within the perimeter.



“Well, one provocation that you could make is, if all of this is empty, why don't we turn this into housing first, before you start building the other one?”

- Freek Persyn, Architect and Professor for Architecture & Urban Transformation

The Free Surfaces

Ownership: mostly private
 Care: different
 Users: none
 Use: none
 Roof: yes
 Access: through the building

The series of office buildings on the east side of Thurgauerstrasse has evident vacancy problems. The buildings from the 80s and 90s do not seem to be attractive for new offices anymore due not only to the working crisis itself but also to their outdated layout (of spaces and facilities). It is said that an average of 25-30% of the surfaces are now empty, and numbers are constantly growing. A paradigmatic change in the planning of the whole neighborhood/district could be the clue to a repopulation of the buildings, which might hide more qualities than at first sight.



Öffentlicher Gestaltungsplan «Thurgauerstrasse Teilgebiete A und C-F Wohnen/Gewerbe»

Zürich-Seebach, Kreis 11, Kanton Zürich

Bericht nach Art. 47 RPV



Kritik von allen Seiten an Mega-Wohnprojekt in Seebach

Politiker haben überraschend viele Bedenken wegen des Neubau-Quartiers Thurgauerstrasse in Zürich-Nord. Fraktionen von links und rechts fordern gar einen Neuanfang.

Abg. Abstimmung vom 29. November

Ist die Überbauung vor Baubeginn bereits veraltet?

Die Stadtzürcher stimmen über den Bau von 700 Wohnungen in Seebach ab. «Musterplanung», sagt die Stadt, «Pflästerlipolitik», sagen die Gegner.

Städtebau geht heute anders

Da lobt die Stadt Zürich für jeden Kiosk einen Architekturwettbewerb aus, aber für die grosse Baulandreserve an der Thurgauerstrasse begnügt sie sich mit einer Testplanung. Eine Stimmempfehlung.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

In Zürich wird darüber gestritten, wie man ein Quartier für 2000 Einwohner aus dem Boden stampft

Am 29. November wird über den Gestaltungsplan Thurgauerstrasse West abgestimmt. Soll die Hochhaussiedlung im Norden Zürichs gebaut werden wie geplant? Oder wären Alternativen möglich, wie die Gegner behaupten?

Arguments

The creation of new legislation as a substitute for the Gestaltungsplan constitutes the core of this master's thesis. Articulated in seven guidelines, the text sets the new canons that could function as the basis for the future development of the district. Along with regulations about sustainability and solidarity, the most radical guideline introduces a **building moratorium on new constructions** within the perimeter, which stretches between Leutschenbachstrasse and the railway tracks west of Grubenackerstrasse. Together with a redistribution of the surfaces of the existing buildings, taking into account

the amount of vacant space and its future increase, the office buildings on the west side are converted step by step into affordable community housing by involving both new and existing Wohnbaugenossenschaften. On both sides, existing buildings are extended in order to increase the population density without building new constructions. Two case studies, the GVZ building and the single family houses, are shown in order to understand the potential for conversion of the existing buildings.

Seven Rules

- I. Make no profit on the ground
- II. Demand sustainability
- III. Construct resilience
- IV. Mantain solidarity
- V. Accept change
- VI. Provide space for discussion, planning and decision-making
- VII. Practice densification instead of expansion

“Why can’t we reverse the conditions? Why can’t we comprehend architecture in a way that we simply rewrite the texts?”

- Arno Brandhuber: *Legislating Architecture*

I. Make no profit on the ground

- ▶ *“Mietendeckel”*: all rental costs are frozen.
- ▶ All vacant surfaces are given directly in Baurecht to Wohnbaugenossenschaften or expropriated by the city in order to provide affordable residential space.
- ▶ The amount of built surface is proportional to what the site can support in terms of accessibility and facilities. The surfaces are to be understood as a flexible resource.

II. Demand sustainability

- ▶ A 2000-watt certificate is required in all three phases of the densification process: planning, construction and maintenance.
- ▶ New forms of energy production within building extensions that go beyond the canton’s norms are allowed to be installed and tried on the perimeter.

III. Construct resilience

- Fast changes in the use of buildings are allowed, as long as the public interest is guaranteed.
- In-between and temporary uses are the basis for improved flexibility within the area.
- The *Thurgauerfeld* and the spaces between the buildings must be arranged in order to allow appropriation.

IV. Mantain solidarity

- ▶ A board responsible for the examinations of intervention proposals, as well as for the temporary building permissions, is created.
- ▶ The board consists of a group of diverse people that represent all the actors who play a role in the development: building owners, the city of Zurich, residents, Wohnbaugenossenschaften. The board is elected democratically every year.

V. Accept change

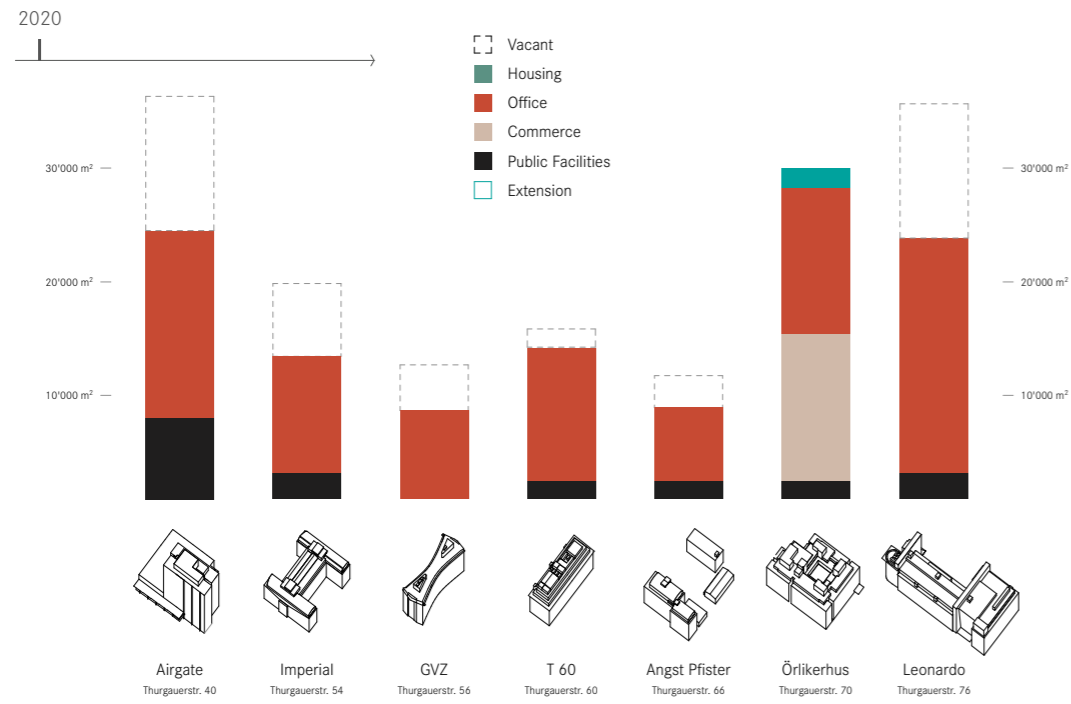
- ▶ This set of rules must be reviewed and adjusted every year.
- ▶ Long bureaucratic processes are to be avoided. In this sense, the task force is allowed to grant building and/or conversion permissions without the city’s or the canton’s approval. The aim is to allow temporary uses and conversions to take place more rapidly.
- ▶ The perimeter constitutes a living laboratory for future development transformations.

VI. Provide space for discussion, planning and decision-making

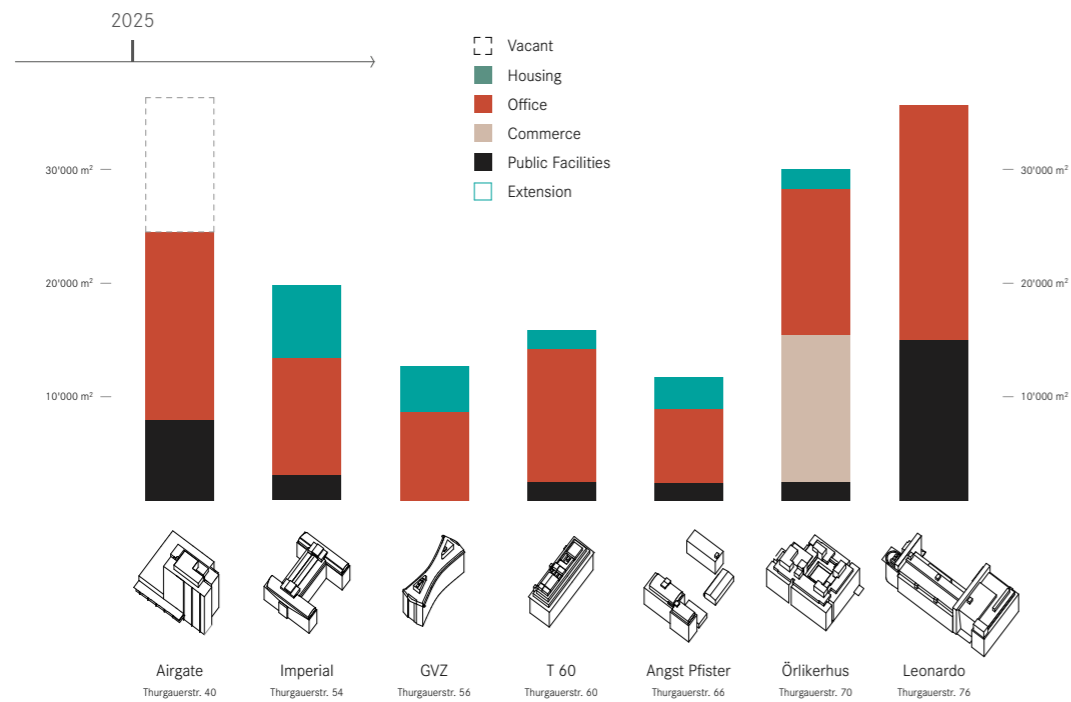
- ▶ The board’s meetings are open to the public.
- ▶ Meetings take place regularly every month and within the perimeter. A calendar is published at the beginning of the year.
- ▶ Proposals for activities within the perimeter and for temporary constructions can be submitted by every resident.

VII. Practice densification instead of expansion

- ▶ A building moratorium on new constructions is imposed within the whole area.
- ▶ All possibilities of extending existing buildings must be examined and eventually carried out.
- ▶ There are no minimal distances from other buildings for extensions. Light, air quality and free-space must be guaranteed.
- ▶ Building extensions may be built over Thurgauerstrasse - as long as sufficient space for circulation and road maintenance are guaranteed.

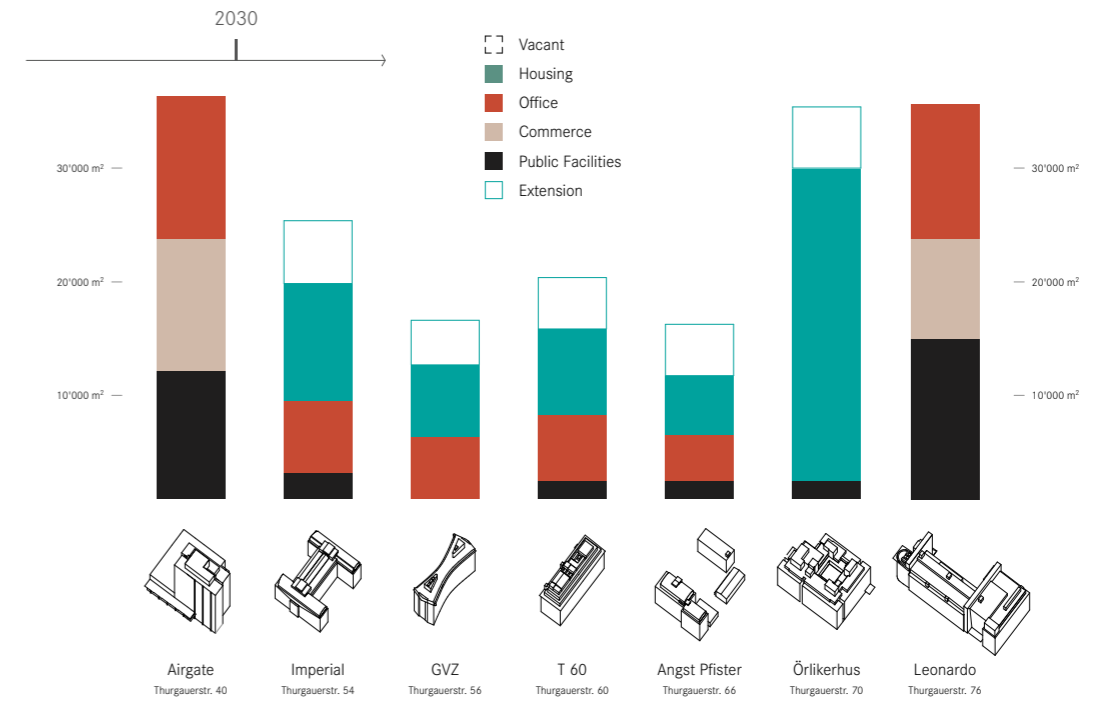


Step 1: 2020
The buildings show a big amount of vacant space while the main program remains office.

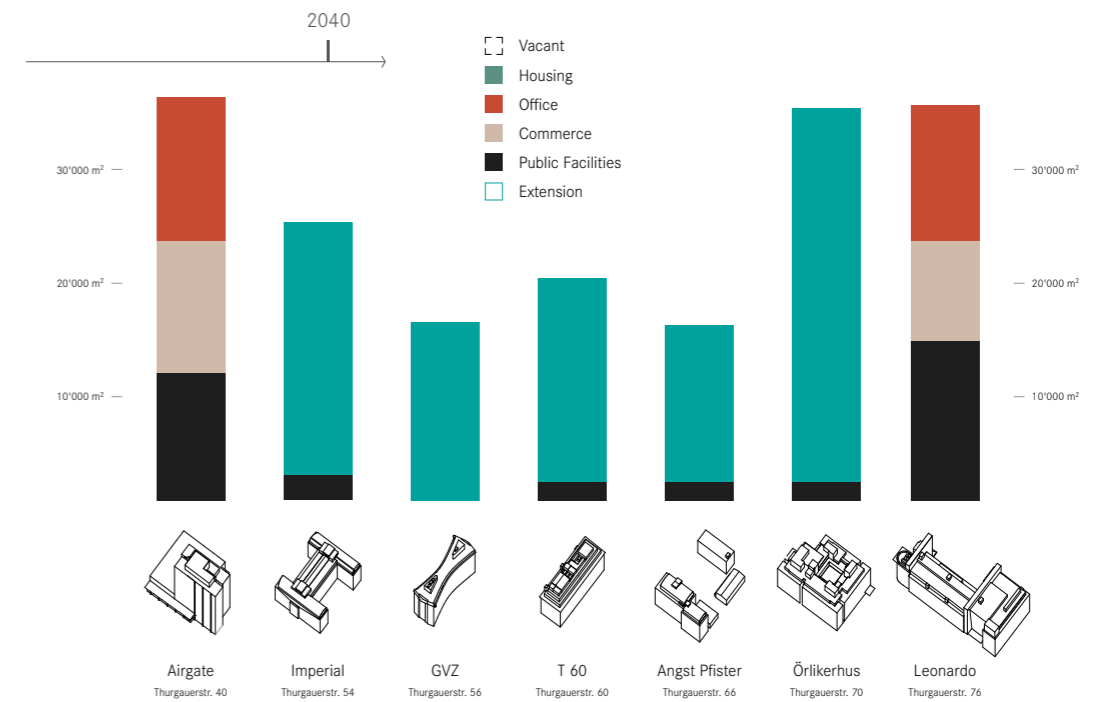


Step 2: 2025
The vacant surfaces are converted into community housing by involving housing cooperatives. The Leonardo building hosts the Thurgauerstrasse primary school.

Future Occupation of Existing Buildings



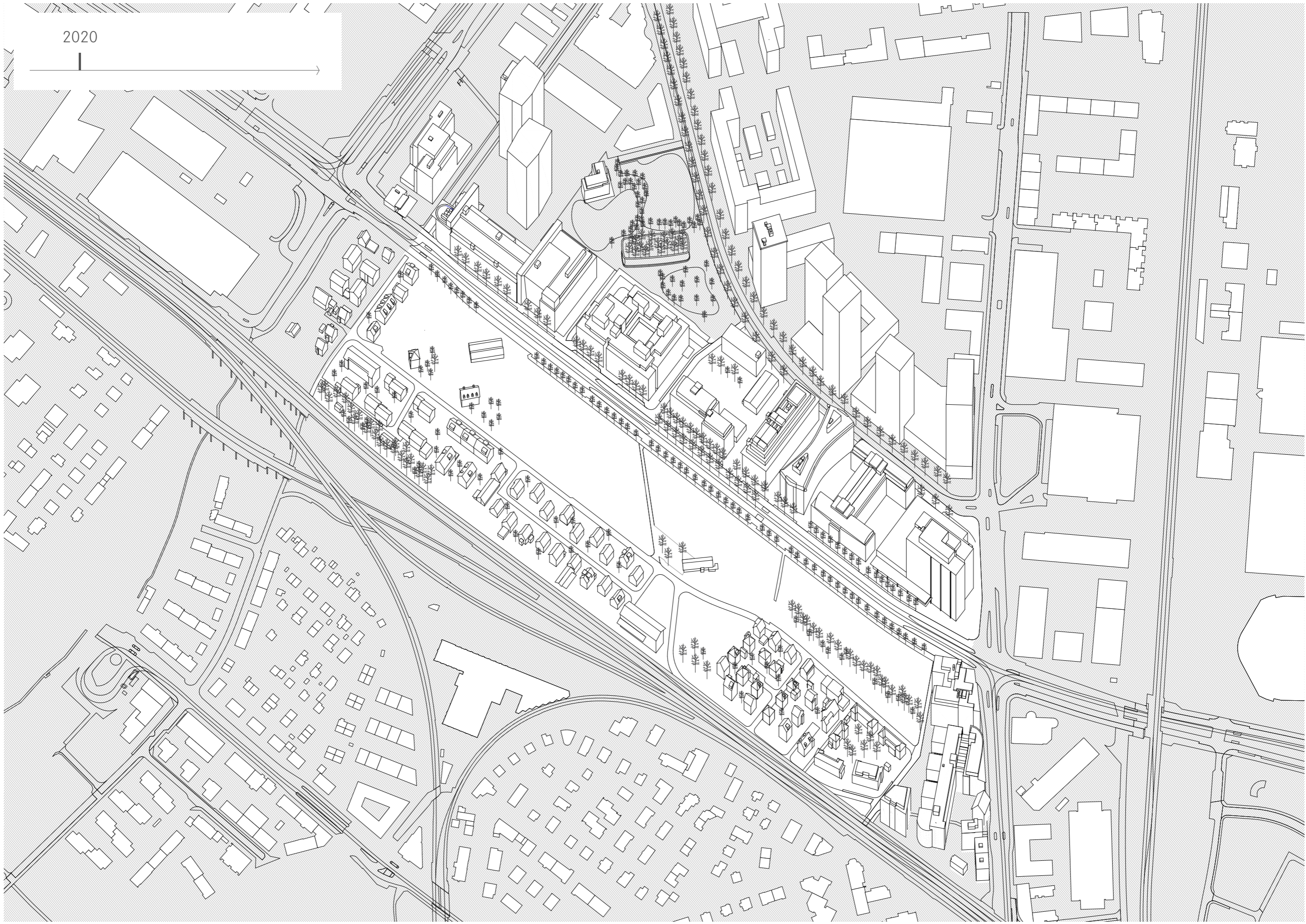
Step 3: 2030
While offices leave the buildings step by step, more and more surface is converted into housing. Moreover, the housing buildings are extended vertically by adding two or three story. The Bau-recht of Oerlikerhus falls and a new one is created - with a Wohnbaugenossenschaft.

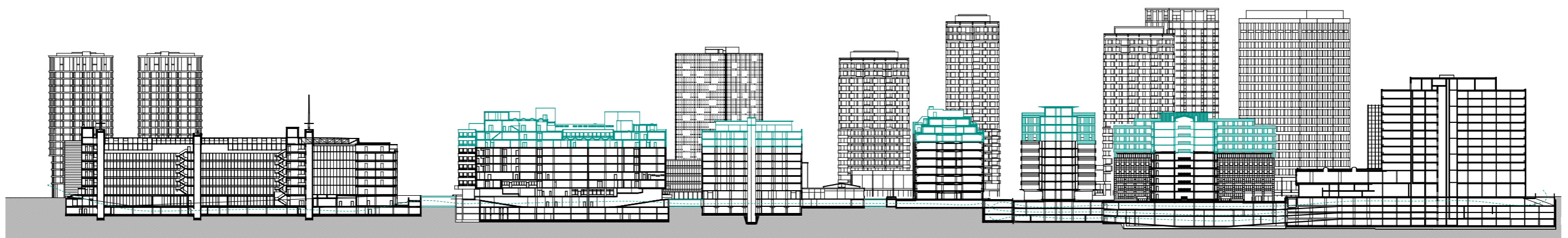


Step 4: 2040
Offices have definitively left Thurgauerstrasse. The only exception are some coworking offices in the Leonardo and the city administration's offices in the Airgate. The buildings in between are fully converted into housing. **The amount of housing surface planned on Thurgauerstrasse West is reached and surpassed.**

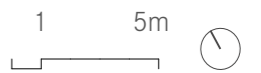
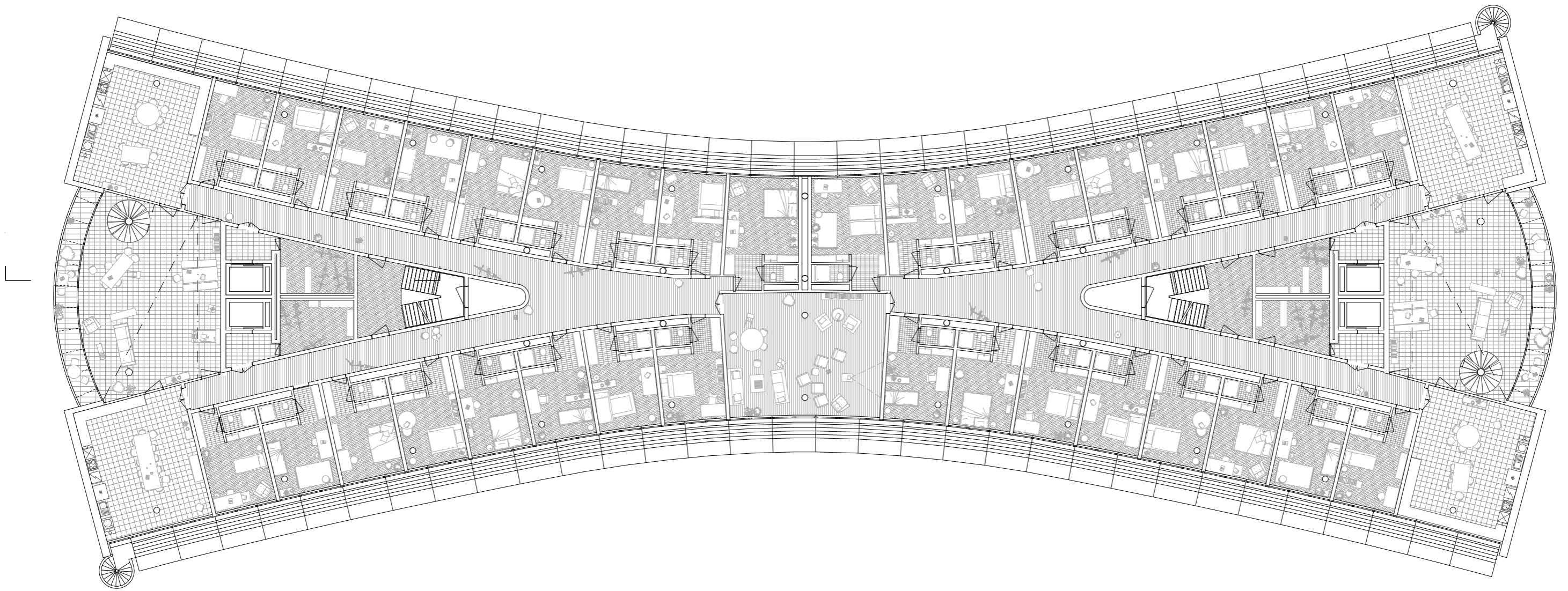
Future Occupation of Existing Buildings

2020





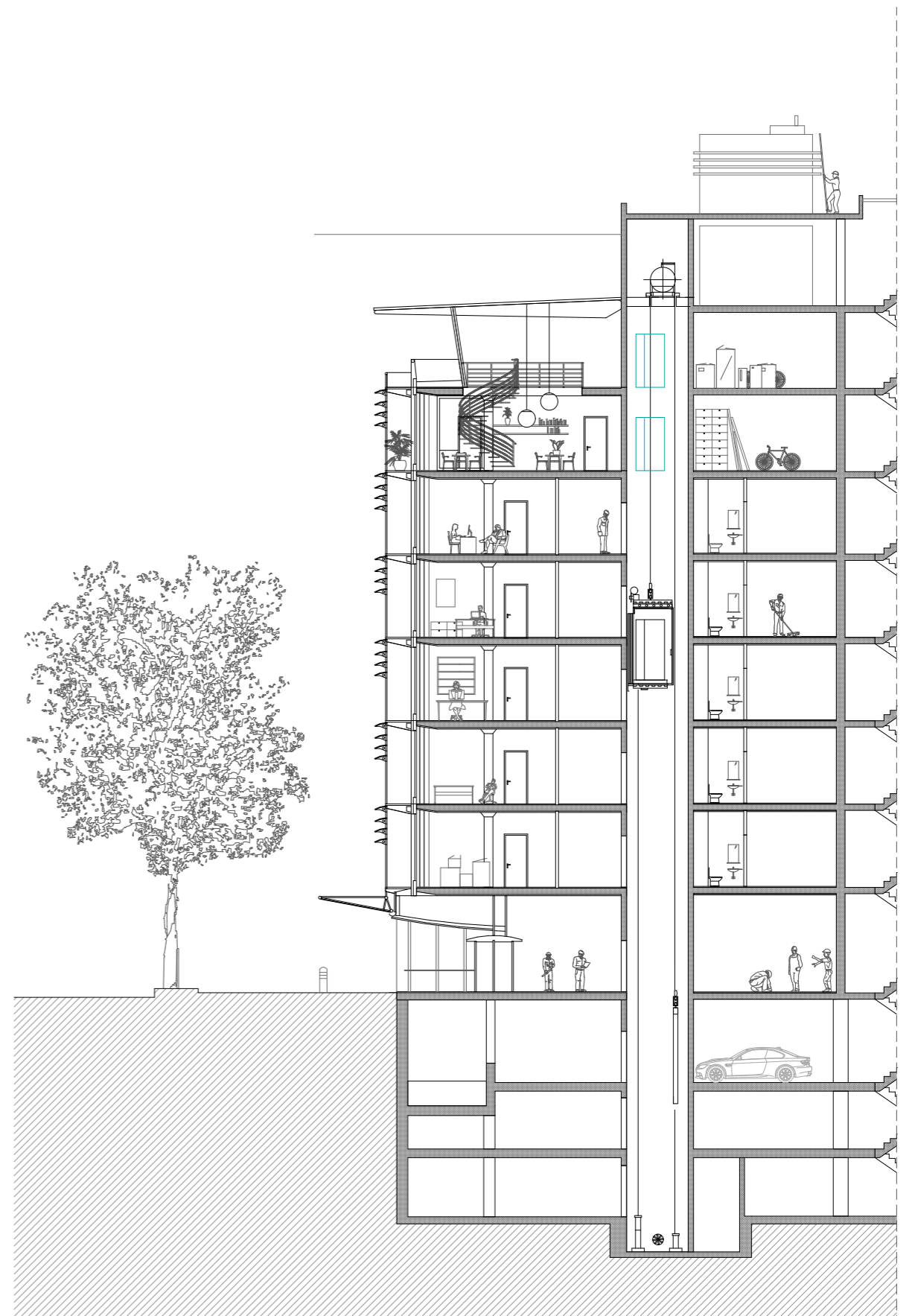
Section through the East side of Thurgauerstrasse
Vertical extensions and transformation of the basement into one big uninterrupted garage



Sixth Floor - GVZ Office Building converted into Student Housing

“These places could retell the history of recent urban development and break the cycle of ‘tabula rasa’ that is repeated every 30 years.”

- (from German) Lucio Crignola, Tobia Rapelli: *Fremde Körper, vergessene Konstellationen*

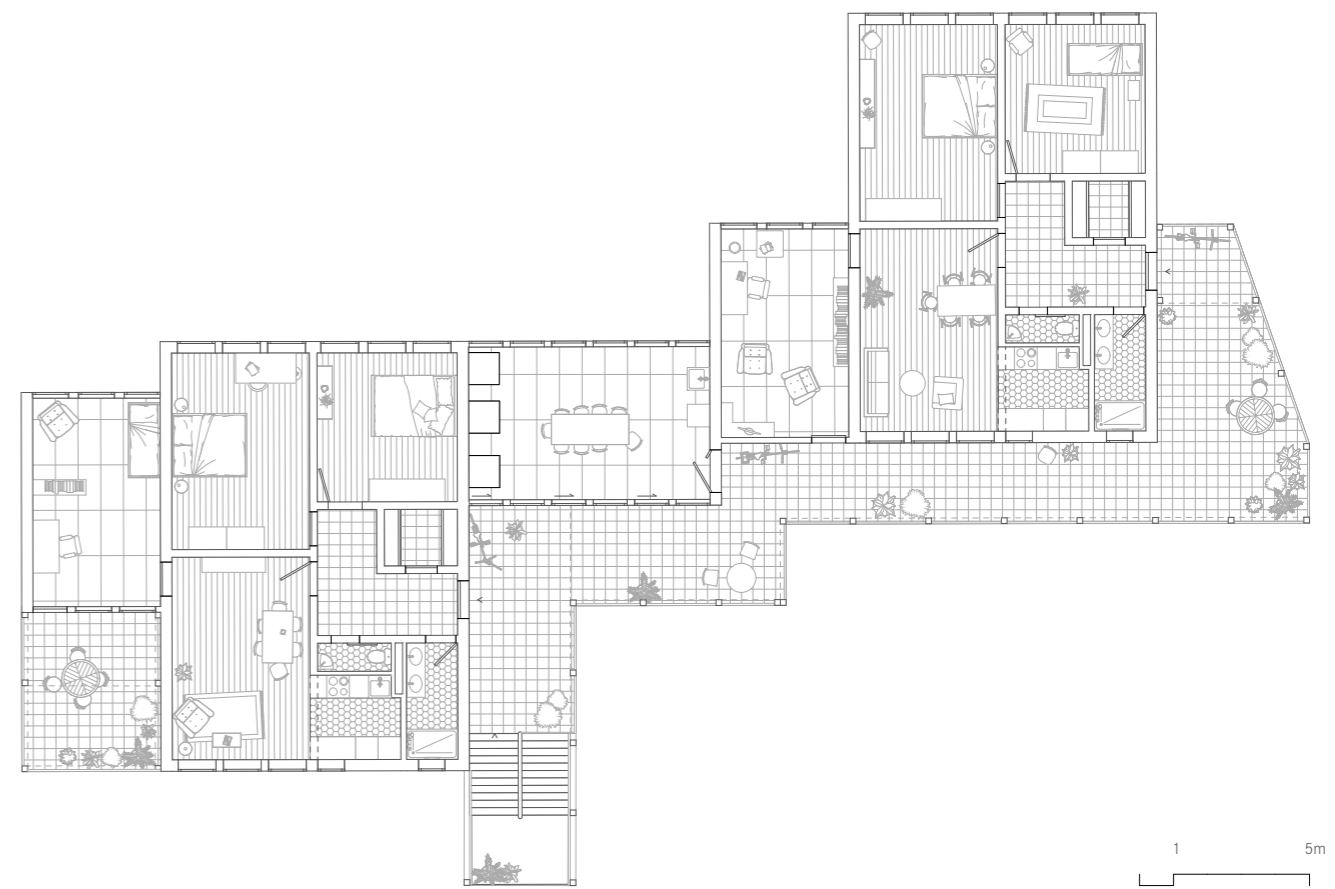


1 5m

Section through the vertical core



Transformation of the single family neighborhood



Second Floor - More shared forms of living

Das Thurgauerfeld

The 65'000 m² city land on Thurgauerstrasse West becomes a big public space that not only enhances configurations that already take place within the perimeter, but also hosts new activities and possible future scenarios. *Das Thurgauerfeld* is planned in order to allow for a high degree of appropriation and concerns sports, gardening, animals, free time and events.

The richly cultivated soil inherited by the *Schrebergärten* becomes the perfect basis for two new types of gardening: the first, community gardens, are managed by action groups such as the experimental landscape group or the vineyard group; secondly, individual gardens can be allotted with a maximum size of 8 m². This prevents a strict privatization of land and the phenomenon of exclusivity that characterizes the *Schrebergärten* - without taking away the possibility of individual experimentation.

Different temporary constructions are added to the site. For example, a long and thin roof structure for gardening tools and water collection for cultivation also serves as a physical separation from the street. The existing farming structures (greenhouses, animal farming) are also kept and their use is maintained.

A roof construction is added next to the existing central *Quartiertreff* (the *Schützenhaus*). This is renovated and turned into a kitchen where different workshops can take place,

also in collaboration with the gardens. A wood-fired oven and the fruit press are also part of this intervention.

A one-kilometer-long running and cycling track surrounds the Thurgauerfeld and makes it an attractive spot not only for part-time Sunday joggers, but also for the fitness studio members' popular warm-up. The different smells that emanate from the different areas of the track make it a beloved route for many visitors, which have recently come even from Glattpark. The loop works together with the new ZüriFit Anlage and new tennis courts or general sports fields. The sport infrastructure also includes the badi on the rooftop of the base of the city-owned Airgate building.

In the southern area of the plot, the pavement of the former parking lot is kept and partially turned into a skatepark and bike track but also into a flexible surface that could host different programs or events like flea markets, weekly market, open air concerts in summer or iceskating in winter.

The reprogramming of the Thurgauerfeld would have an impact not only on the district through the creation of a new public space, but also within the existing buildings that would face new domestic situations. Moreover, the project might provide a space for moments or events that have never taken place in this neighborhood and in this part of the city.

“How can architecture act in the terrain vague without becoming an aggressive instrument of power and abstract reason? Undoubtedly, through attention to continuity: not the continuity of the planned, efficient, and legitimated city but of the flows, the energies, the rhythms established by the passing of time and the loss of limits.”

- Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubio: *Terrain Vague*



New activities around Thurgauerstrasse

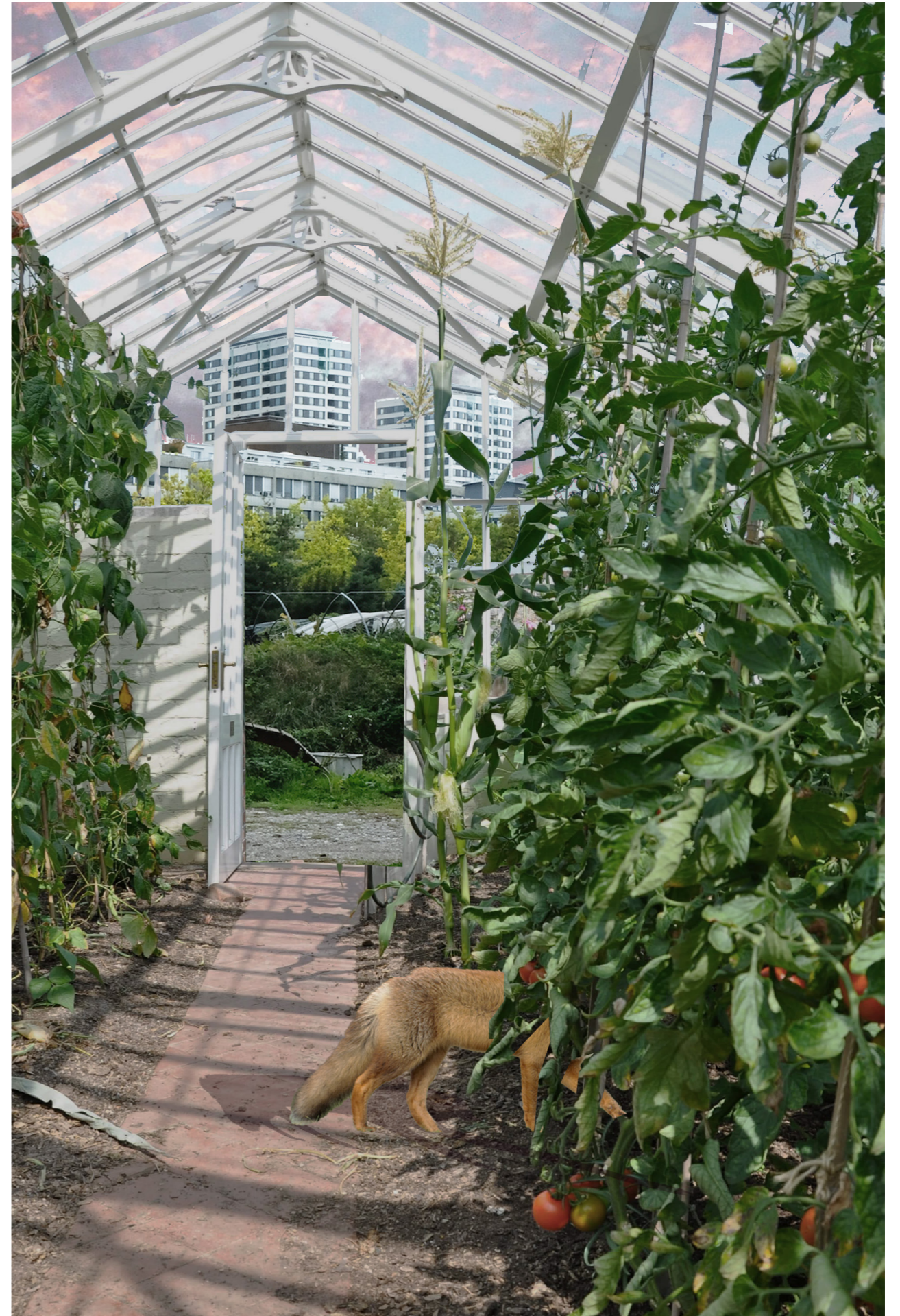




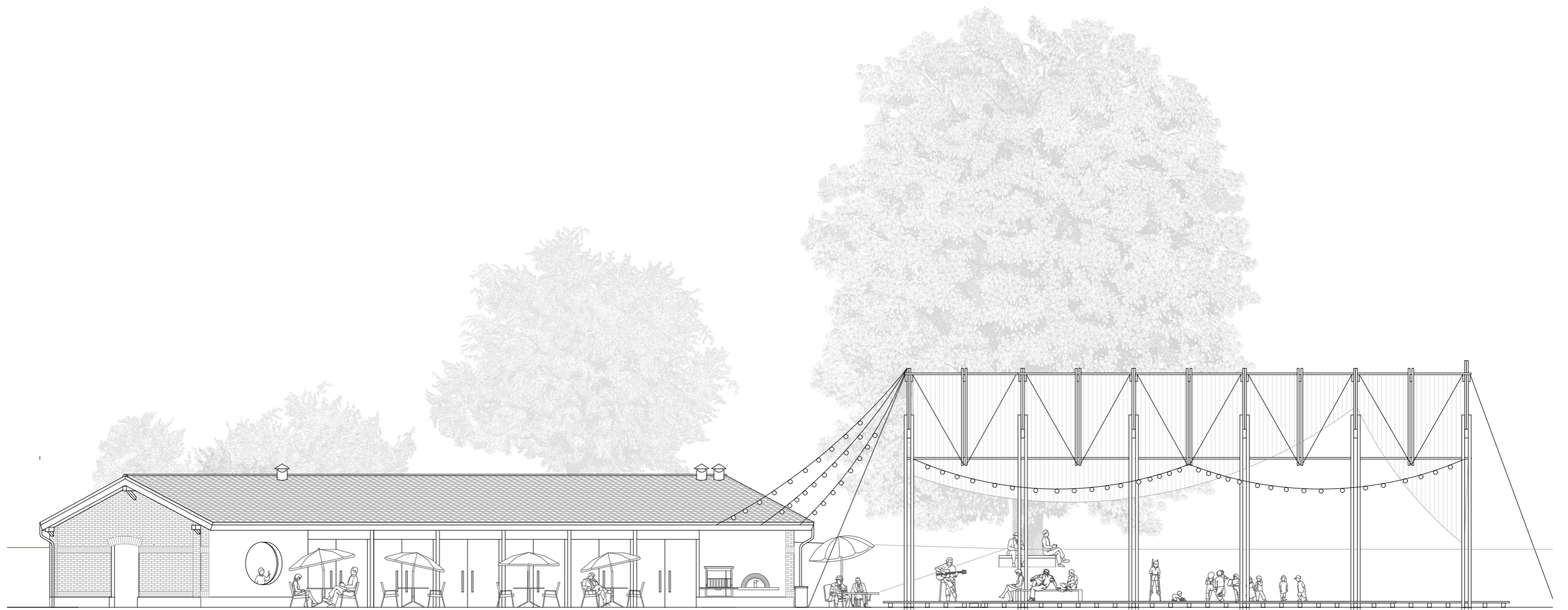
Self-initiated community gardens



New Temporary Infrastructures



Re-Use of Existing Infrastructures



Temporary constructions on the *Thurgauerfeld*



“Densification is only a means to an end and not the primary goal. We need sustainably developing and resilient cities.”

- Matthias Probst, President of the Green Party Zürich Nord

Conclusion

Moved by the real threat of the climate crisis and the role that construction plays in it, the introduction of a building moratorium within the perimeter opens new possibilities for dealing with the existing structures and for the reconsideration of the role that the largest empty urban lot owned by the city of Zurich should play.

If one looks at the building conglomerations that rise around the perimeter of Thurgauerstrasse, it is clear that the most popular planning model is that of big building clusters that work on their own, each of them with their own green space, their own ateliers, their own precise floor plans. The proposed public *Gestaltungsplan* does nothing different: it is about “similar operations which are empowering a certain kind of business, a certain type of real estate” (F. Persyn). The lack of a broader connection between the different plots is not only formally but also programmatically evident. In that sense, this project can be read as a critical approach to the general instrument of the *Bau- und Zonenordnung*, to planning as a pure top-down process as well as to the current way of planning a district that lets each defined plot be developed by single,

external investors, who fail to engage with the real environmental crisis and with the existing phenomena that characterize each neighborhood.

Although the proposed *Gestaltungsplan* was accepted by the majority of the population, a 40% of disagreement with the city’s planning shows that the discussion on how empty urban plots are planned is very much open and needs to be carried on, and so do all fundamental question on how do we want our cities to develop.

To conclude, the approach of “looking for the site’s hidden potential rather than for problems that should be solved” has, at least for this project, proven to be a very productive way to look at a site. The project claims that there is already an extreme wide range of potentials that hide around Thurgauerstrasse. Not only their acknowledgement but also the imagination of their possible futures must be seriously considered in order to lay the right basis for the planning of what will come next in the biggest empty urban lot owned by the city.

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- Events in Grubenacker, Quartiertreff: Christian Häberli (IG Grubenacker), partly modified
- Catalogue of Potential; Thurgauerfeld: Google Earth, partly modified

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The project consists of an analysis of existing potentials, a new set of rules, a redistribution of the built surface, two case studies for densification within the existing constructions and an alternative design for the strip of land that physically mediates between the two sides of Thurgauerstrasse.

Moved by the real threat of the climate crisis and the role that construction plays in it, the introduction of a building moratorium within the perimeter opens new possibilities for dealing with the existing structures and for the reconsideration of the role that the largest empty urban lot owned by the city of Zurich should play.