

The Potential of Circulation Spaces in Collective Housing

PART 2

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2025, Adrien Fleischer

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Case study

Some buildings have been designed with the intention of showcasing the potential quality of their distributive spaces. The following eight case studies illustrate what these spaces can offer to their inhabitants, highlighting in blue the fortuitous spaces of interaction, and in red the chosen communal spaces that serve specific functions, such as laundry rooms, shared terraces or other spaces dedicated to the collective.

To get a better idea of the distributive architectural qualities of these buildings, two buildings have been selected for each of the four types of distribution: core,

passageway, “rue intérieure” and hybrid. They are all represented in the same way for comparative analysis, starting with a picture of the entrance, two general plans, an axonometric view of the distribution and communal spaces, and then a plan and a photography of the appropriation of the communal spaces by the residents. This approach is based on readings, redrawings, personal visits and photographs to understand them in further detail.

01 Hammerstrasse

The Hammerstrasse project, designed by Diener & Diener between 1978 and 1981, is characterized by its 6-core distribution in the central part of the building, and 2 cores that cut through the building with a glass roof at either end (1). This system is based on a central stairwell with natural zenithal light, serving two or 4 apartments per level. The private spaces of the apartments, mainly facing the street, benefit from a certain privacy thanks to the more closed facades. In contrast, communal spaces and outdoor extensions, such as winter gardens and balconies, open generously onto the central courtyard (4), fostering interaction between neighbors and a sense of community.

The distribution design also reflects careful attention to urban and social contexts. The central courtyard, accessible and lively, contributes to the building's collective dynamic. The project demonstrates how a central core distribution can integrate functional and social qualities. The stairwells are all walk-through, giving direct access to the street or courtyard on the ground floor (3). On the top floor, access to a roof terrace (2) available to all offers a communal living space for the residents.

Location: Basel

Architect: Diener & Diener

Year: 1987

Building Type: Barre

Distribution Type: Core

Number of floor : 5

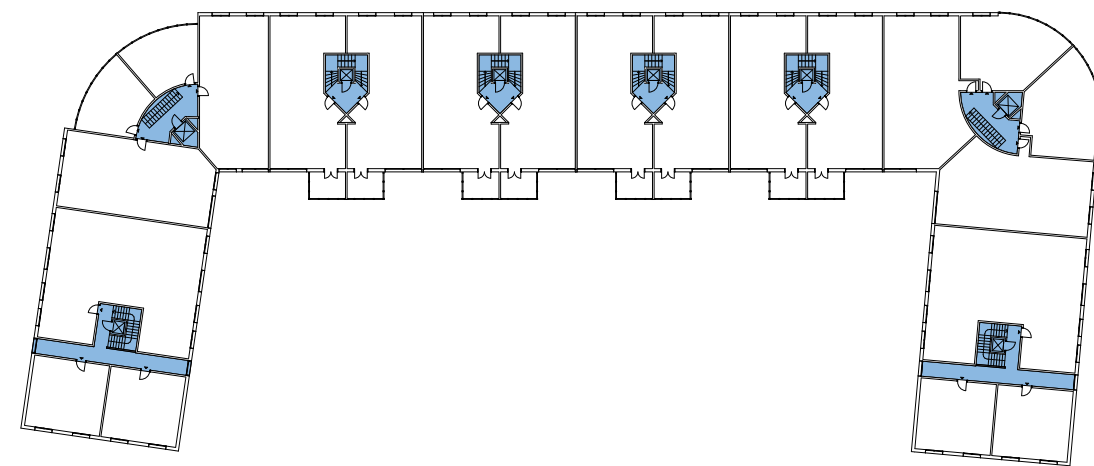
Number of apartment: 88

Number of inhabitant : 210

Apartment per bearing : 2 to 4

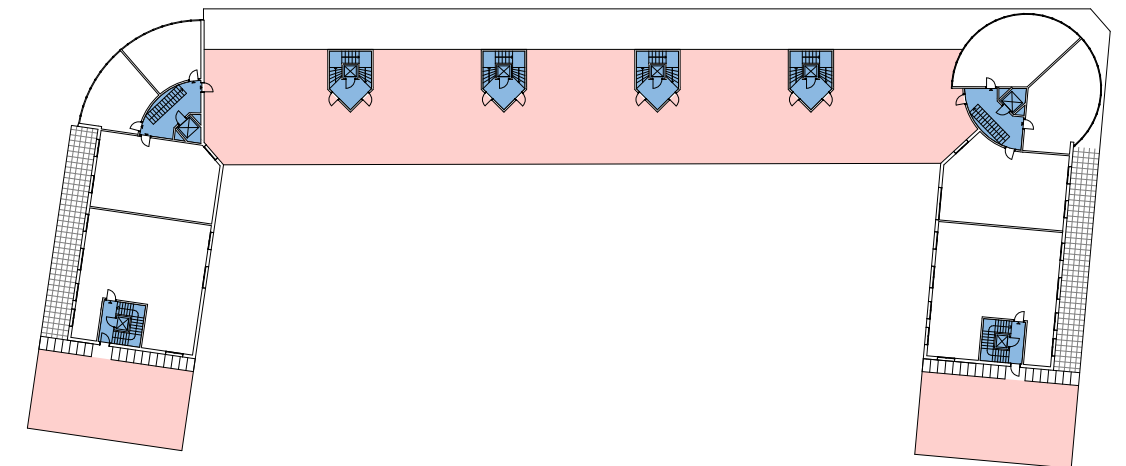


FIG 1.1 front door



10m

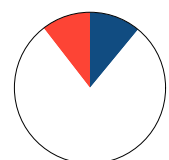
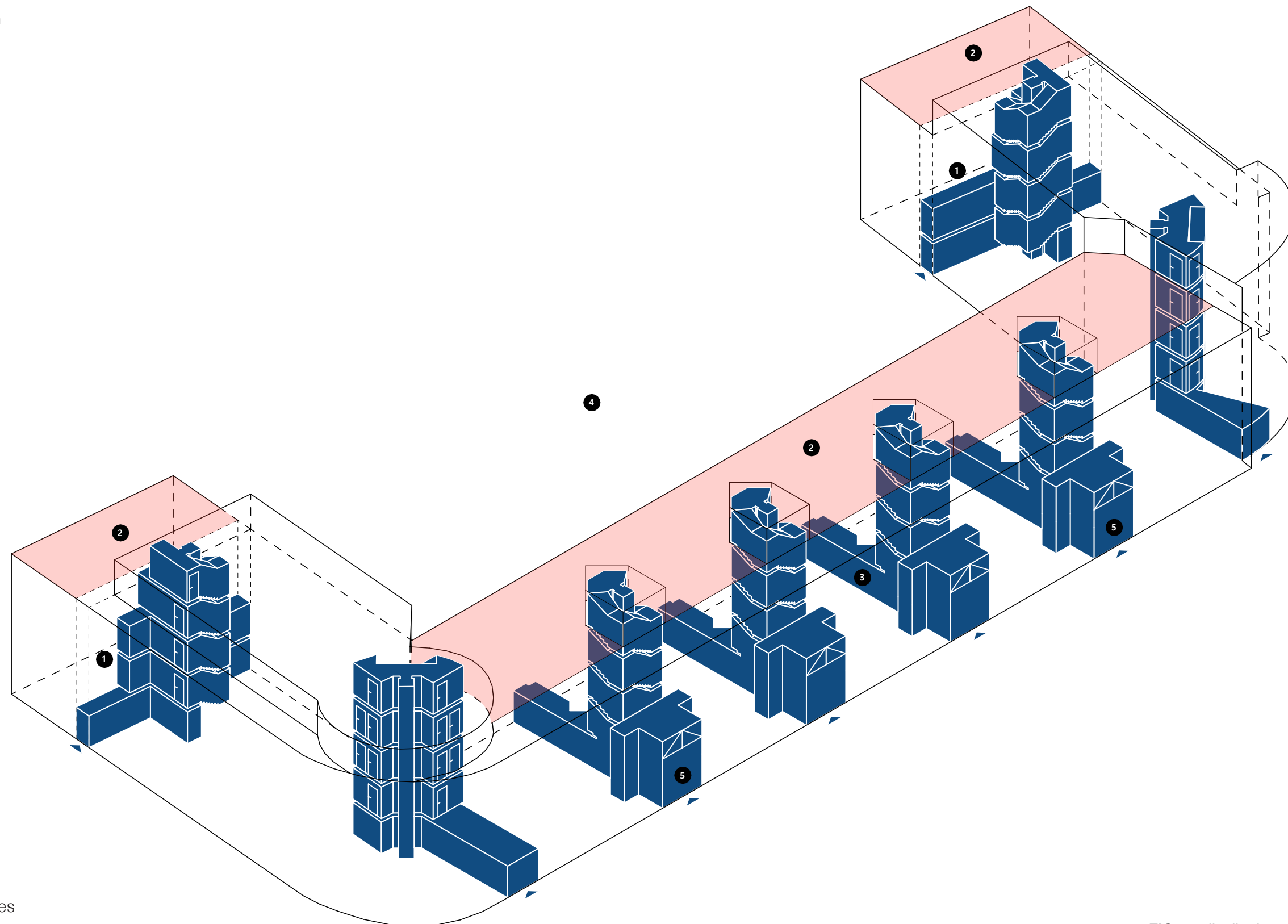
FIG 1.2 2nd floor plan



10m

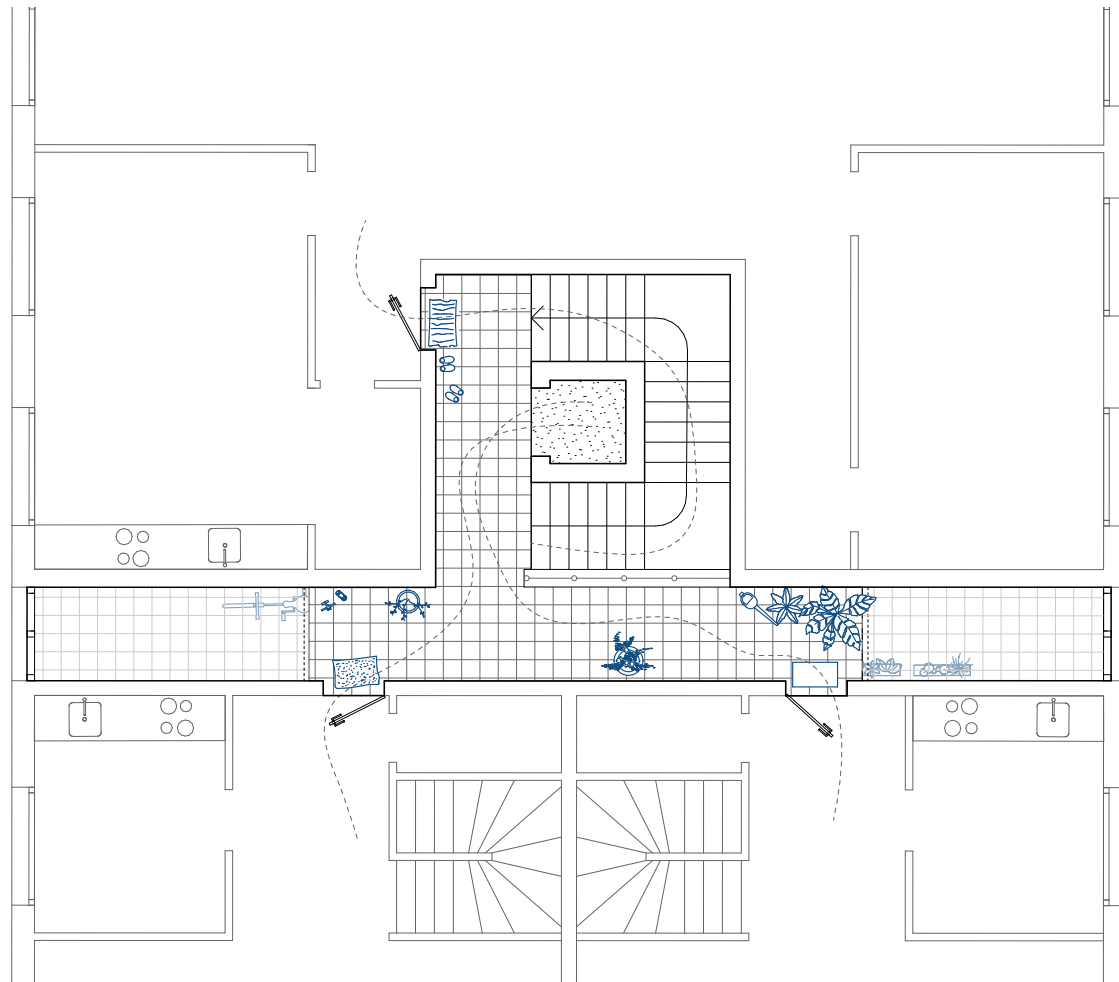
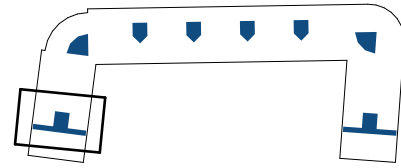
FIG 1.3 Roof plan

- ① Co-visibility
- ② Roof Terasse
- ③ Ground Floor through
- ④ Courtyard
- ⑤ Double-height Porch



■ distribution spaces
■ communal spaces

FIG 1.4 distribution skeleton 1:300



1m

FIG 1.5 Appropriation by the inhabitants



FIG 1.6 staircaises on the rooftop

02 Mehr als Wohnung

The project Mehr als Wohnung by Duplex architekten, built in Zurich in 2015, is a plot building with a central circulation core illuminated by a beautiful zenithal light (1). It has 6 stories, and each level serves 2 large flats, but as the name might suggest, the intention of this project is to go beyond purely residential units. The specificity of this project lies in the tension between coziness and privacy on the one hand, and community-building opportunities on the other. Each large flat gives access to 5 or 6 small 1- or 2-room satellite flats that share large communal spaces such as a kitchen and living room. The satellite flats represent a new form of communal living.

In addition to this new form of living, each floor shares a laundry room (3), and the communal spaces of the large flats have large windows overlooking the central core (2), which means that the circulation spaces and flats are co-visible. The circulation areas are well decorated with plants and furniture belonging to the residents, as well as some shared objects such as a piano (5) on the ground floor, which resonates in the core for all residents.

Location: Zürich

Architect: Duplex Architekten

Year: 2015

Building Type: Plot

Distribution Type: Core

Number of floor : 6

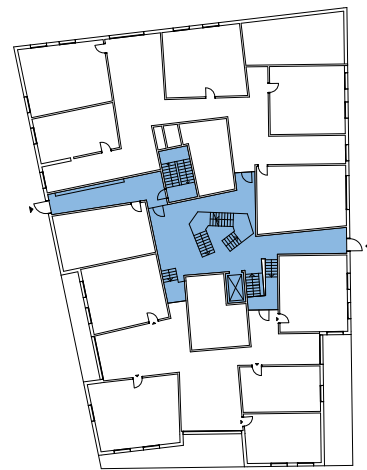
Number of apartment: 66

Number of inhabitant : 100

Apartment per bearing : 2 shared kitchen and 11 intimate apartment

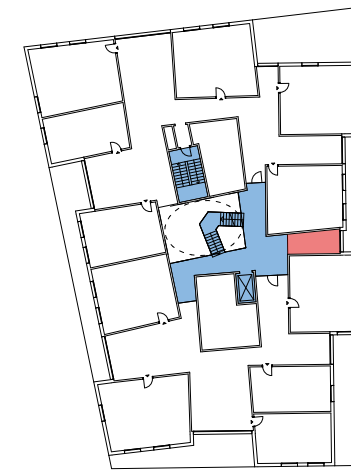


FIG 2.1 front door



10m

FIG 2.2 groundfloor plan



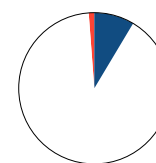
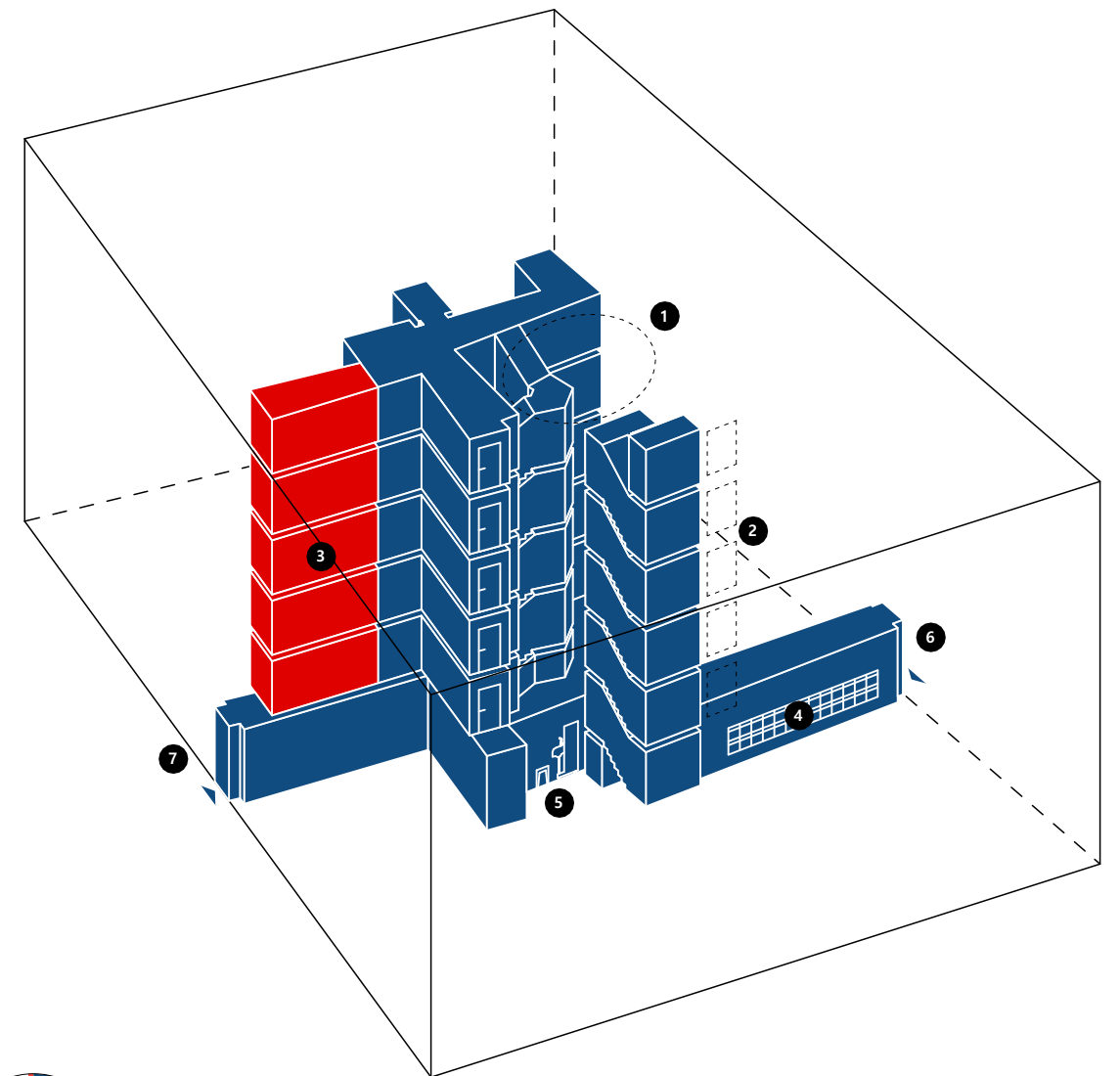
10m

FIG 2.3 3rd floor plan



FIG 2.4 common staircase

- 1 Natural light
- 2 Co-visibility
- 3 Laundry room
- 4 Mailboxes
- 5 Shared piano
- 6 Main entrance
- 7 Secondary entrance



- distribution spaces
- communal spaces

FIG 2.5 distribution skeleton 1:300

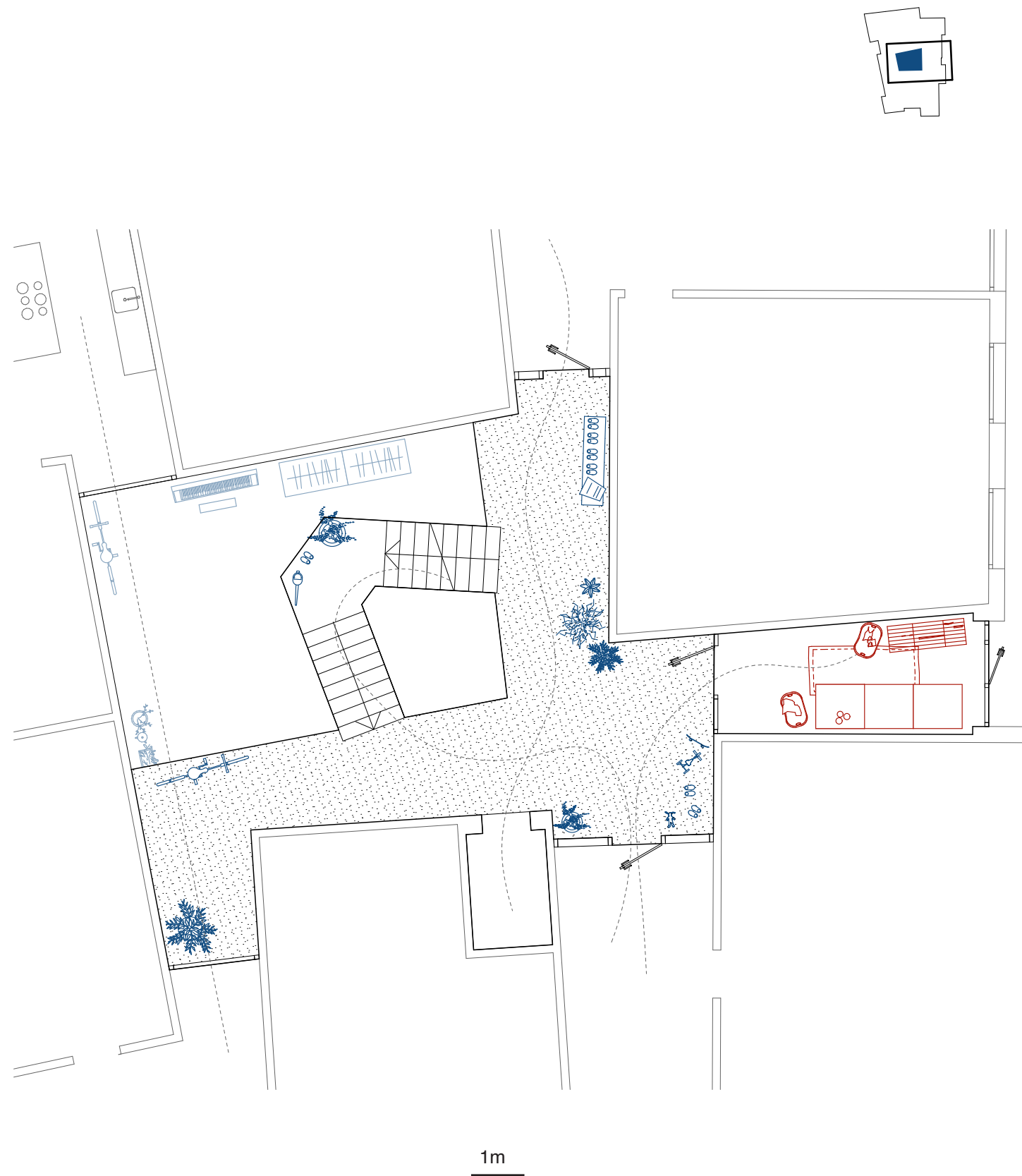


FIG 2.6 Appropriation by the inhabitants

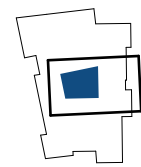


FIG 2.7 furniture in the entrance

03 Siedlung Brahmshof

The Brahmshof housing built by Kuhn-Fischer-Hungerbühler Architekten AG in 1991 in Zürich, illustrates a community-oriented residential architecture. This project continues a legacy of social care by offering a diverse array of housing and communal spaces. Organized around a courtyard (1), the complex integrates an old tree at the center of its communal courtyard while introducing modern architectural solutions with an exterior passageway looking into the courtyard. Helped by the accessible via a public street, a harmonious balance between private and shared spaces can be seen in this project. The common passageway can be accessed from four different stairs, that all lead to the four washrooms (3) which are located on the roof as a social and more energy-independent meeting place where you can

dry your laundry in the fresh air (2). Designed to accommodate a wide range of residents including families, single parents, young people, and individuals with physical or mental disabilities, its communal facilities include space for social gatherings, as well as a public café, and facilities for children. The balcony of the inhabitant in an extension of the passageway detached from the facade, and look into the courtyard. Most of the apartments have 2 doors for entrance, the main one on a bearing for 2 apartments (6), and another one from the balcony (5).

Location: Zürich

Architect: Kuhn-Fischer-Hungerbühler Architekten AG

Year: 1991

Building Type: Ilot a cour

Distribution Type: Passageway

Number of floor : 5

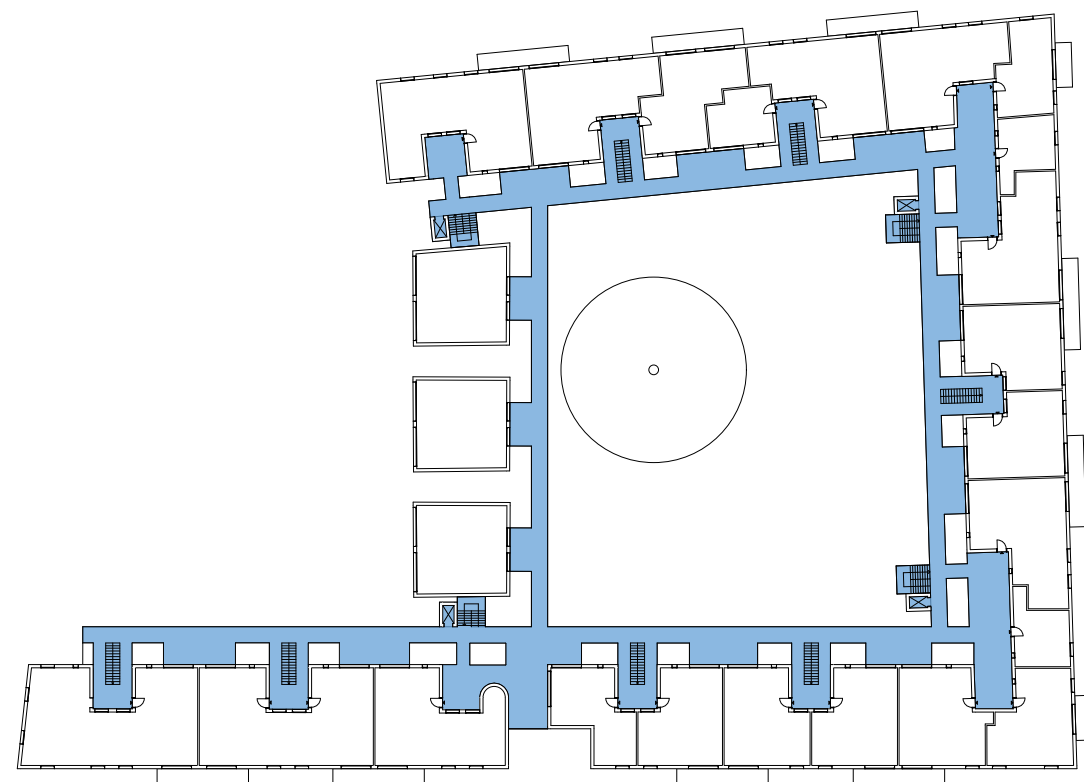
Number of apartment: 70

Number of inhabitant : 240

Appartment per bearing : 2

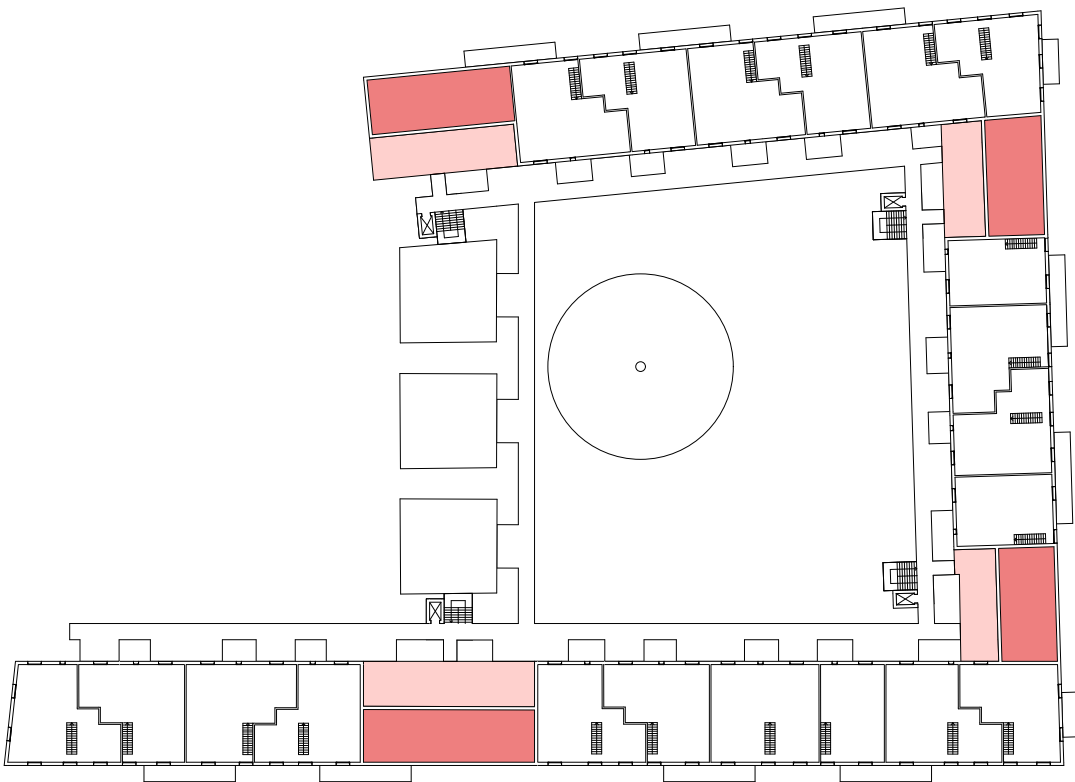


FIG 3.1 front door



10m

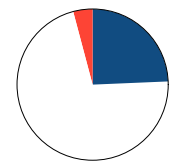
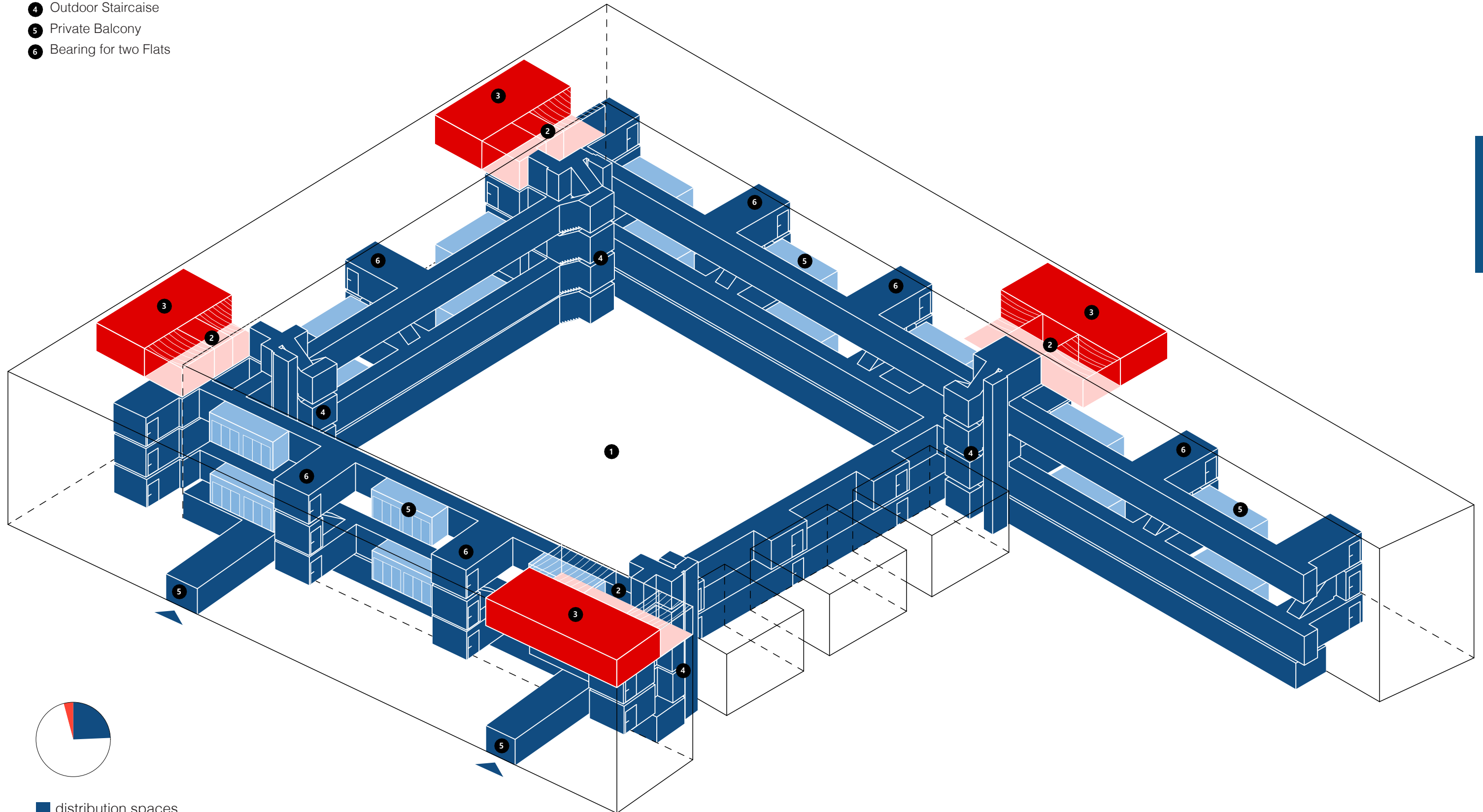
FIG 3.2 1st floor plan



10m

FIG 3.3 4th floor plan

- 1 Courtyard
- 2 Hanging Laundry Outdoors
- 3 Washroom
- 4 Outdoor Staircase
- 5 Private Balcony
- 6 Bearing for two Flats



- distribution spaces
- communal spaces
- housing spaces
- other

FIG 3.4 distribution skeleton 1:300

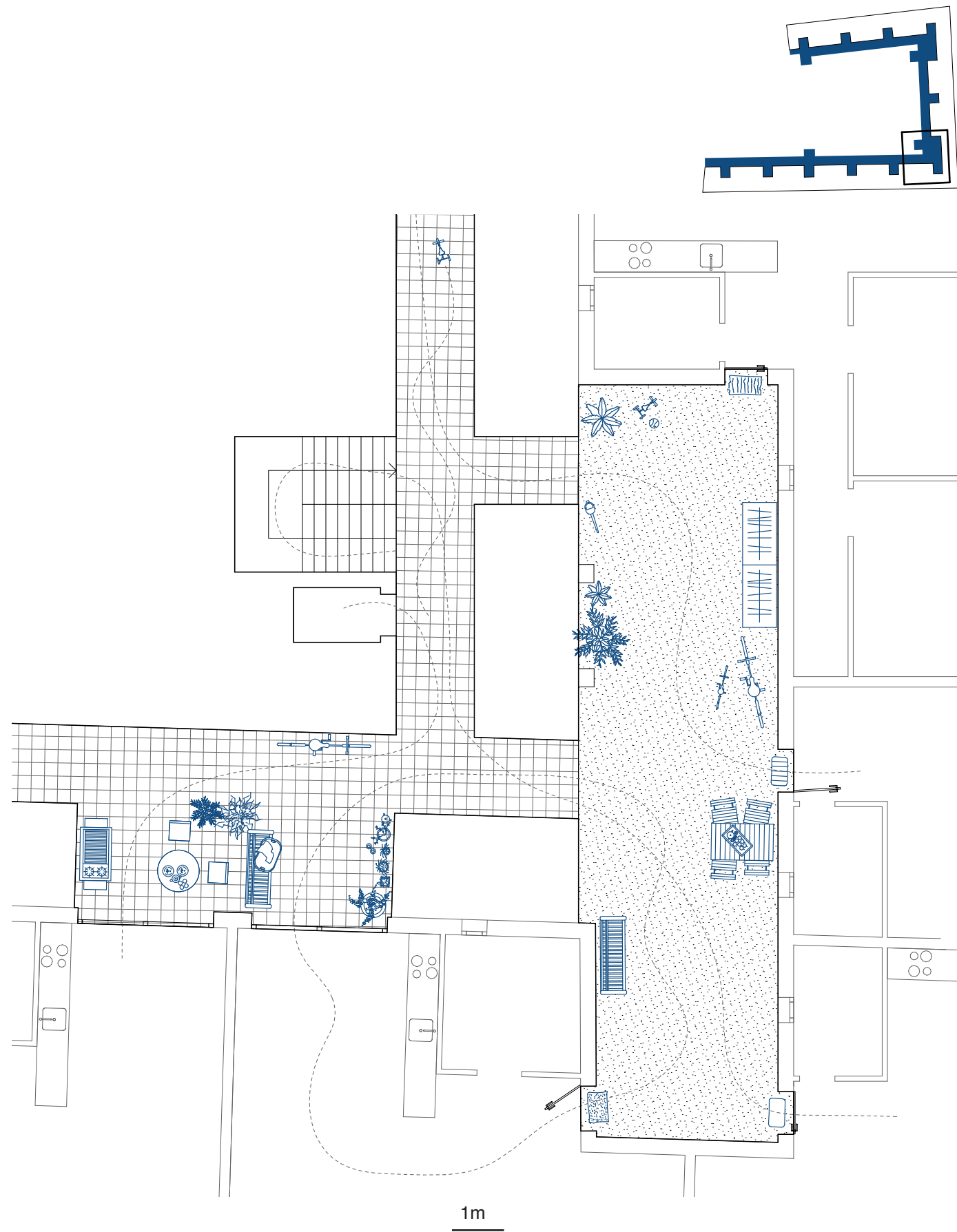


FIG 3.5 Appropriation by the inhabitants



FIG 3.6 View of the Passageway

04 Hellmutstrasse

The Hellmutstrasse building by ADP architects, built in 1991 in Zurich, demonstrates a high degree of modularity in apartment layout, which can be transferred from one type to another depending on where the walls are positioned.

It uses the corridor as a means of distribution, with 3 separate corridors in the facade's redans, all of which connect at the top floor (4), where there are common terraces (2). The intermediate landings give access to three apartments, but these landings can be seen as extensions of the dwelling, and connect all the kitchens of the

three apartments to each other, creating a small community on the same level, with leisure areas for the residents. In addition, the ground floor features a multi-purpose room for residents (3), as well as a creche for children. The corridors are generously planted with vegetation, with a large climbing plant running up all four levels.

Location: Basel

Architect: ADP

Year: 1991

Building Type: Barre

Distribution Type: Passageway

Number of floor : 4

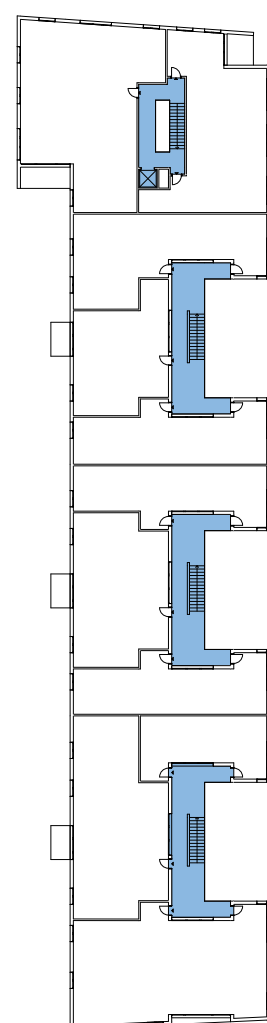
Number of apartment: 36

Number of inhabitant : 90

Apartment per bearing : 3

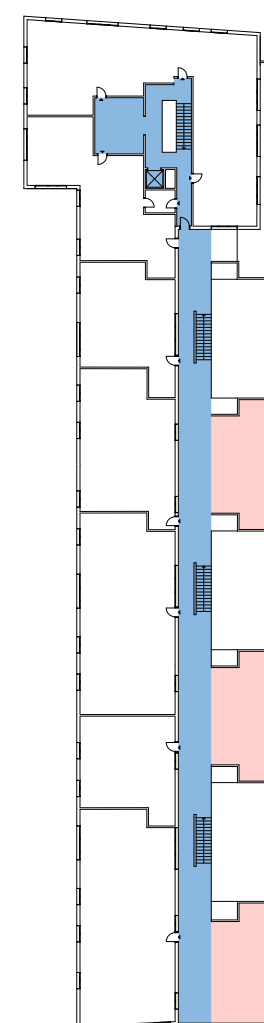


FIG 4.1 front door



10m

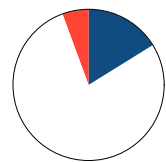
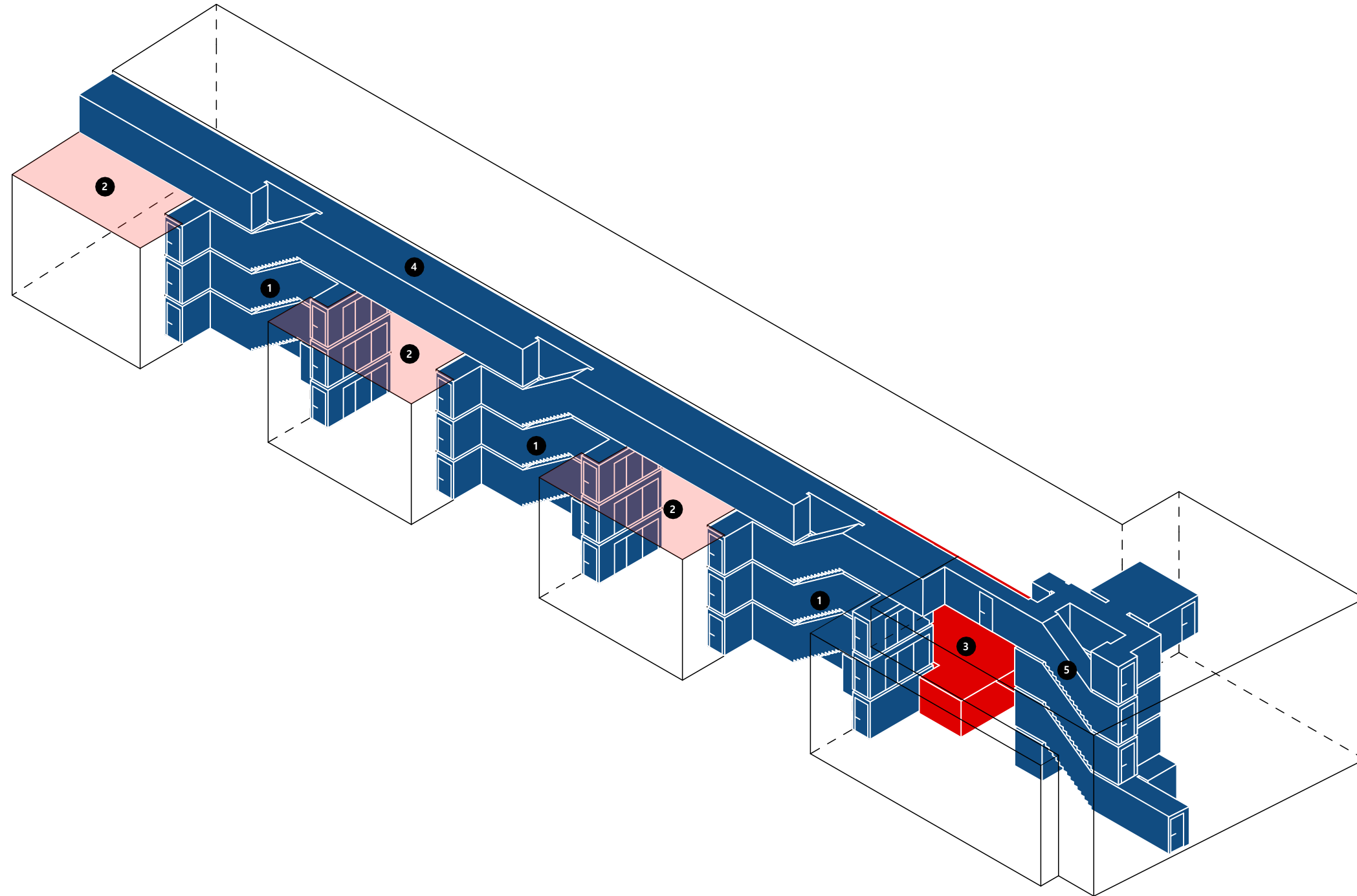
FIG 4.2 2nd floor plan



10m

FIG 4.3 4th floor plan

- ① Stair
- ② Roof Terasse
- ③ Communal Space
- ④ Common Passageway
- ⑤ Interior Staircase



■ distribution spaces
■ communal spaces

FIG 4.4 distribution skeleton 1:300

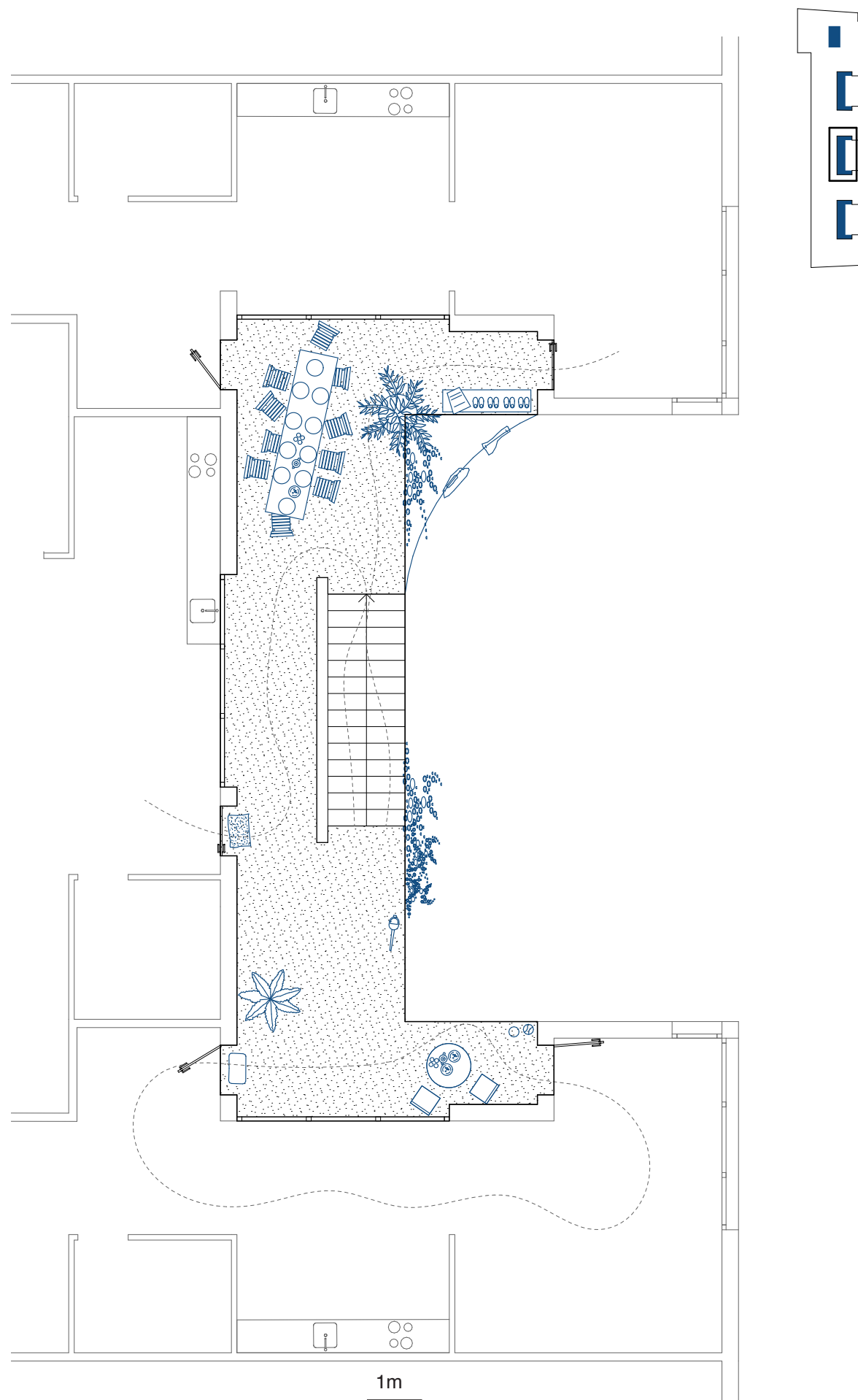


FIG 4.5 Appropriation by the inhabitants



FIG 4.6 common bearing

05 Unité d'Habitation

L'unité d'habitation of Marseille, designed by Le Corbusier between 1947 and 1952, is an iconic work of modern architecture. This monumental 127 meter long, 24 meter wide housing bar houses 337 duplex units, organized around an rue intérieure that promotes social interaction, with more than 50 apartments on the same floor sharing the same rue intérieure (1).

In addition to the housing, the building integrates a nursery (6), a shopping gallery (4) and an impressive roof terrace between mountain and sea. These shared spaces reflect an ambition to create a complete living environment well in advance of its time.

Location: Marseille

Architect: Le Corbusier

Year: 1948

Building Type: Barre

Distribution Type: Rue intérieur

Number of floor : 18

Number of apartment: 337

Number of inhabitant : 1400

Apartment per bearing : 58



FIG 5.1 front door

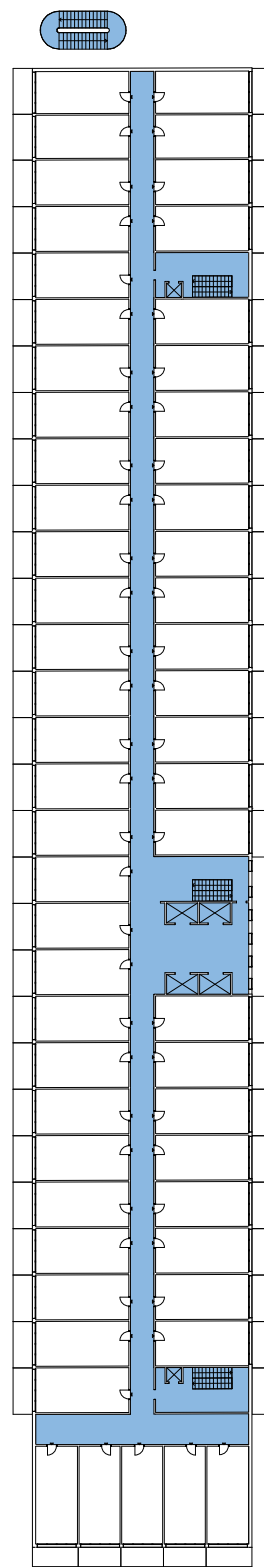


FIG 5.2 rue intérieure floor plan

10m

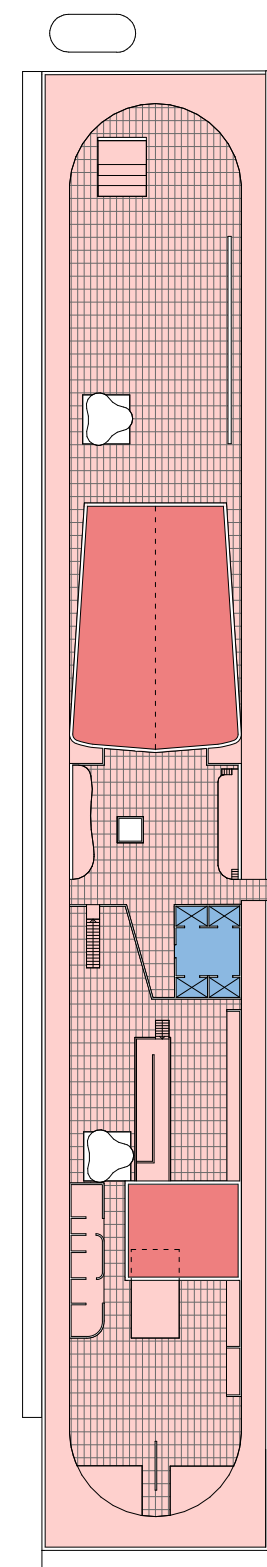
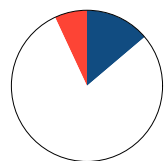
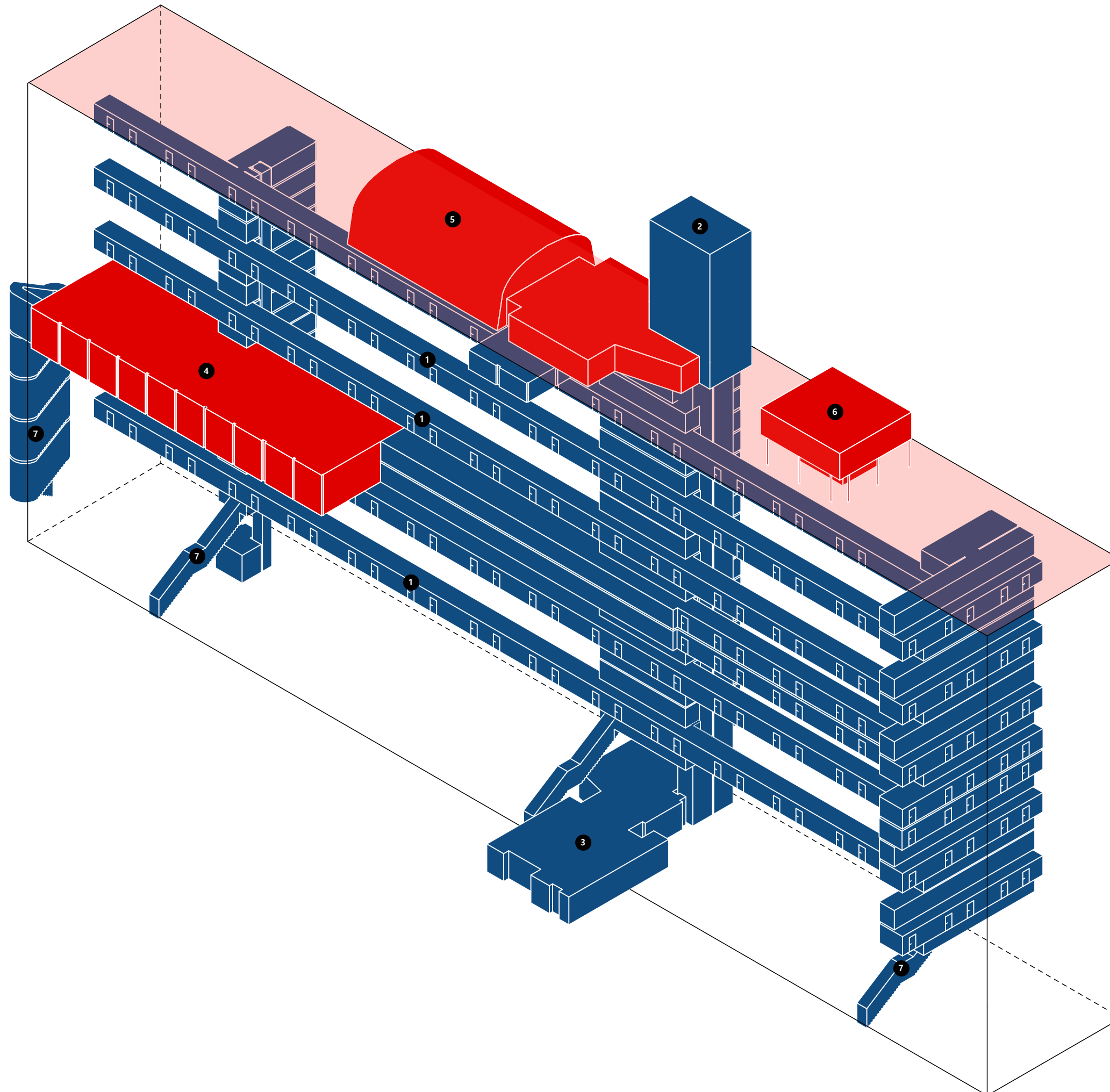


FIG 5.3 rooftop plan

10m

- ① “Rue Intérieure”
- ② Elevator
- ③ Entrance
- ④ Shopping Gallery
- ⑤ Gym Hall
- ⑥ Nursery
- ⑦ Emergency Staircase



- distribution spaces
- communal spaces

FIG 5.4 distribution skeleton 1:500

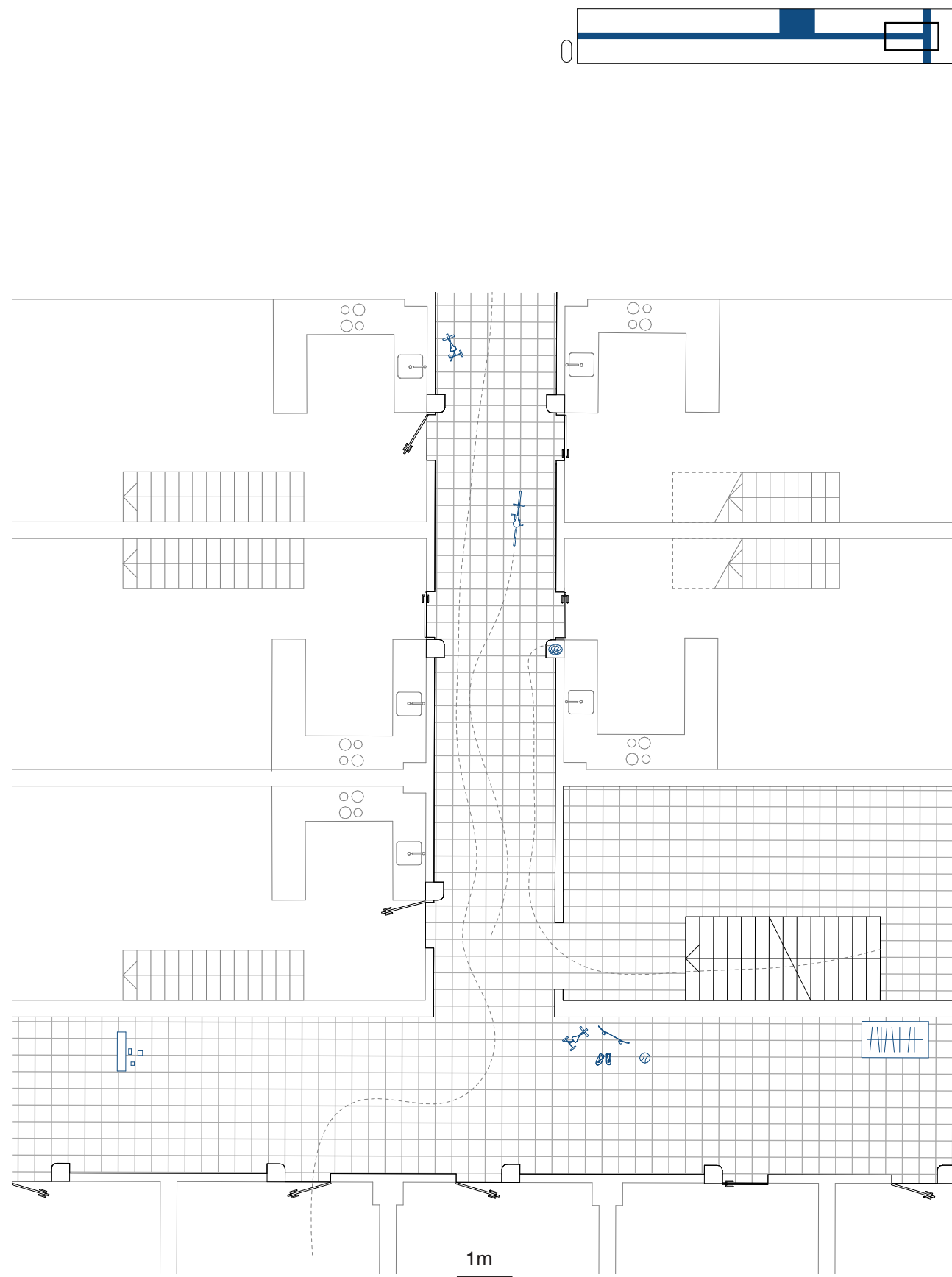


FIG 5.5 Appropriation by the inhabitants



FIG 5.6 Rue intérieure

06 Kalkbreite

Situated in the center of Zurich, the Kalkbreite built in 2014 has a visionary approach to urban housing and mixed-use design. Built on top of a functioning tram depot, the project combines residential, commercial, and communal spaces. Designed by Müller Sigrist Architects for the Kalkbreite Cooperative, the building serves as a good example of integrated urban living. It proposes a public courtyard (7) on the roof of the tram hall, with additional private roof gardens reserved for the residents (6).

The circulation inside the building is possible thanks to the “Rue intérieure,” (2) a central corridor that loops through the structure, connects 88 apartments of varying sizes, including flexible “joker rooms” (4) and communal spaces (3), fostering social interaction and adaptability for the 500 residents and workers.

Location: Zürich

Architect: Müller Sigrist Architekten

Year: 2014

Building Type: Ilot a cours

Distribution Type: Rue intérieure

Number of floor : 8

Number of apartment: 97 residential units in 55 flats

Number of inhabitant : 250

Apartment per bearing : 3 to 20



FIG 6.1 front door



FIG 6.2 3rd floor plan

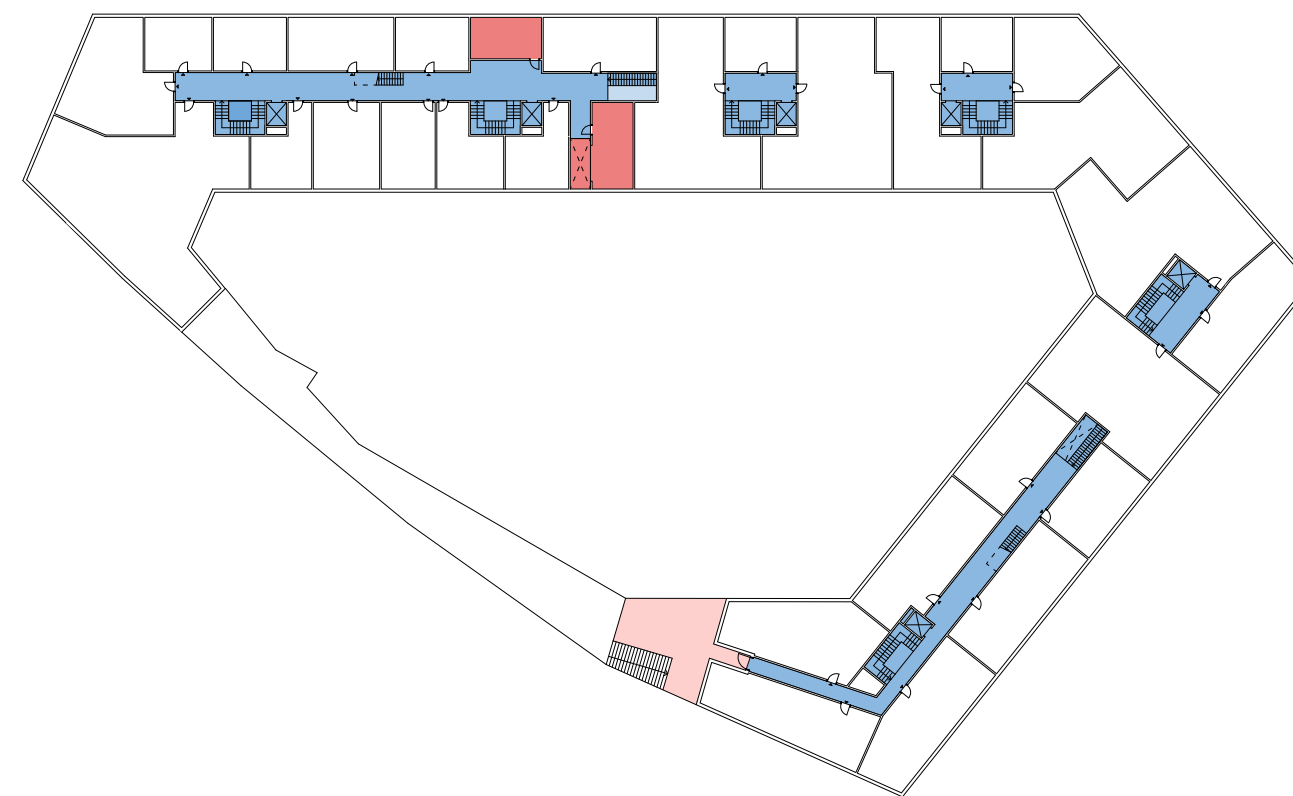
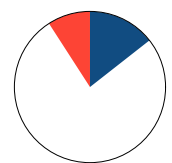
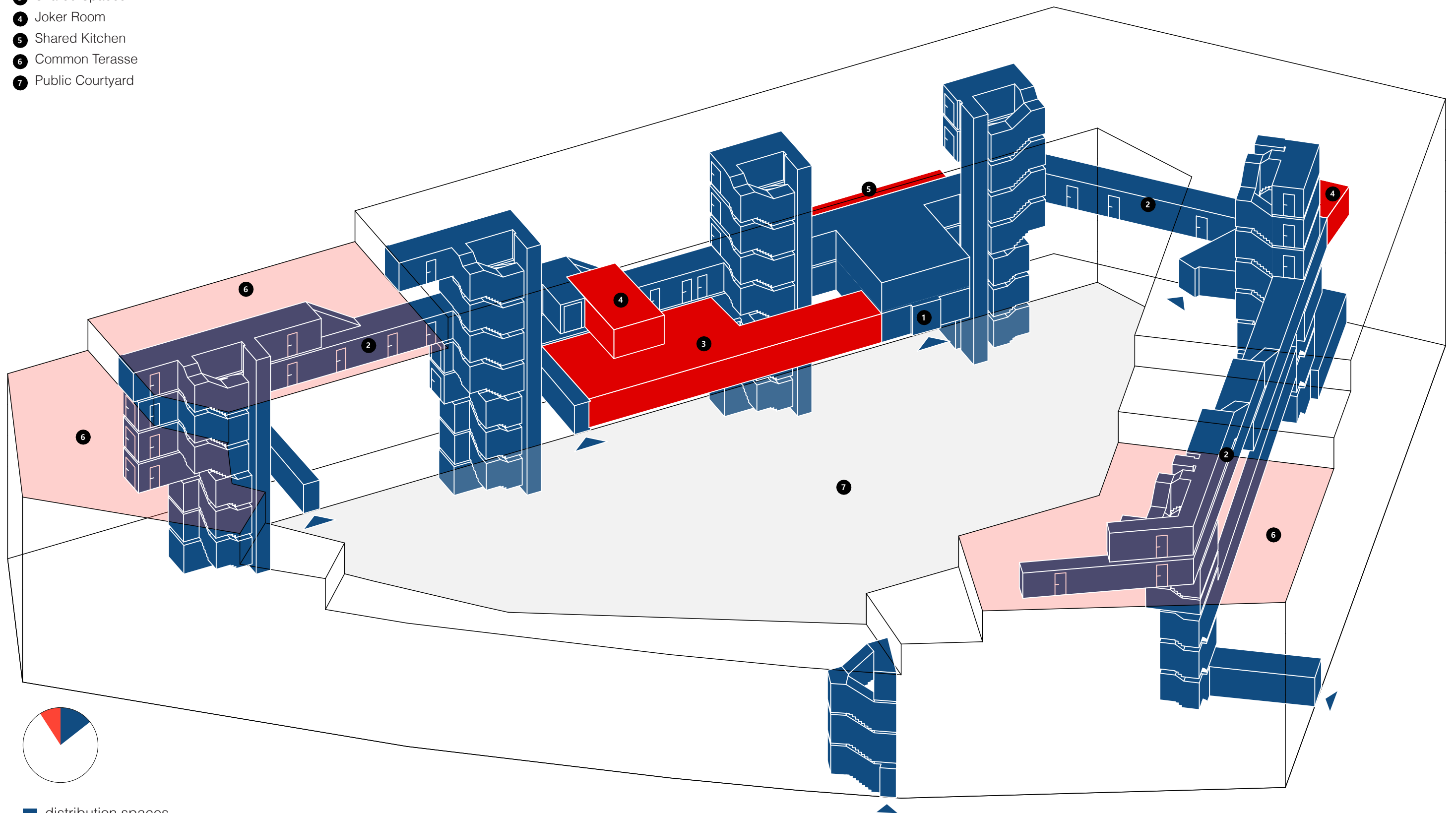


FIG 6.3 4th floor plan

- ① Main Entrance
- ② "Rue Intérieure"
- ③ Shared Spaces
- ④ Joker Room
- ⑤ Shared Kitchen
- ⑥ Common Terasse
- ⑦ Public Courtyard



■ distribution spaces
■ communal spaces

FIG 6.4 distribution skeleton 1:300

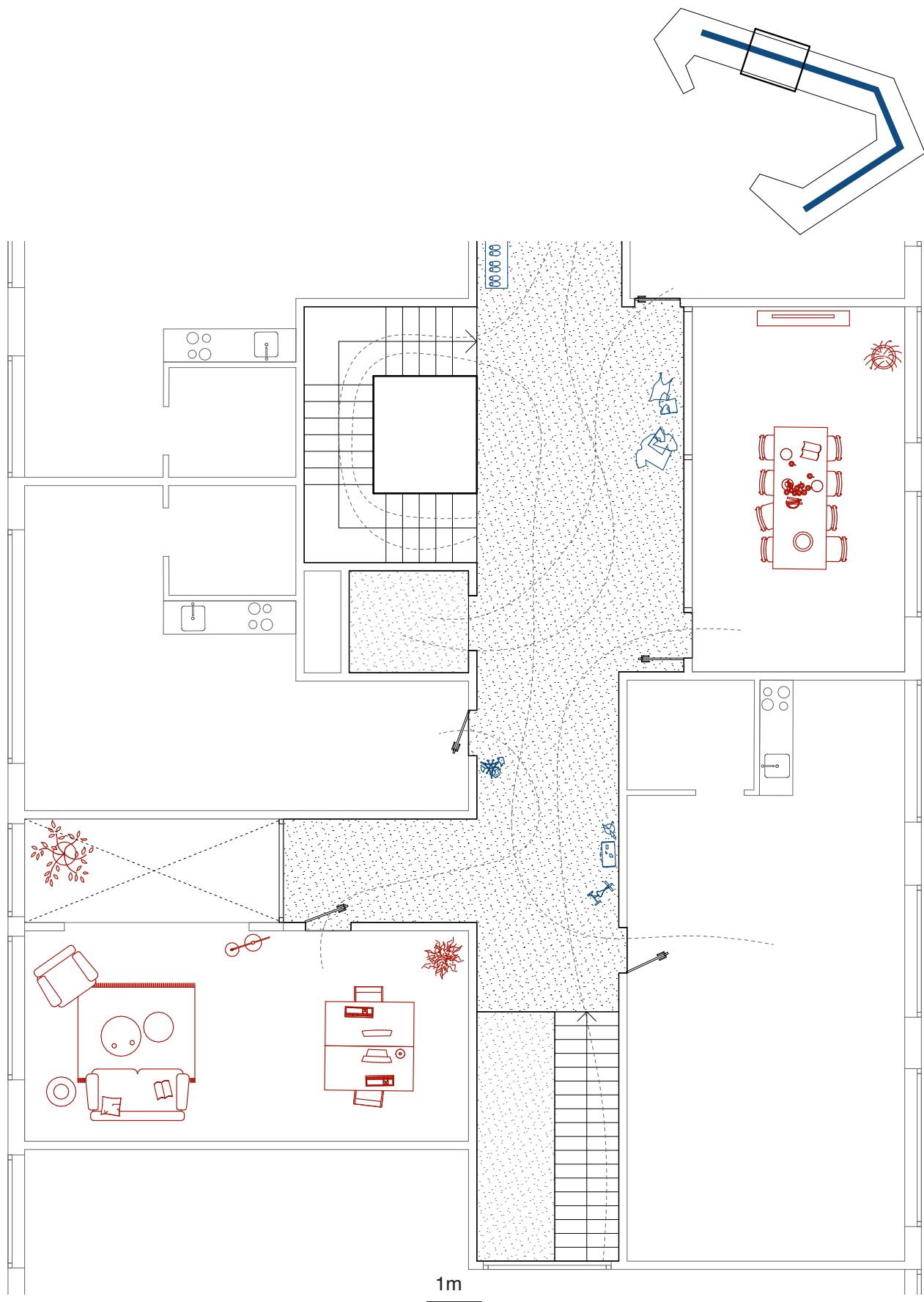


FIG 6.5 Appropriation by the inhabitants



FIG 6.6 Rue intérieure

07 Wohnen im Ehemaligen Weinlager

The Wohnhaus Weinlager residence, located in Basel's Lysbüchel district, illustrates an innovative approach to architectural rehabilitation and social organization by the architects Esch Sintzel. Designed from the existing structure of a wine warehouse, the project illustrates the transition from industrial space to residential function. The architects have preserved and reinterpreted emblematic structural elements, such as the monumental mushroom-shaped pillars, to create housing with a unique and varied character. These elements, integrated into the spatial organization, generate a typological diversity that allows spaces to be adapted to the varied needs of residents, while at the same time showcasing the industrial aesthetic.

Location: Basel

Architect: Esch Sintzel

Year: 2023

Building Type: Barre

Distribution Type: Hybrid

Number of floor : 7

Number of apartment: 64

Number of inhabitant : 150

Apartment per bearing : 3 to 18

The project is distinguished by the implementation of different distribution strategies that promote social mixing and collective interaction. A “rue intérieure” (1), a truly social artery, crosses the building on the 3rd level, while an inhabited “rue extérieure” (2) takes shape on the top residential floor, reinventing the corridors as meeting and sharing spaces. These circulations are completed with common spaces such as a roof terrace (6), communal laundry rooms (4) and rooms dedicated to community activities, reinforcing the idea of “living together”. This architectural and social model, promoted by the Habitat Foundation, goes beyond simple housing design. It reflects a vision of accessible and inclusive housing, where common spaces and privacy levels are designed to accommodate a wide range of profiles - families, students, senior citizens or flatmates.



FIG 7.1 front door

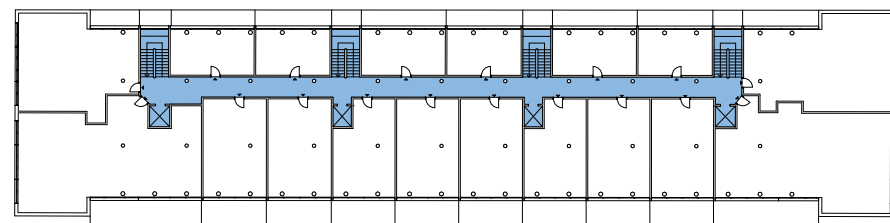


FIG 7.2 rue intérieure floor plan

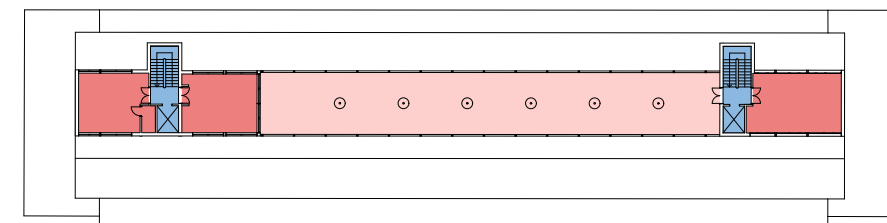
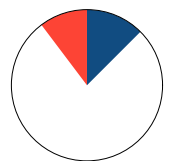
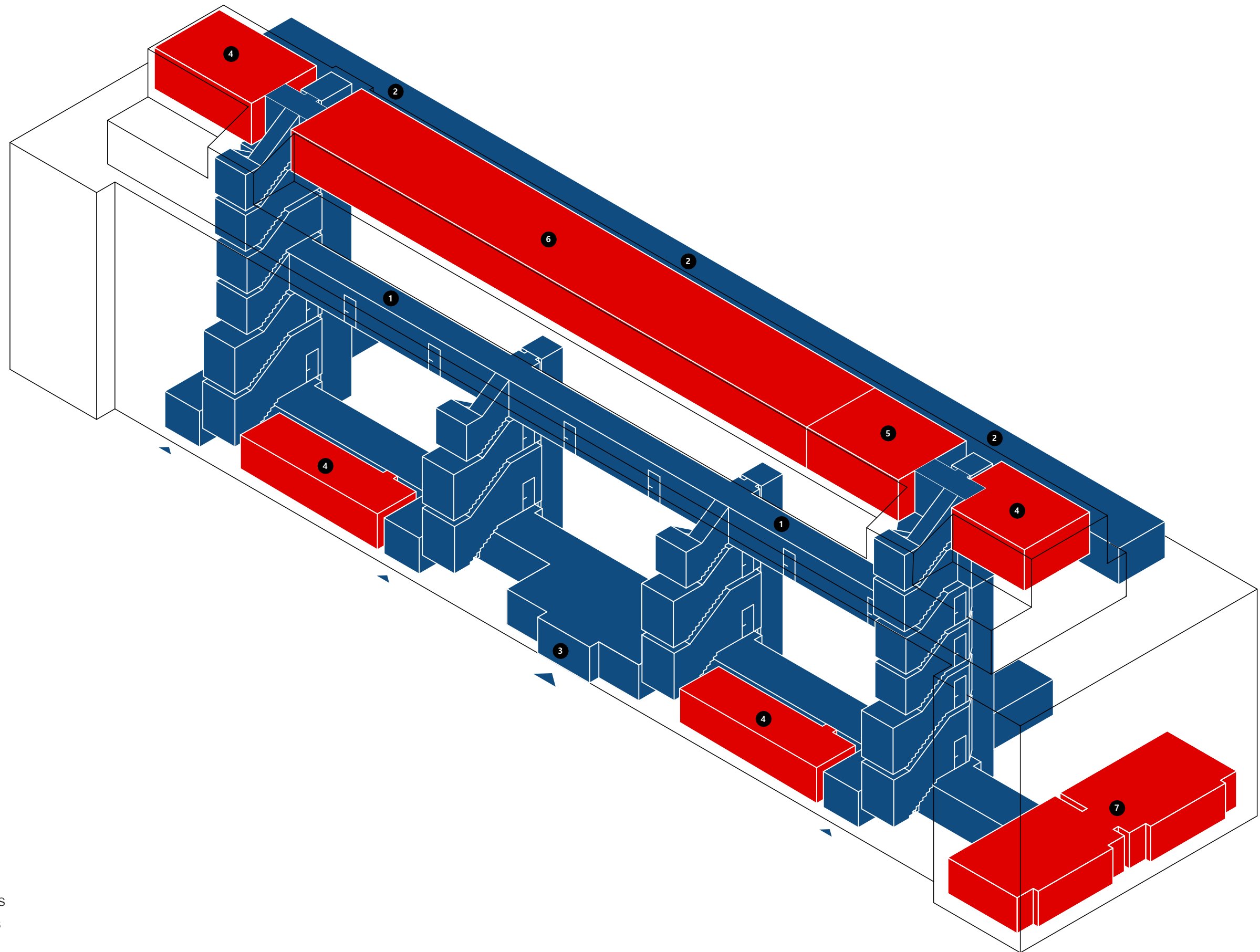


FIG 7.3 Rooftop floor plan

- ① "Rue Intérieure"
- ② Passageway
- ③ Main Entrance
- ④ Washroom
- ⑤ Shared Kitchen
- ⑥ Common Terasse
- ⑦ Public Café



■ distribution spaces
■ communal spaces

FIG 7.4 distribution skeleton 1:300

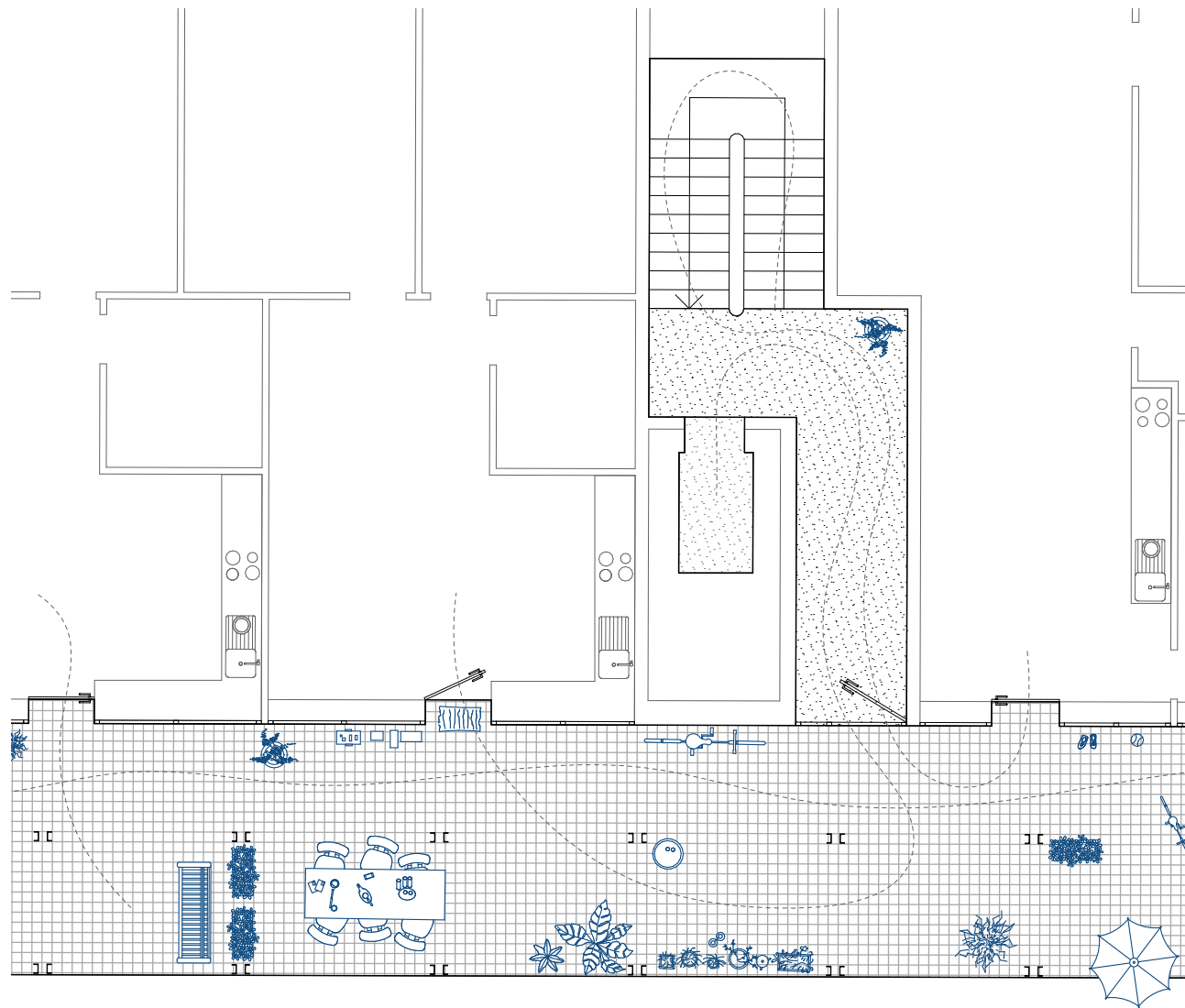


FIG 7.5 Appropriation by the inhabitants



FIG 7.6 5th floor passageway

08 IBeB

The IBeB building in Berlin, by the architectes Ifau and Heide & von Beckerath, built in 2018, is a mixed-use building, which includes cooperative apartments, owner occupied, and atelier and apartments for artists. The project has a circulation system that ensures exchange and propels associations between the collective of the inhabitants. At the center of the building, on the first floor, there is the “rue intérieure” (1) that functions as a spacious, interior communal area, fed by natural light from the 2-storey atrium (3) to the roof and with plants and benches.

There is also a complex network of stairs overlapping onto another to access all the apartments. There is also another “rue extérieure” (2) on top of the building, with a communal roof garden (5) and a collective meeting place (4). In addition, at the ground floor, there is a bike parking (7) and café and shops open to the public (6).

Location: Berlin

Architect: Ifau, Heide & von Beckerath

Year: 2018

Building Type: Barre

Distribution Type: Hybrid

Number of floor : 6

Number of apartment: 66 apartments and 17 studios

Number of inhabitant : 180

Apartment per bearing : 28

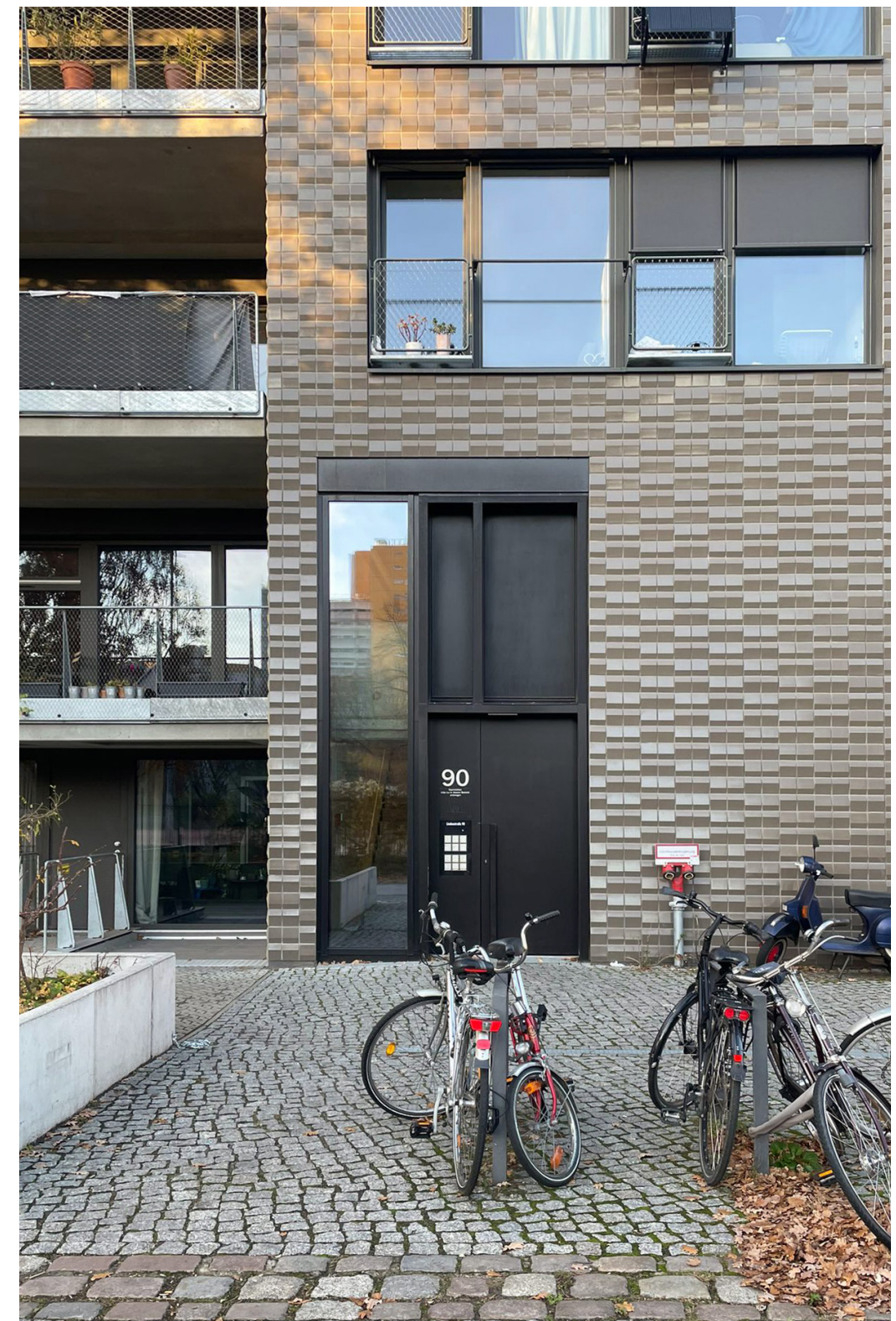
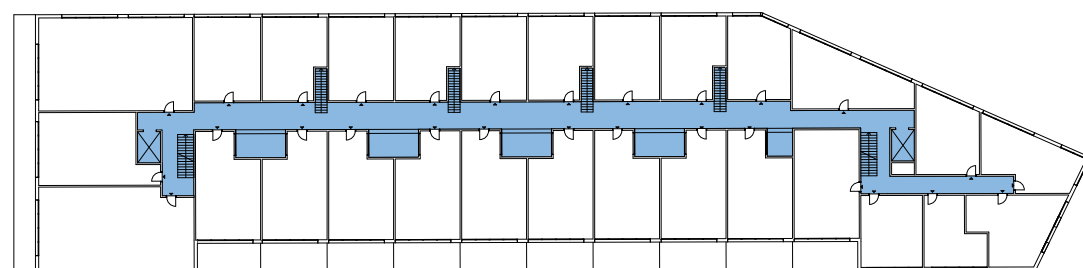
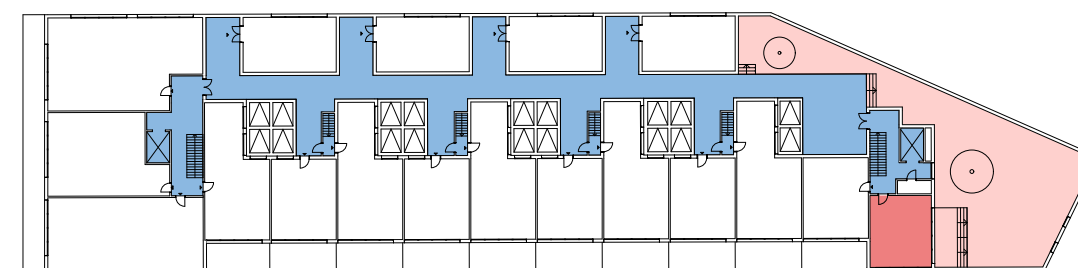


FIG 8.1 front door



10m

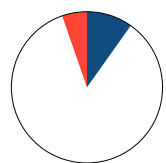
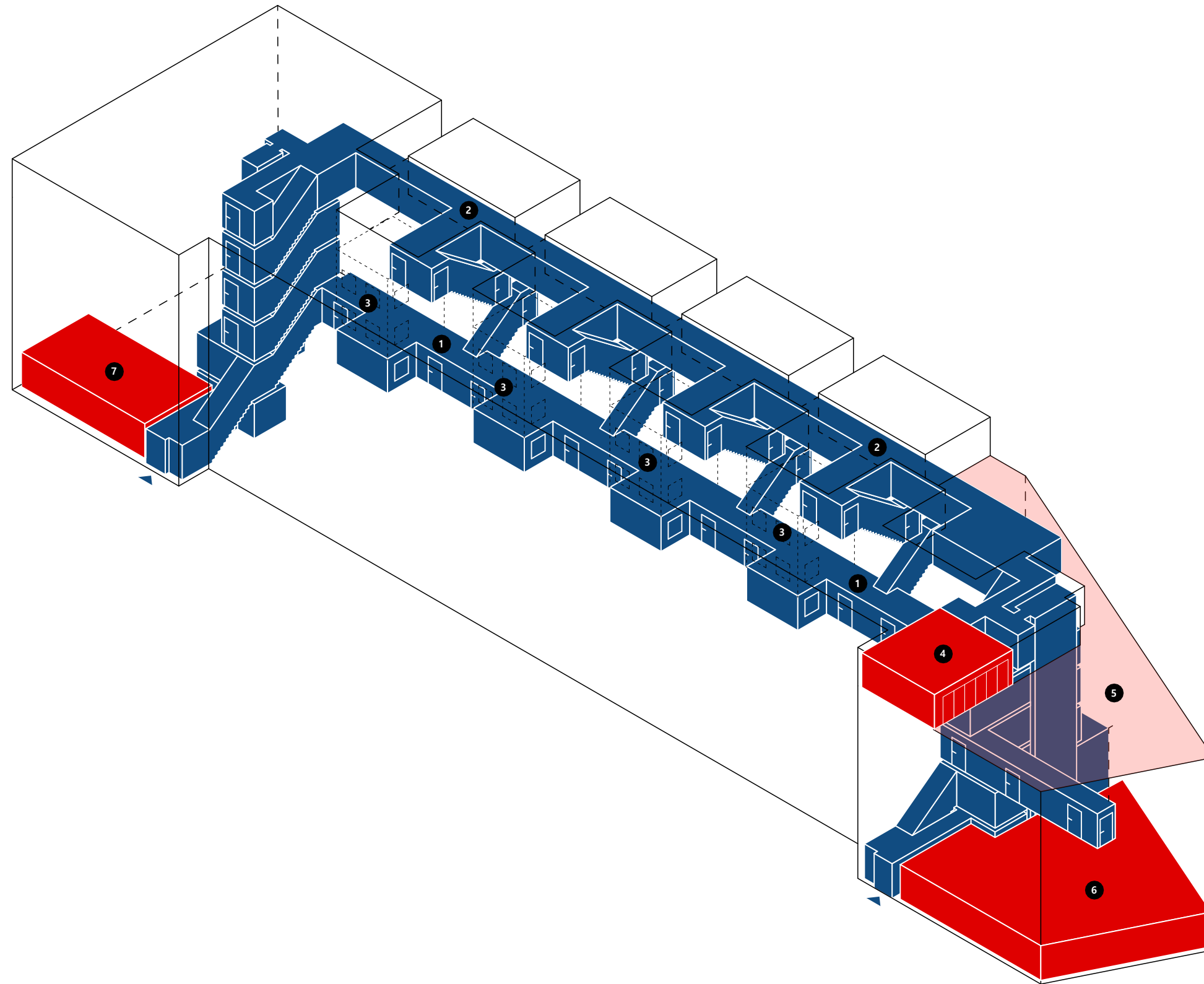
FIG 8.2 rue intérieure floor plan



10m

FIG 8.3 Rooftop floor plan

- ① "Rue Intérieure"
- ② "Rue Extérieure"
- ③ Atrium
- ④ Common Room
- ⑤ Common Terasse
- ⑥ Public Café
- ⑦ Bike Parking



- distribution spaces
- communal spaces

FIG 8.4 distribution skeleton 1:300

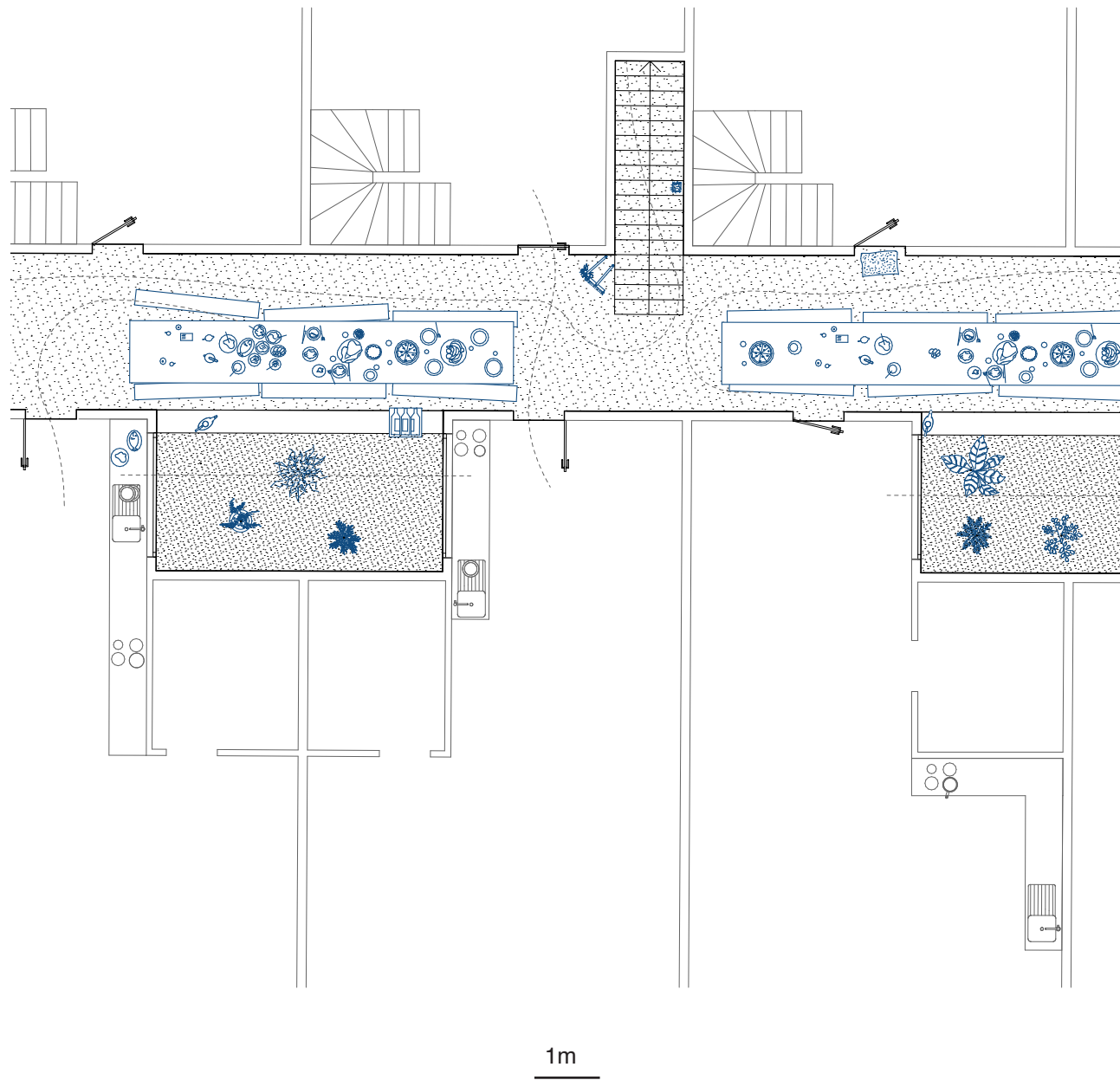
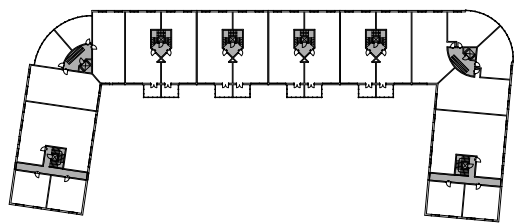


FIG 8.5 Appropriation by the inhabitants

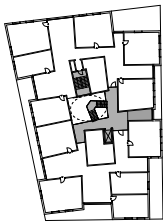


FIG 8.6 dinner in the rue intérieure

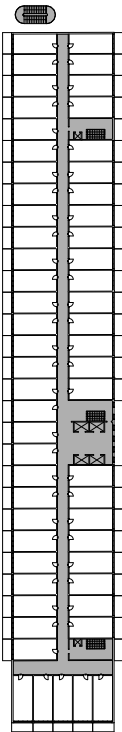
Core



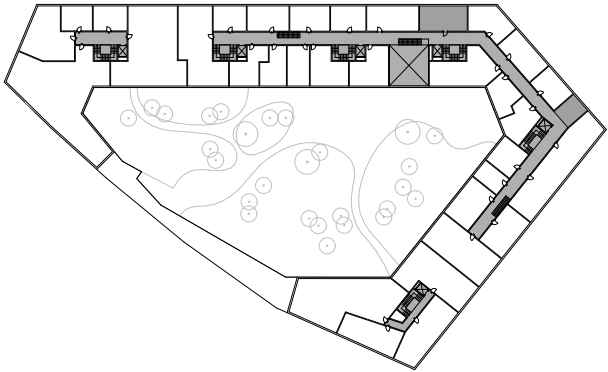
01 Hammerstrasse



02 Mehr als Wohnung

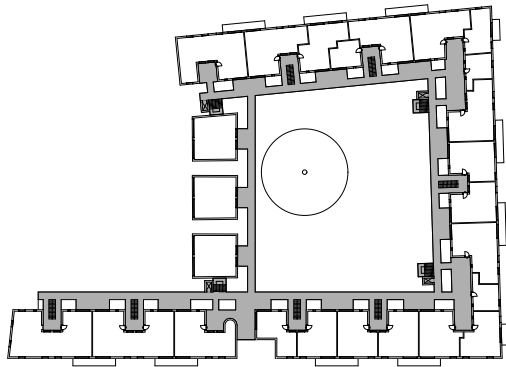


05 Unité d'Habitation

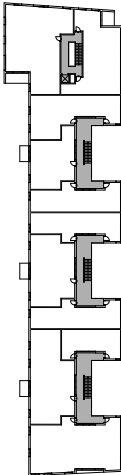


06 Kalkbreite

Passageway

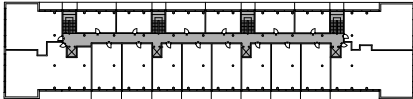


03 Siedlung Brahmshof

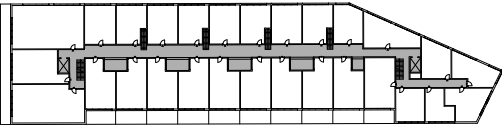


04 Überbauung Hellmutstrasse

Hybrid

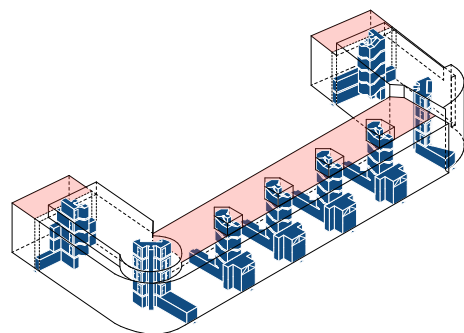


07 Wohnen im Ehemaligen Weinlager

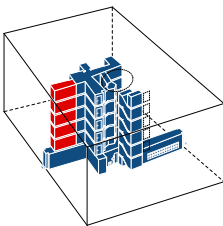


08 IBeB

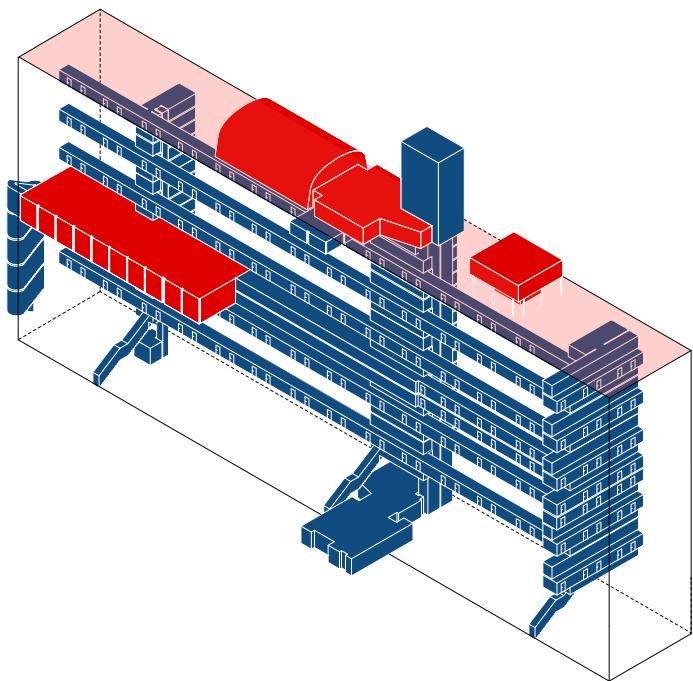
Core



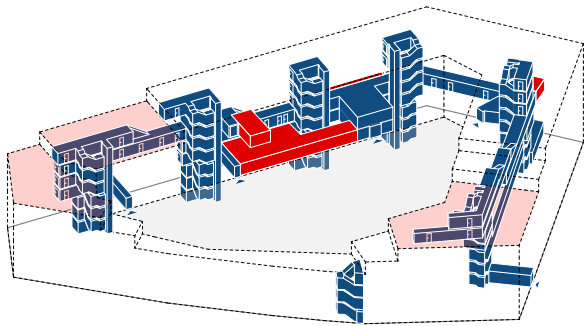
01 Hammerstrasse



02 Mehr als Wohnung

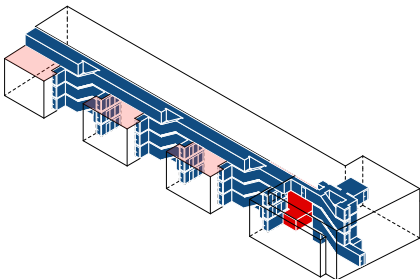


05 Unité d'Habitation

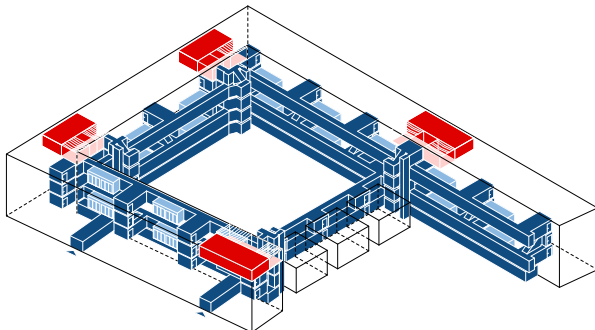


06 Kalkbreite

Passageway

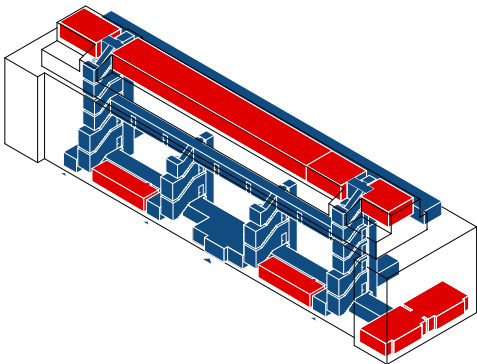


03 Siedlung Brahmshof

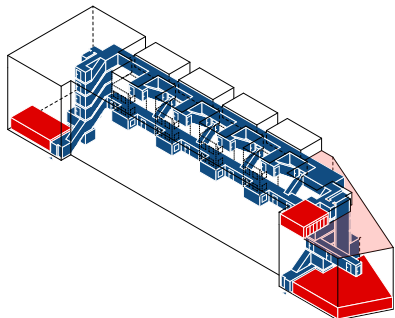


04 Überbauung Hellmutstrasse

Hybrid

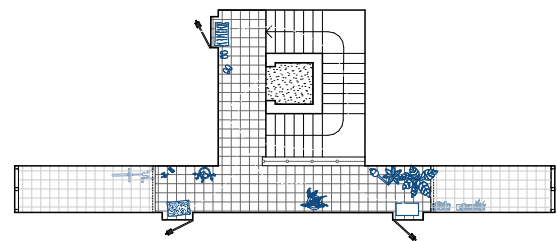


07 Wohnen im Ehemaligen Weinlager

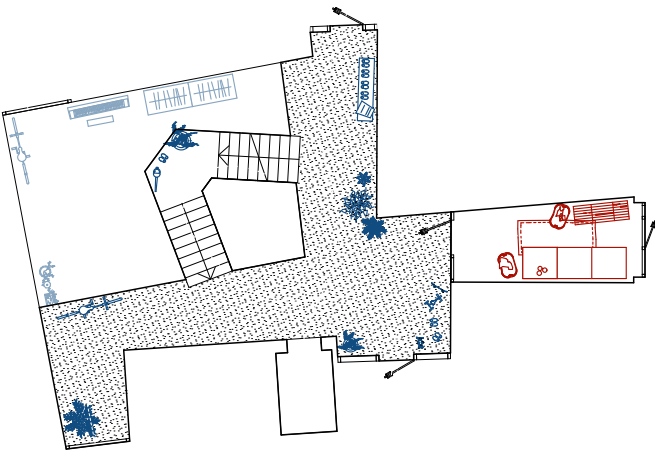


08 IBeB

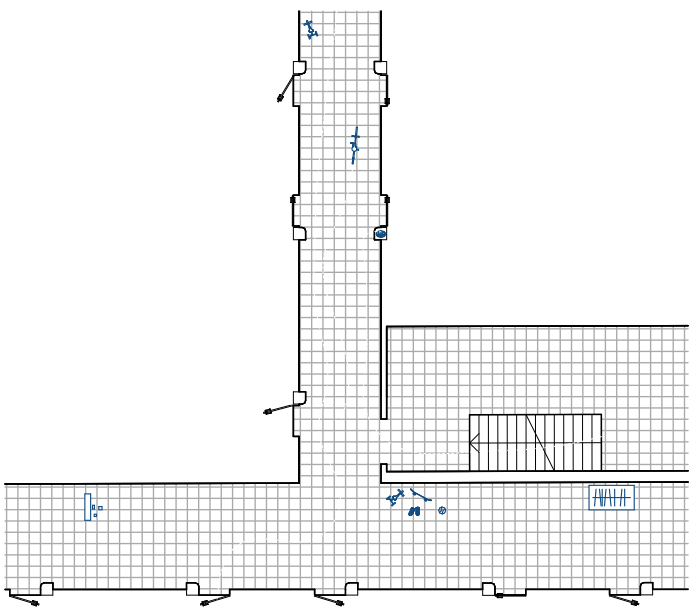
Core



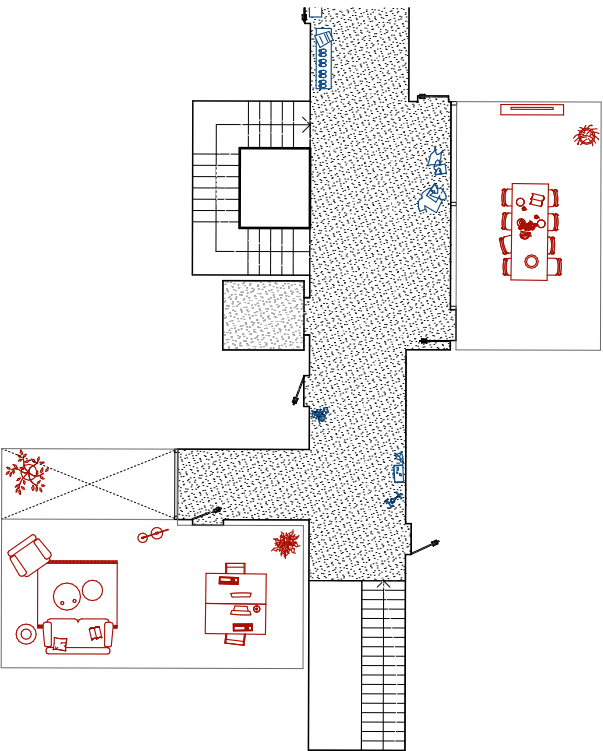
01 Hammerstrasse



02 Mehr als Wohnung

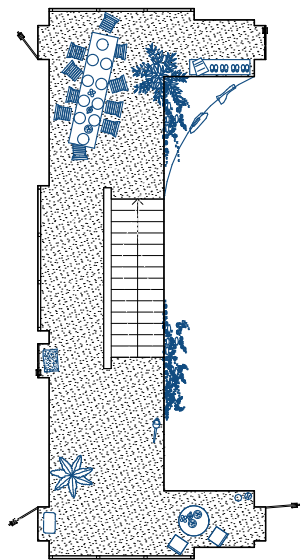


05 Unité d'Habitation

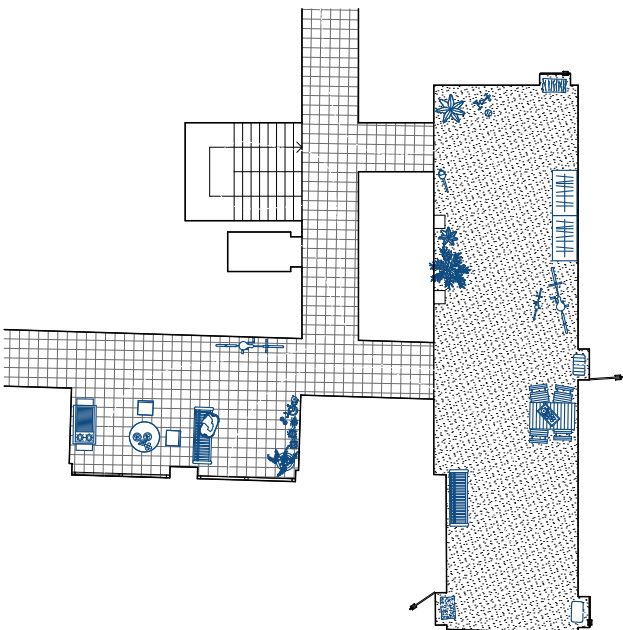


06 Kalkbreite

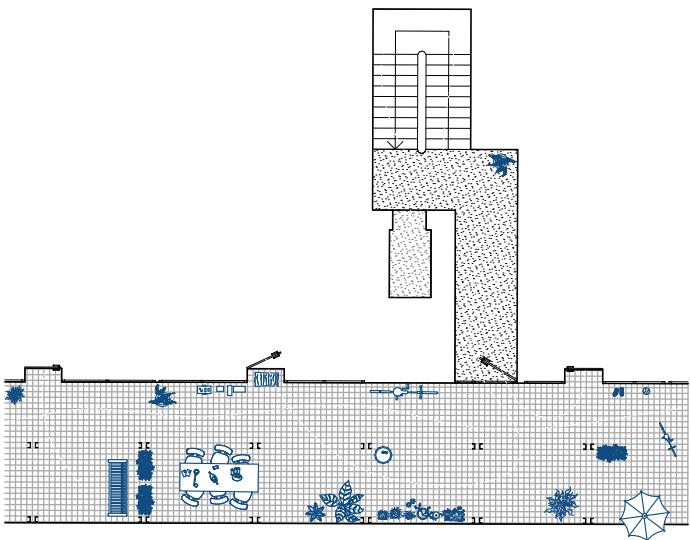
Passageway



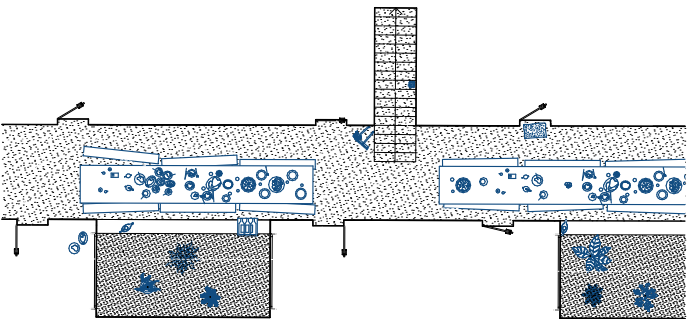
03 Siedlung Brahmschhof



04 Überbauung Hellmutstrasse



07 Wohnen im Ehemaligen Weinlager



08 IBeB

Hybrid

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Iconography

All the illustrations, with the exception of those below, were produced by the author: the photography were taken on site and the plans redrawn.

Fig. 1.6 Marius Slawik, Conrad Kersting, Hammer 1, Park Books, AG, Zürich, 2025, p.68
Photographer: Mikael Steinström

Fig. 4.6 A.D.P. Walter Ramseier / Beatrice Ljaskowsky via <https://wrarch.ch/architektur/wohnungsbau/uberbauung-hellmutstrasse-zurich/>

Fig. 5.1, 5.6 Photographer: Bernard Ddd via <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bds13/52097778897/in/pho-tostream/>

Fig. 8.6 ifau, Heide & Beckerath, via <https://heidevonbeckerath.com/single/ibeb>
Photographer: Andrew Alberts

