

5

BELA-BELA

URBAN CONDITION, URBAN VISION AND URBAN FRAMEWORK

“A town thriving on its natural resources”

Chapter 5 Bela-Bela: This chapter outlines the author’s mapping of the urban environment around the nucleus by analysing the liminality of the location, and introducing the site on the north-eastern boundary of the resort. An urban vision is proposed concluding the mapping that intersects with this liminality. An urban framework for development in and around the nucleus of Bela-Bela concludes the chapter.



LIMINALITY

“Liminality is a topographical issue. It indicates the hovering on a boundary, an in-between place; or two or more spaces and their cross-over points, communication links, connecting doors” (Binet et al., 2001: 348). Liminal, derived from the Latin word *limen* (meaning, “a threshold”) (Simpson and Weiner, 1989), relates to an in-between condition during a ritual where there has been a shift from the pre-ritual status, but not having reached the end state yet. The liminality of a location is thus that transience of people in between conditions and components that the locality witnesses. It is this liminality that the project proposes to tap into to create urban and rural linkages between components and conditions.

BELA-BELA AS TOURIST DESTINATION

The Bela-Bela region flourishes as an eco-tourism destination (IDP: 2014; 14) with its tourism sector contributing approximately 26% to its local economy (IDP, 2013: 112). With more than a million visitors annually (Graham, Herrman, 2003: 54), the Forever Resort is the primary economic stimuli to urban Bela-Bela. The Forever Resort hosts a wide range of recreational water and eco-tourism facilities. It furthermore hosts a range of accommodations, from camping in the outdoors, to the comforts of the hotel. It resembles a microcosm of a town, within a nucleus of a town, dedicated to recreation

BELA-BELA AS AN AGRICULTURAL- RURAL- AND ECO-TOURISM CENTRE

Bela-Bela presides over fertile soil conditions (Fig.) (IDP 2013/2014: 125), which has traditionally been used in the cultivation of citrus, cattle, mielies, sunflowers and wheat. The fertile soils, along with favourable weather conditions, make it an environmentally rich locality that posits great opportunity for new environmental initiatives to arise.

Bela-Bela also forms part the greater Waterberg region that has been named a UNESCO biosphere reserve, and is surrounded by Eco-Tourism initiatives. Major transportation routes extending into this environment enfolds the resort that bares witness to the fleeting tourism. These routes link the airport, located to the south of the town (in close proximity to the nucleus), and the major metropolis of Pretoria and Johannesburg with the natural hinterland to the north.

Figure 5. 1
Bela-Bela
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 2
Bela-Bela urban edge
(Author, 2015)

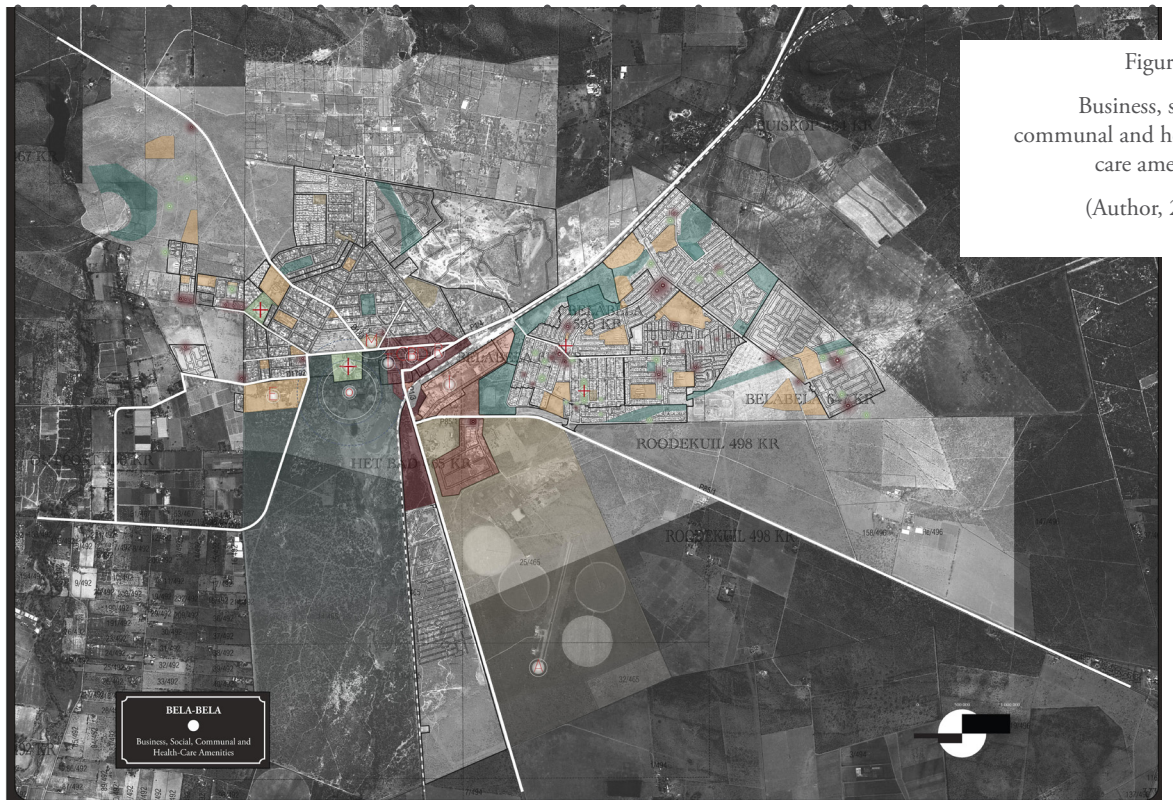


Figure 5. 2
Business, social,
communal and health-
care amenities
(Author, 2015)

BELA-BELA AS URBAN RESIDENCE

In 2013, the population of Bela-Bela was estimated at 66 500 and had increased from 2001 by 27.6% (IDP. 2014/2015: 66). The resort's grounds, forming the nucleus of the town, are ringed by all different types of land usage (Fig), ranging from industry to the southeast; the CBD and civic to the east and north; Residential to the west and north-west; and rural to the south and southwest. Beyond this fragmented radial, Residential development sprawl outwards and informally over urban peripheries (Fig). The dilapidating and segmented urban core causes fragmented development around the peripheries of the town (Fig). This perpetuates a segregated development of social and racial classes that Apartheid planning instilled. The central transit interchange, the taxi rank, also borders the resort to the east enveloped by semi-private parking spaces.

BELA-BELA AS A LEARNING CENTRE

Urban Bela-Bela hosts 13 schools (IDP. 2014: 88). The Sondela Academy offers tertiary training within Tourism (Guiding and Hospitality), Nature Conservation, and Technical Courses (IDP. 2014: 84). Similar academies, such as the Lapalala Wilderness School exist within the extended Waterberg districts. The Toowoomba Agricultural Research Station is located on the urban edge of Bela-Bela and provides valuable environmental research on the area.

BELA-BELA AS A HEALTH CENTRE

The municipal area of Bela-Bela is currently serviced by two hospitals, six clinics and two mobile clinics (IDP. 2013: 153). The hospitals are situated around the heart of urban Bela-Bela, while the warmbaths provincial hospital is located bordering the fountain. Apart from this, there are also the baths. Due to the water's medicinal and mythical properties, these are frequented by many for its health-restoring properties (Graham, Herrman, 2003: 54).

Figure 5. 3

Urban transactions around the nucleus of the town

(Author, 2015)





EXISTING
CONDITION
•

SITE

LIMINALITY

Transportation infrastructure rings the boundary of the resort. At the north-eastern boundary, major vehicular routes that diverge into the environment ring the site. The CBD rings the resort to the northeast, with a commercial presence to the east and a civic presence to the north. This site is bordered off from the town by a wall and silently witnesses the liminality of the *place*, the fleeting tourism, and the local population in and about their town.

DIALECT

This site is located on the irresponsive boundary of the core of the *place*. This boundary, in its current form, deters links and a dialect from happening between conditions and components of the larger environment. The site thus presents the opportunity to facilitate and enable connections between urban and rural conditions and components through a responsive and connective intervention.

URBAN TRANSACTIONS

The energy and transactions of the town weigh heaviest in the CBD that rings the recreational core to the east and northeast. Though, this energy remains stagnant due to the insular resort and a preference in peripheral investment that results in an unresponsive inner core and a subsequent deteriorating public realm. Through insertion of a new condition, the core is proposed to become reactive with new opportunities for investment arising in and around the nucleus of the *place*.

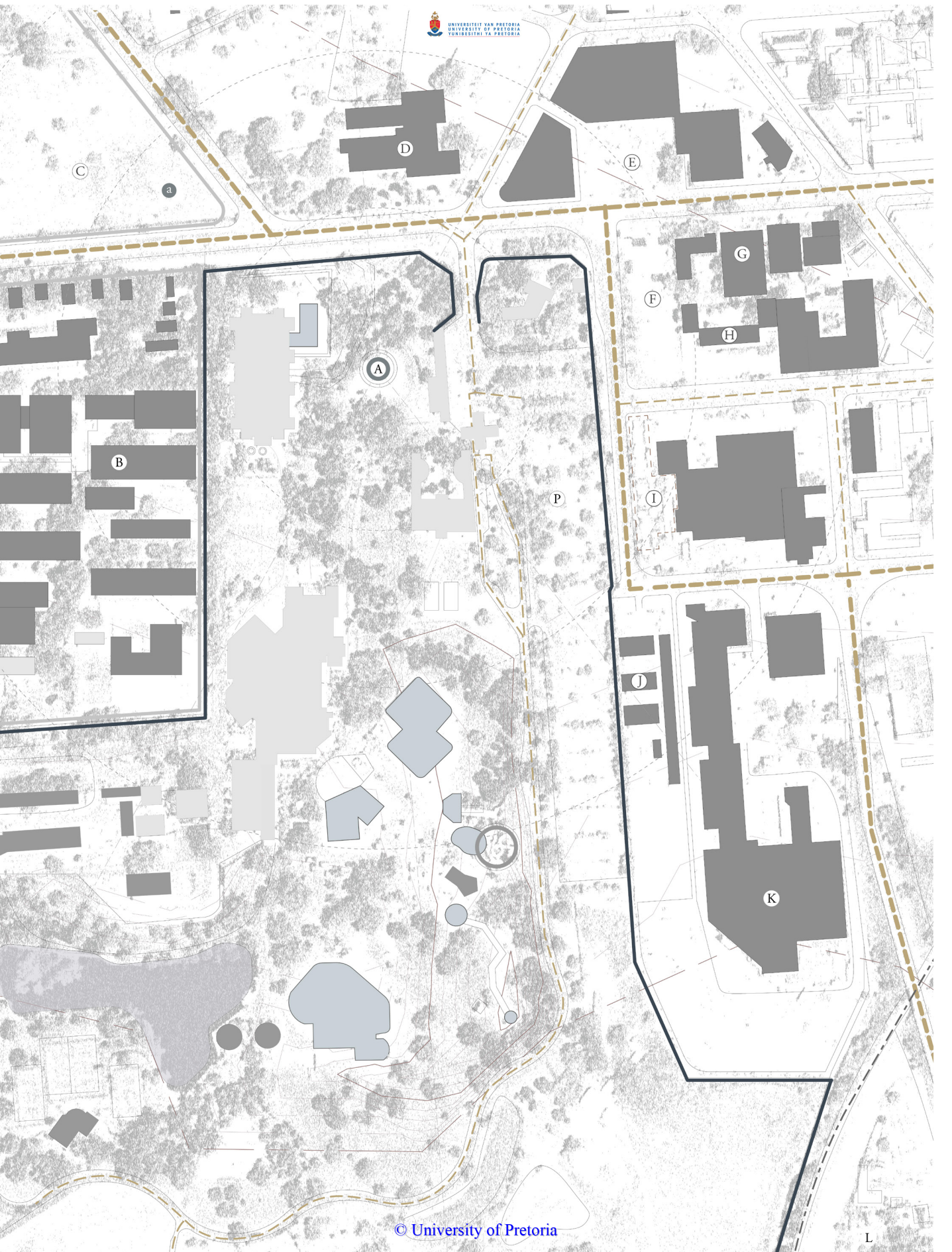
THE RESORT

The gardens around the ore of the fountain have traditionally been public grounds. The project proposes the reinstatement of these as fully accessible public grounds where from the Hydro, the garden pools, the hotel, the hospital, the proposed intervention and those of the urban framework could be individually accessed. The individual operation of these various facilities and their grounds allow the public realm to extend in-between them. It also encourages the acceptance of a mutual responsibility in the upkeep and safeguarding of this environment.

Figure 5. 4

Site

(Author, 2015)



- A: The Warmbaths fountain
- B: Bela-Bela provincial hospital
- C: Multiple residential zoned plot
- D: Bela-Bela municipality
- E: Shopping complex
- F: Vacant plot wit car sales
- G: Commercial enterprises extending along the street
- H: Hotel, cabanas, restaurant and bar
- I: Informal craft market
- J: Taxi rank
- K: Shopping mall
- L: Commercial sales and the Waterfront to the south

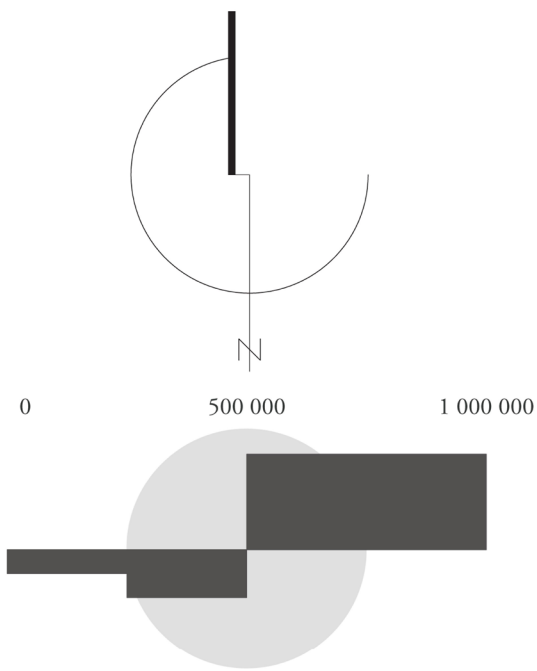


Figure 5. 5
The enveloping town
around the resort
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5.6
The ski-boat dam to the south beyond the fence
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5.7
The wall between the parking of the mall and the resort
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 8
Resort parking
and site
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 9
Boundary between
resort parking and
taxi rank
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 10
Taxi-rank
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 11
Looking north from
the taxi rank. The
informal market on the
right and the resort on
the left
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 12
The wall
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 13
Looking east on Chris
Hani way with the
resort entry to the right
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 14
Looking west on Chris
Hani way. The resort
and hospital on the left
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 15
The boundary wall and Hydro beyond
(Author, 2015)



Figure 5. 16
The municipality
(Author, 2015)

AN URBAN VISION

THE URBAN COMMONS

To mediate the fragmented condition, the project proposes a framework that aims at re-stitching the central core of the town and the socio-spatial hierarchies that determines access to opportunity. It furthermore aims towards instilling a relationship between urban development and the natural splendour to promote an inter-changing animation as a theme within the town.

The project proposes a spatial layer over the violent collisions where the various land usages meet the unresponsive wall of the resort. This new condition is zoned for public facilities, urban landscaping and infrastructure that reaches into the environment along transportation linkages.

The agenda for the commons is to become a threshold device that communicates the dialect of local and global conditions; to create and facilitate new urban 'transactions', narratives and opportunities; and to stimulate an urban condensation towards the core that deters urban sprawl from spreading onto the productive, and naturally rich, rural environment.

REVEALING AND FUSING THE LANDSCAPE

The Project proposes the *monumentalisation* of the natural landscape and its inherent beauty, so as to promote a harmonious *dwelling* amongst it. The project suggests that the fountain and the central gardens of the town be liberated, and to become public grounds once again. By making the natural beauty 'visible', a dialect is created with the extended rural environment that transverses the urban fabric.

The vision concentrates on the abrupt condition between the urbanity of Bela-Bela and the gardens, fountain and resort located at the Nucleus of the town. The project proposes that the urbanity of the town and the natural environment be fused so as to allow the two, through architecture and infrastructure, to animate and complement one another. New relations can then be born between urbanity and the rich rural environment. The fusion serves as a theme to the urban framework and is proposed to become the theme for future development.

ACCESS

New transportation nodes are proposed, which reconfigures the existing transportation system. It is aimed at optimising access to and from the commons, and also pedestrian movement within. The project also proposes that semi-private parking spaces be conjoined, to upgrade this space with mutual investments, and to intertwine these with proposed and existing public spaces.

TOURISM AND THE TOWN

Tourism to the town is proposed to extend beyond the borders of the resort, back into the town grain. The reinstated public gardens, along with the urban framework and the intervention, aim at stimulating a fusion between tourism, local culture and local commerce.

Figure 5. 17
The Urban
Commons
(Author, 2015)

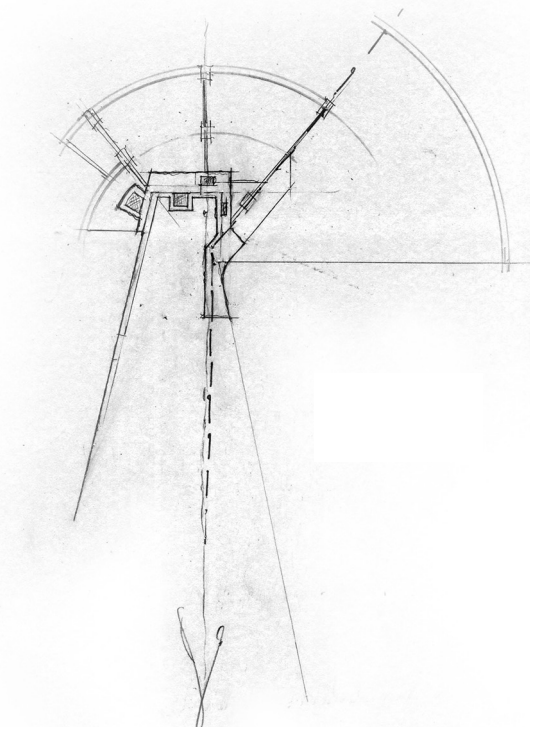


Figure 5. 18
A spatial relationship
between the nucleus
and the natural
environment that
traverses the town's
grain
(Author, 2015)

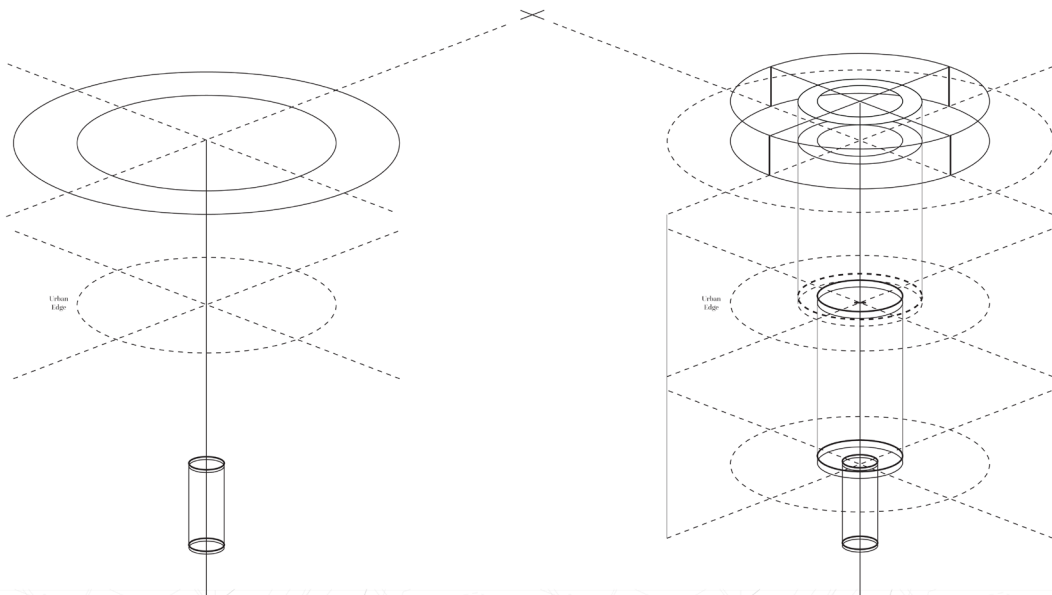
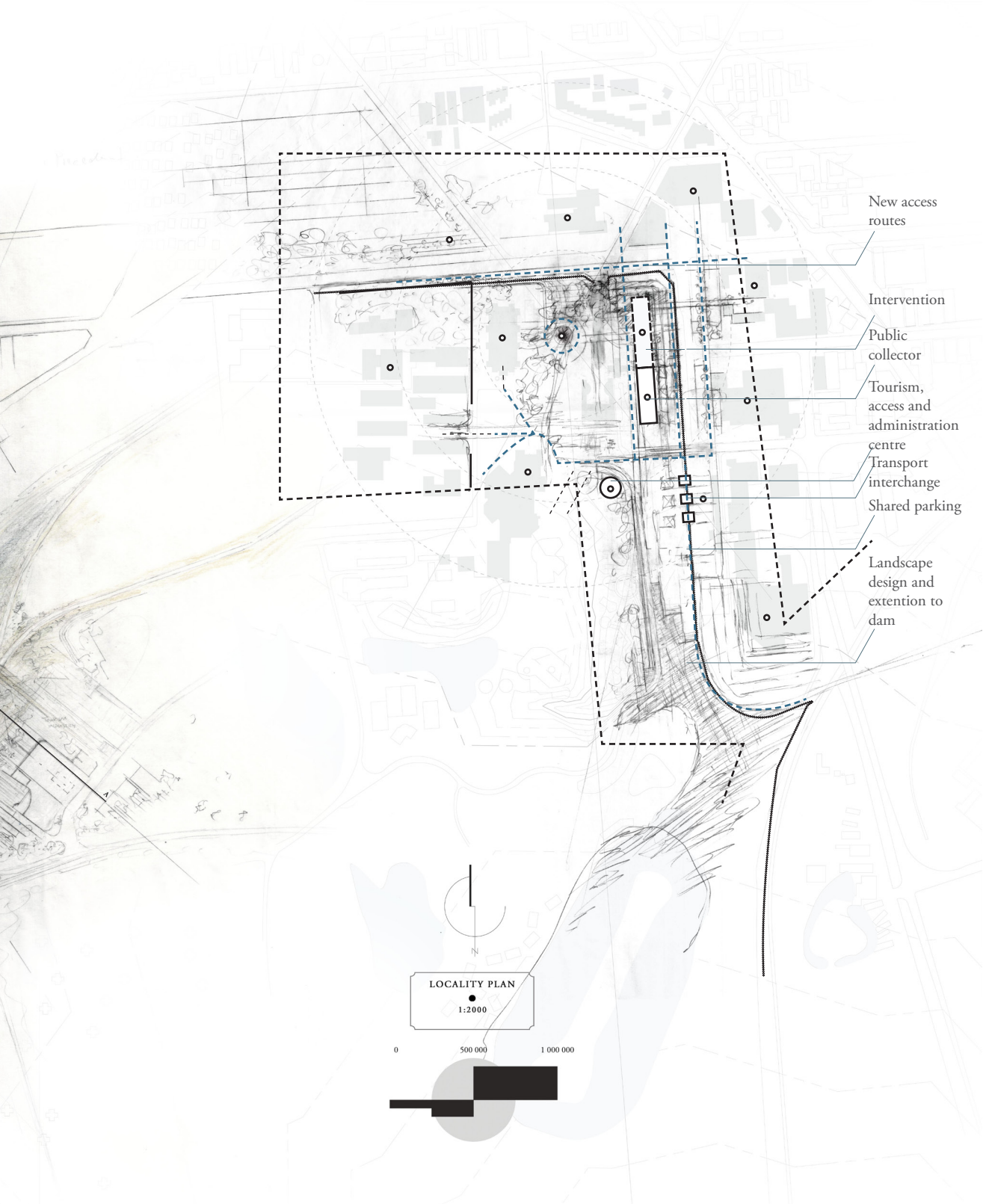




Figure 5. 19
Urban framework
design
(Author, 2015)



New access routes

Intervention

Public collector

Tourism, access and administration centre

Transport interchange

Shared parking

Landscape design and extension to dam

LOCALITY PLAN
1:2000

0 500 000 1 000 000

URBAN COMMONS

AN URBAN FRAMEWORK

THE 'WALL'

The wall enveloping the facilities is proposed to expand into a new public spatial layer that mediates between the resort and the urban condition. The gardens to the north are proposed to become publically accessible from where the Hydro; the southern gardens with water facilities; the hospital; the hotel; the urban design and the intervention are accessible. The intervention and urban design becomes the mediator to this condition. This reconfiguration defines the access into and around the resort and thus challenges existing fabric that determines the current condition. A heritage assessment of these structures are included concluding this chapter.

THE TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE AND SHARED FACILITIES

A centralised transport interchange is proposed where the current taxi rank is located. This facility is proposed along with a new, shared parking complex for the shopping centre and the resort. Due to its close proximity to other transit interchanges (such as the airport in the southern part of the urban edge), it allows for optimal access into the environment and makes global conditions local. It furthermore aids in representing the natural landscape, and acts as an urban condenser in terms of access to opportunity. The sharing of parking facilities enables sharing in the design, construction and maintenance of these facilities. These facilities intertwine with the commons through a boardwalk design alongside the water landscape.

NEW ACCESS FACILITIES AND TOURISM CENTRE

The new tourism centre is proposed within the central gardens bordering the transport interchange and parking facilities. This facility interconnects with a new access control, administration and changing amenities that lead to the southern garden with existing water facilities. The clustering of these facilities conjoins tourism of the area with the resort and integrates with the proposed transit interchange to intercept the liminality that it accommodates.

THE PUBLIC COLLECTOR

An urban square in the form of a garden, with a fresh produce market and a craft market, is proposed to the south of the site. This creates an interchange between tourism and local culture, and is intended to serve as an anchor to local cultural endeavours within the urban grain that leads from there. It furthermore serves as public space for the residences of Bela-Bela and becomes another node to the narrative of the Everyday. This collector forms an extension to the intervention to the north through a greenhouse that extends onto the site .

THE "BAD SE LOOP"

The flow and the downstream drainage from the facilities at the fountain, traditionally known as *Bad se loop*, are still visible through retention dams that host recreational usage. Extensions to the ski-boat dam are proposed so that a portion of the resort resembles the original state of the terrain - a marshland. The visibility of the transformed landscape design, throughout the region and the town, enables an understanding of what the *place* is about. The metaphysical connection between the water from the fountain and tourism industry is also proposed through mineral harvesting from the water for the industrial land-usage that forms part of the commons. The design of a water feature, that makes visible the filtration system of the water, is proposed to link and animate the downstream transferral of the water drained from the site and the promenade.



Figure 5. 20
Framework
plan
(Author, 2015)

THE MUNICIPAL AND MULTIPLE RESIDENTIAL GROUNDS

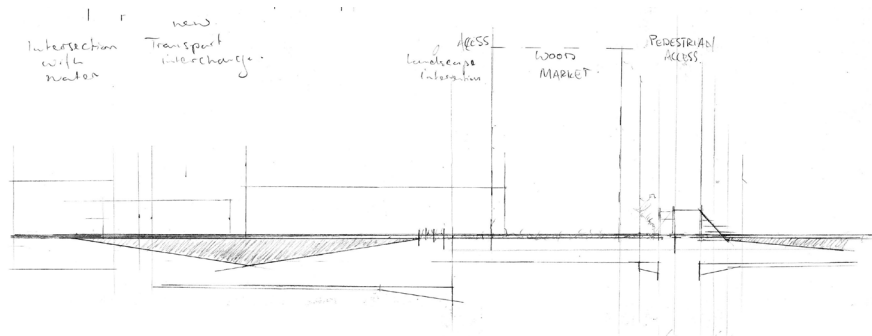
Through extending the landscape design, over the main road to the municipality and the open land to the west, the grounds, zoned as Municipal and as Multiple Residential, gain a relationship with the urban centre and recreational facilities. New Tourism-Residential, Residential and Commercial Mixed-Use developments set in the urban park, is proposed to the west, which conjoins with reformed municipal facilities and grounds.

THE PROMENADE

A promenade is proposed that envelops the eastern boundary of the site. It is proposed as articulated pathways and connects between all these interventions and the existing urban fabric. Where it meets the site of transport interchange and, it diverges into routes that extend over the site and interconnects the site with the nodes and conditions around it. This promenade form an integral component to the transit interchange in order to create new associations between remote localities and the nucleus and fountain.

SITE SECTION

B-B



SITE SECTION

A-A

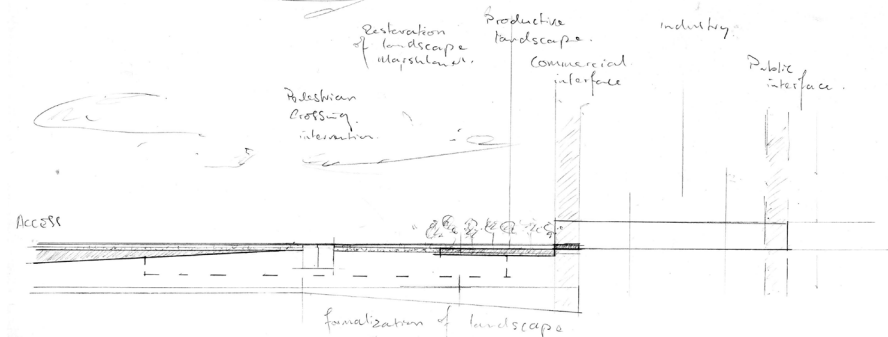


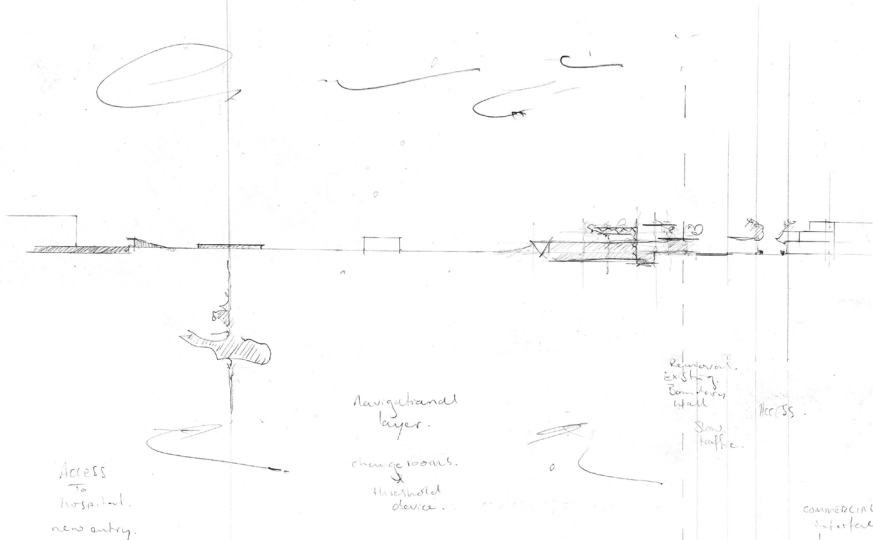
Figure 5. 21

Urban framework:
Section
development

(Author, 2015)

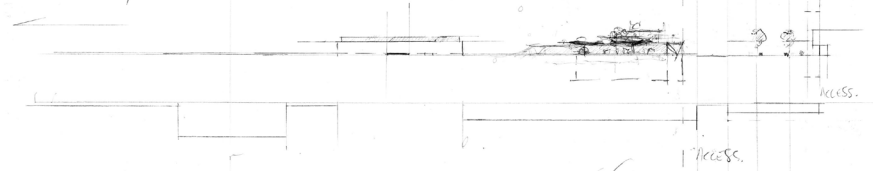
SITE SECTION

F-F



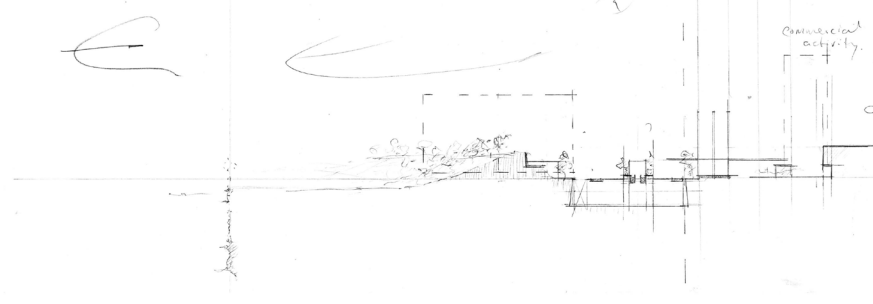
SITE SECTION

E-E



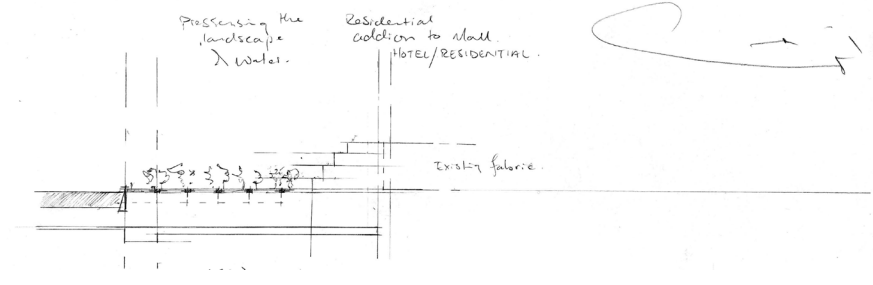
SITE SECTION

D-D



SITE SECTION

C-C



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

THE RECEPTION AND OFFICES

This building was designed a part of the perimeter condition to the new Hydro spa centre by Jan Bosch and Partners architects 1974. It accommodates the resort's reception offices and conjoins with the with the vehicular entrance gate.

The building, less than 60 years old, is constructed of the same materials as that of the Hydro and represents thae same undulating brick skin though it is not used for the same purpose. This building merely serves an administrative function and has no cultural significance or other special value for the present and future community.

The project proposes the re-scripting of access and movement at the nucleus condition and thus proposes that the building be demolished so new relations can manifest with the re-instated public gardens and fountain.

HOUSE FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT

This building was designed at the northeastern boundary of the resort to house the superintendent to the facilities. Designed by K. J. Richards, in 1965, the structure is of no architectural or cultural significance and is less than 60 years of age. It still serves as residency to staff of the resort by is located fronting the CBD of the town.

This edge is ringed by major vehicular arteries extending into the environment and is proposed as catalytic site for the intervention which aims to mediate a relationship between the urbanity and the central gardens.

THE CHANGING FACILITIES

This building serves as changing facilities and pedestrian access control into the garden pools and facilities. This building dates out of the period when facilities were formalised at resort but has seen many additions and alterations to it. It once flanked the main pool located south of it as the changing facilities flanked the axis extending from the gardens to the north, to the centre of the loggia. Later, an addition of a tearoom was constructed on first level which was subsequently demolished years later.

The building has been a major determining factor of development at the resort but has lost its initial purpose and is amended to in function by changing rooms closer to water facilities. All the facilities and structures that once conjoined with this building have been demolished along with the initial pool. The project proposes the reinstatement of the northern gardens to public and the rehabilitation hereof as this cultural value transcends the value of the structure.

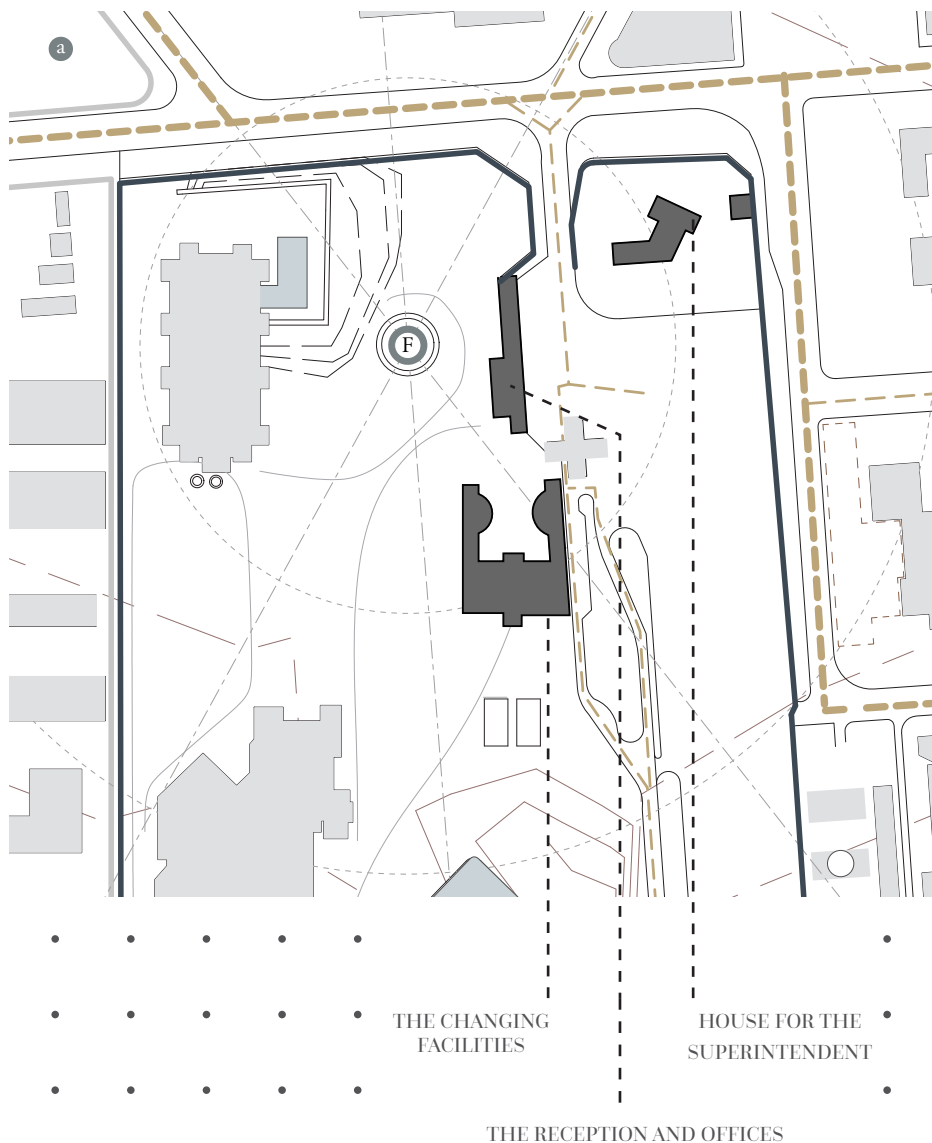


Figure 5. 22
The proposed
structures to be
demolished
(Author, 2015)

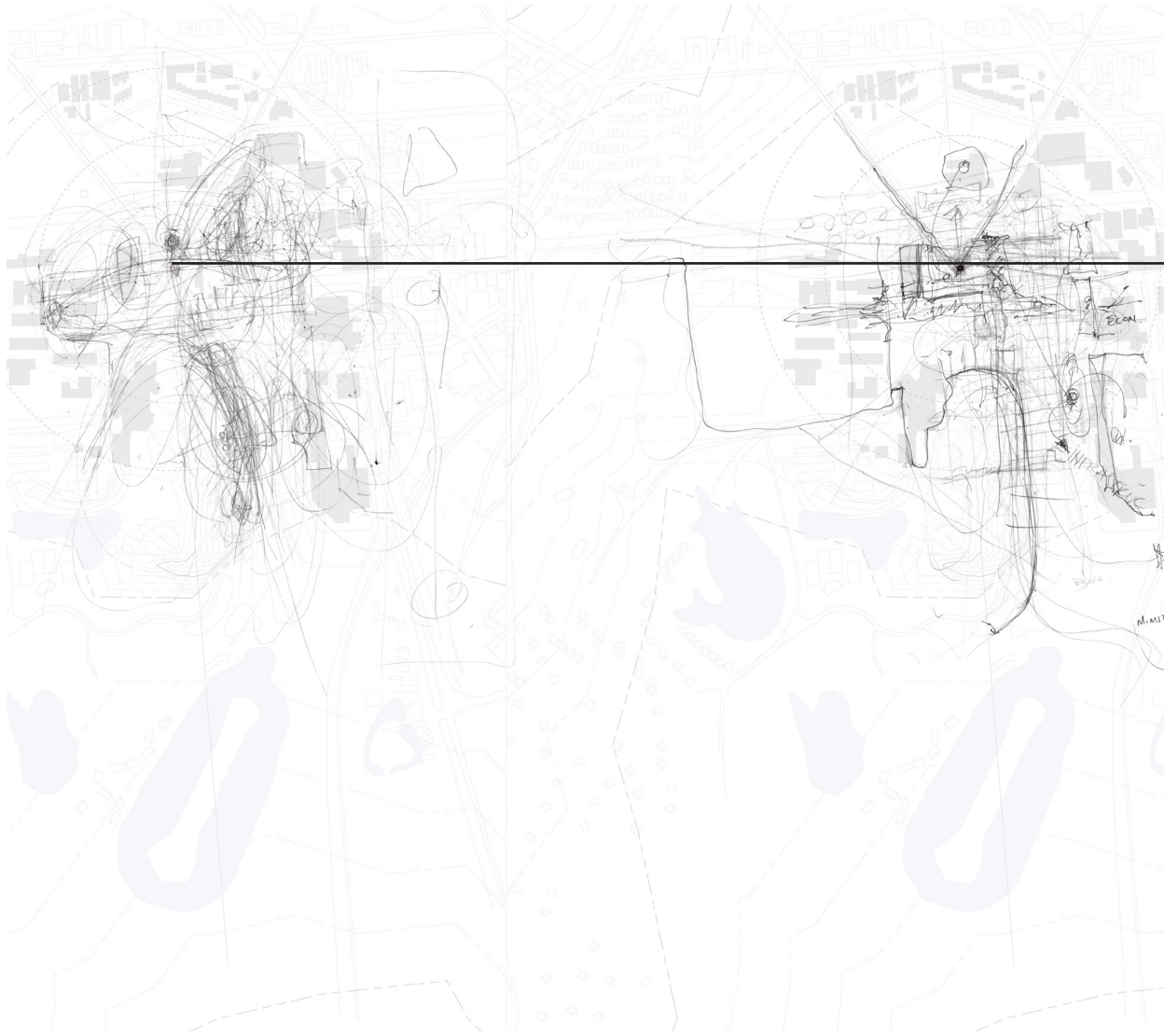


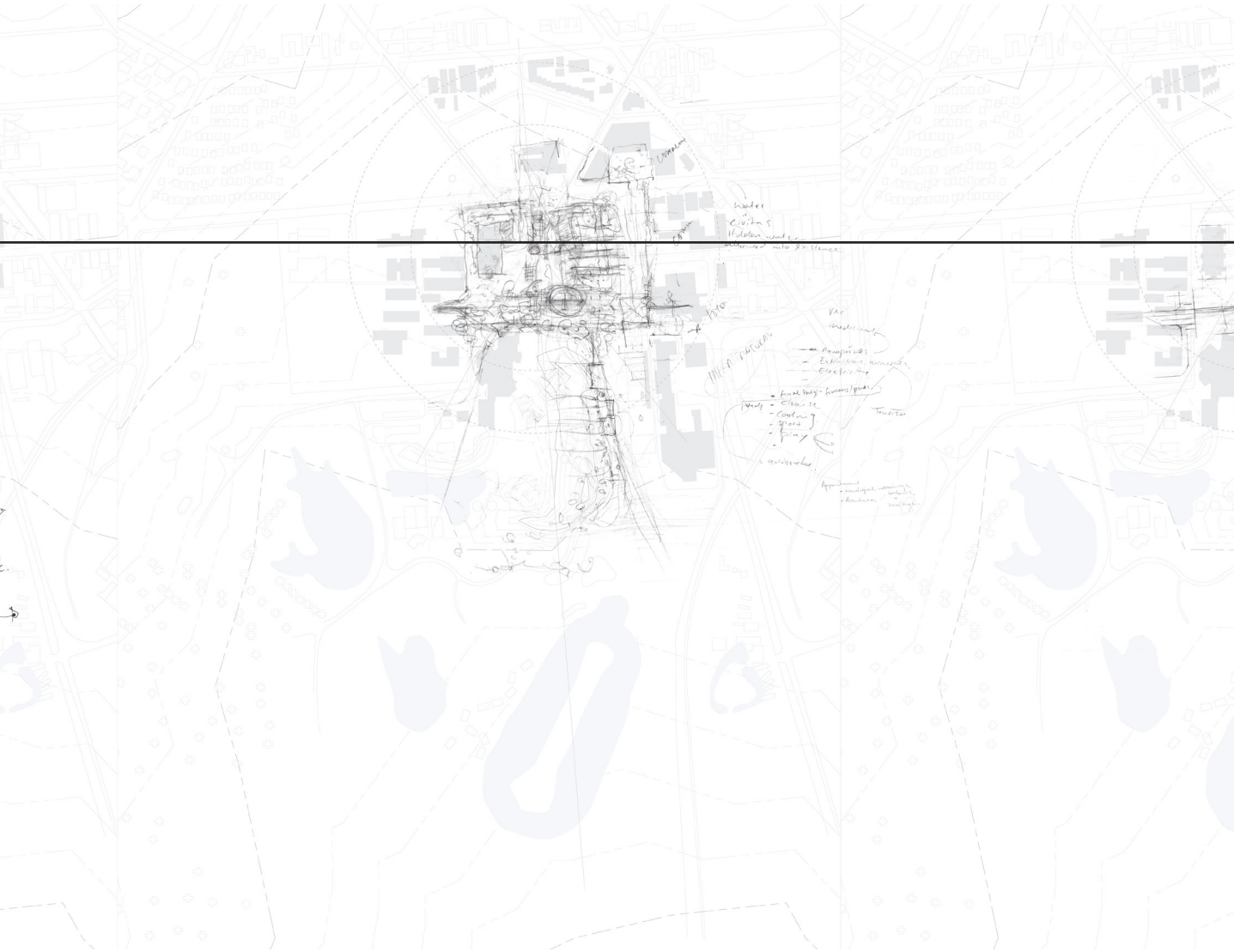


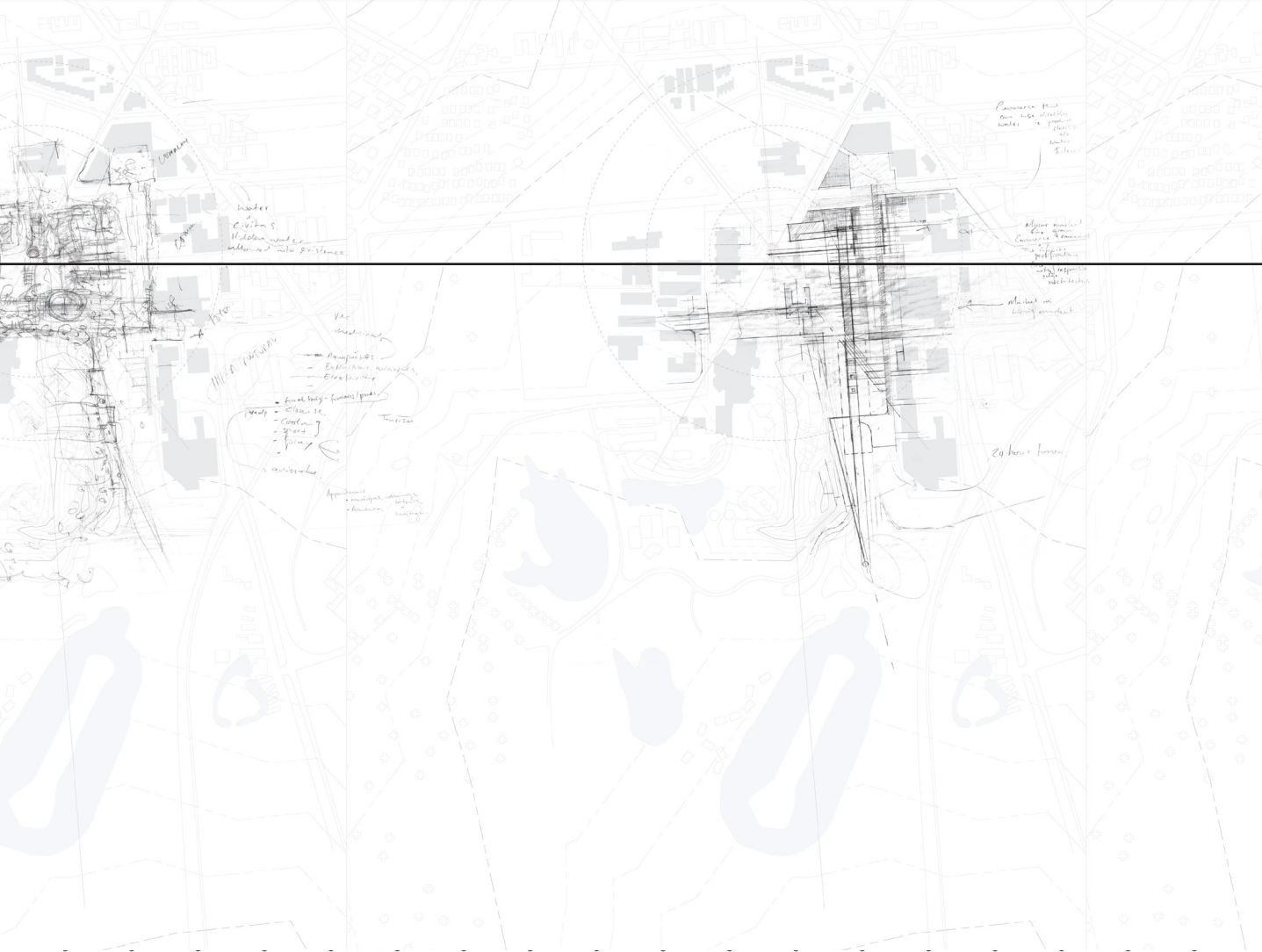
Figure 5. 23
House for the
superintendent
(Author, 2015)

Figure 5. 25
The reception
and offices
(Author, 2015)

Figure 5. 24
The changing
facilities
(Author, 2015)







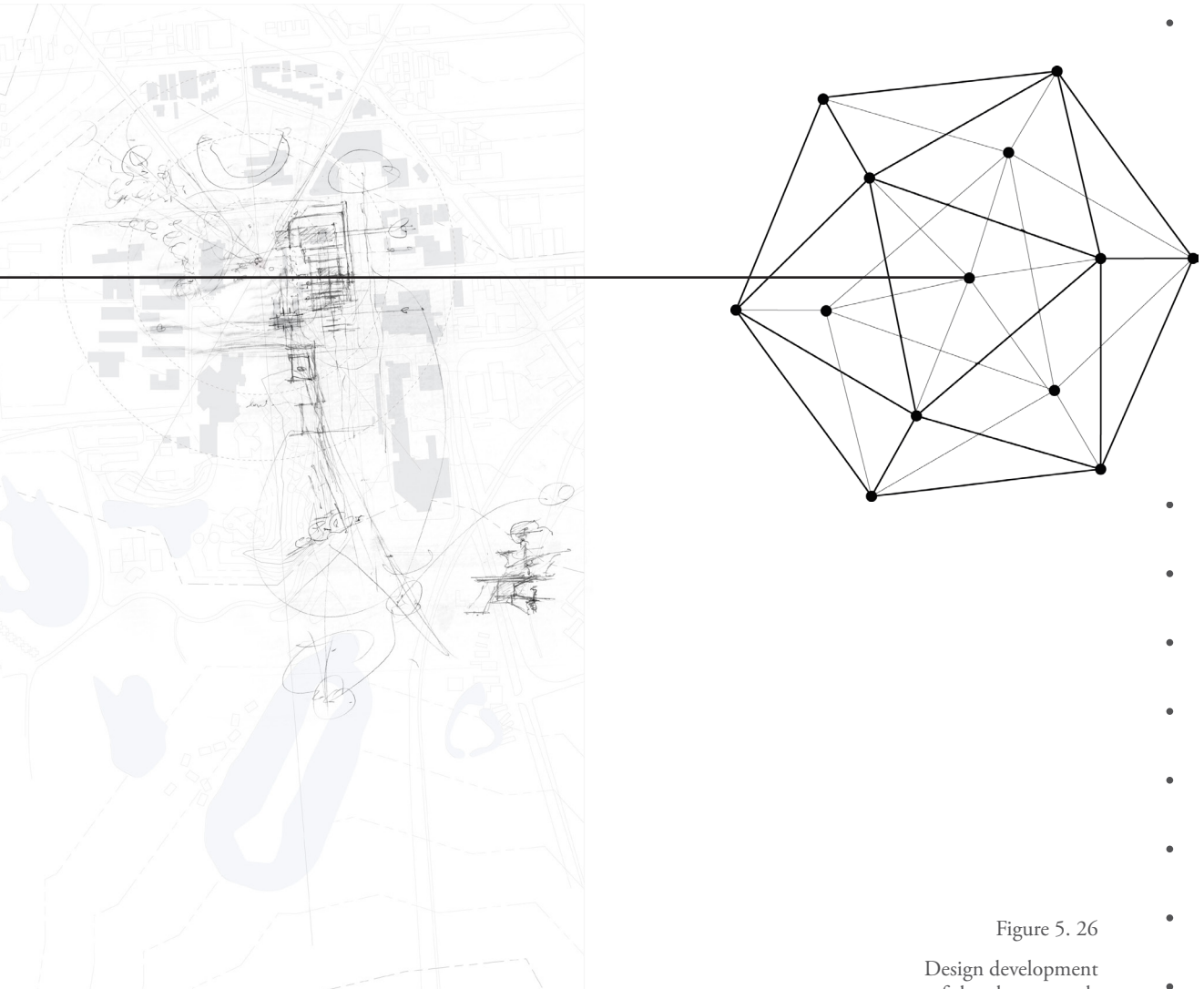


Figure 5. 26
Design development
of the plan: towards
an integration of
conditions and
components
(Author, 2015)

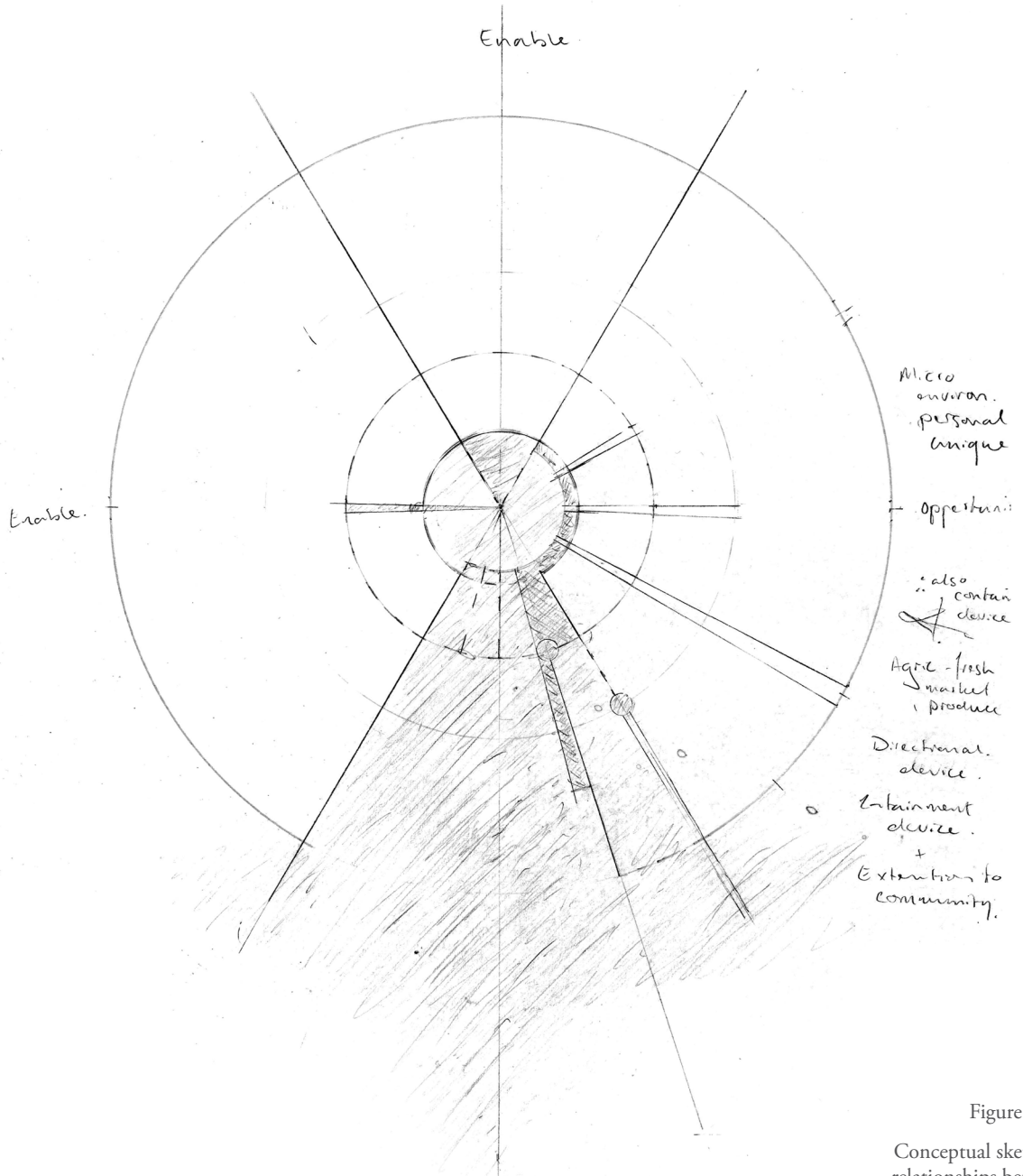


Figure 5.27
Conceptual sketch of relationships between the commons and the enveloping environment
(Author, 2015)

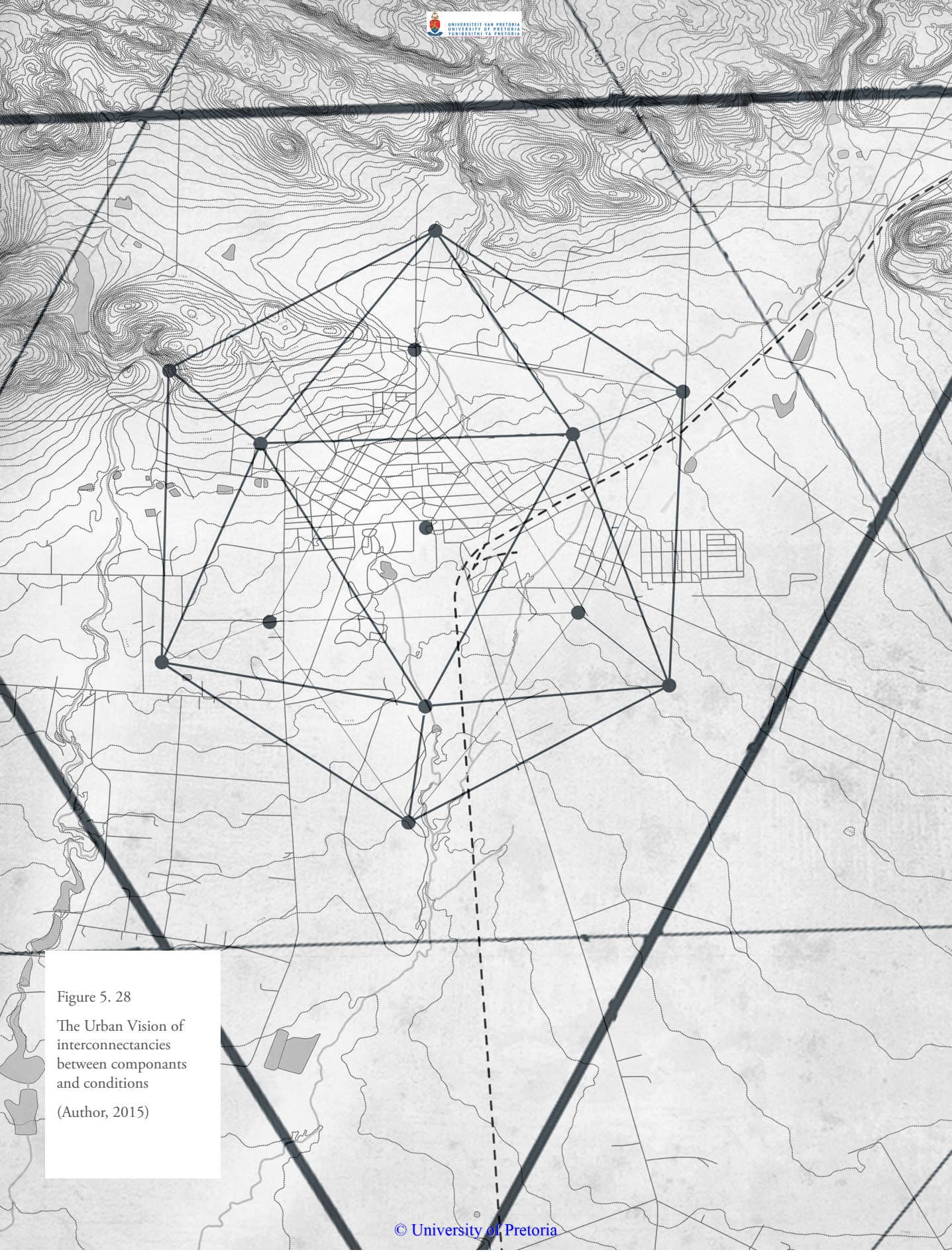


Figure 5. 28

The Urban Vision of
interconnectancies
between componants
and conditions

(Author, 2015)

