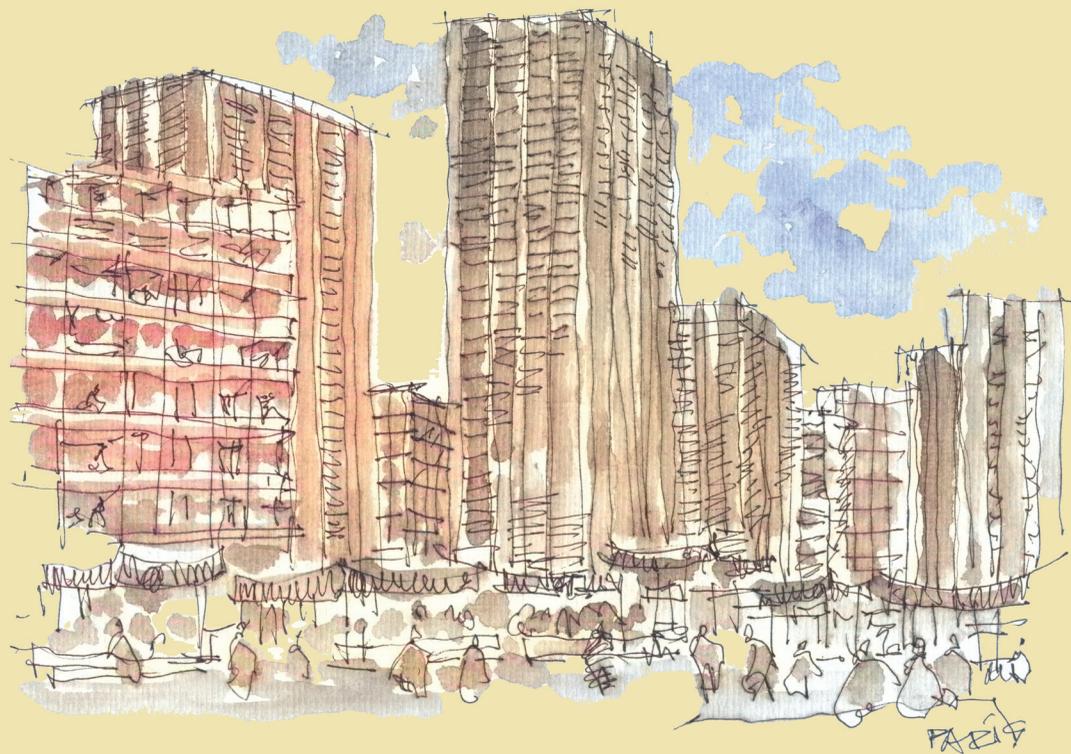


UNCLE GEORGE'S PLAYGROUND

Mass Housing for Kids

Vlatko P. Korobar · Roberto Goycoolea · Inês L. Rodrigues · Paz Núñez



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European
Middle Class
Mass Housing
□ □ □ □ CA18137

English edition

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How to use

THE BOOK

ABOUT THE BOOK

The book tells the adventures of Marco, Uncle George and their neighbours, people who could be living anywhere in the kind of mass housing shown in the drawings. Through these characters, we want to give young readers (as well as their parents, teachers, and grandparents...) an idea of what this urban social phenomenon was like, while providing a general picture of the different neighbourhoods scattered across various European cities, where many of us live. And our children too.

Vlatko and Ines' determination to produce a book for children as one of the outcomes of the COST Action (CA18137) led to a first draft of the story. Roberto offered to do the illustrations, based on selected neighbourhoods covered within the Action, and Paz contributed to parts of the book in its revised form.

The authors would like to express their gratitude to 8-year-old Sara, who had the patience and resolve to read the story and point out the bits which did not reflect the attitude and point of view of a child.

The book, which started out as a simple story, gradually took the form of the story/game/manual it has now become - a learning game for those who would like to put it to even better use.

In the column marked A, a number refers to the drawing of a mass-housing complex similar to where the story takes place. The game is to figure out which country and city the building in the drawing is from. The answers are at the end of the book.

Below each picture there is a caption (B), which gives clues as to where the example in the picture comes from.

For those who want to know more about mass housing, each drawing has its own QR code (C), that provides a link to more information on the housing development shown in the drawing. The information has been taken from the book *European Middle-Class Mass Housing: Past and Present of the Modern Community*.

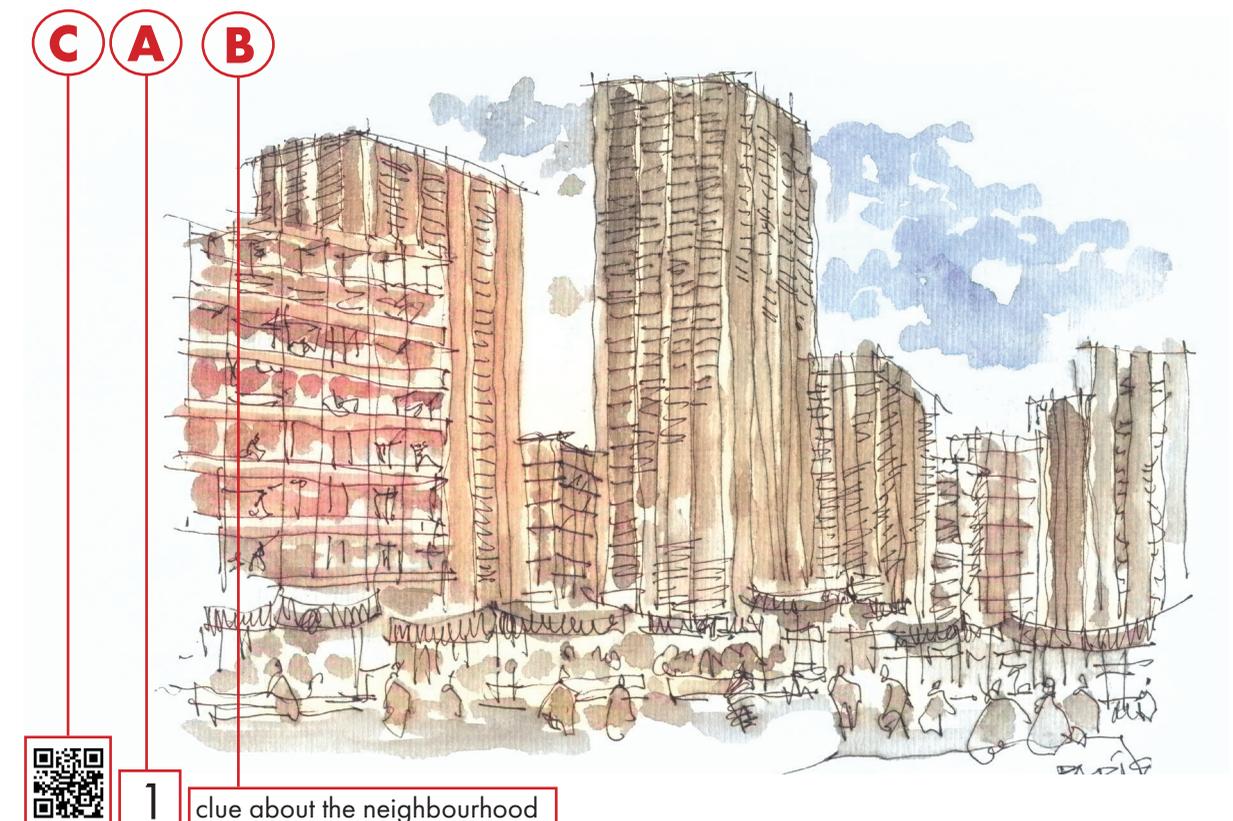
AFTER READING THE BOOK

At the end of the book, you'll find the same drawings, but this time in black and white.

Why not colour them in either on your tablet or by printing them out, to then bring them to colourful life in your own way? You can even add anything that you think makes the neighbourhood look even more liveable!

Likewise, at the end, you'll also find a link to download a printable version of the book, if you like having your own paper copy. You can do it yourself at home!

Once you have coloured them in (either digitally or manually), if you want you can send your drawings to mcmh.eu@gmail.com and become part of the COST Action MCMH-EU collection of children's drawings.





THE MASS HOUSING COMPLEXES

At the beginning of the second half of the last century, cities in Europe were growing at a rapid rate, welcoming an ever-increasing number of new residents.

This increase led to a need to provide enough new apartments to house them all.

The solution to the problem was found in the construction of all kinds of housing buildings of different heights. When built in close proximity to each other, they formed a community. This community needed not just apartments, but also shops, kindergartens, schools, playgrounds, and green areas.

In this way, communities became small semi-autonomous cities within a city.

The building of a large number of structures with apartments all at once, intended to provide homes for many, became known as mass housing.

Not all these housing areas were considered successful, or desirable places to live. Over time, some of them were demolished, giving way to new construction. However, others were liked so much that they became well-known parts of cities. These areas bore witness to a time when buildings with enough apartments to house a vast amount of people, or so-called mass housing, was the prevailing form of residential construction.

Of course, the needs of residents change over time, and many of these areas have been renovated and upgraded. It is always good when actual residents are included in this process; no one knows their needs better than they do.

Studying how these MHs arose and the current state of these MHs was the goal of COST Action CA18137 on Middle-Class Mass Housing in Europe.



Mass Housing for Kids

UNCLE GEORGE'S PLAYGROUND

My name is Marco. I live in a part of town full of housing blocks and towers. We live on the fifth floor of one of the big housing towers.



A long time ago, the flat belonged to my grandparents, but recently it was renovated, and the entire facade was spruced up. In our neighbourhood, there are two more housing towers, just like ours. The towers are exactly the same. The people who live in them are not.

I go to the primary school which is not far away from our building. Lots of my friends at school live in the same building as me. I know some boys and girls from the other two towers, who go to the same school as me, but I am mostly in contact with my friends from our tower.

We have a group on social media, and we chat everyday. I couldn't really say whether I spend more time doing my homework or chatting with my friends.



During the day I spend a lot of time lying on my bed with my mobile or tablet, and a big pile of sweets by my side. Just recently, I've put on a bit of weight. I imagine that's why they call me Chubby. I don't like it.



3

A mass-housing development in the second largest city of a Central European country on the eastern border of the European Union. Located on the banks of the Vistula River, it was the country's capital until the end of the 16th century.

Yesterday, Ahmed from the second floor got a present from his cousin. A “real” professional football. Ahmed suggested that tomorrow after school we should play football on the nearby green field that many of us used, but nobody was really taking care of.



When we got there, we were surprised how tall the grass had grown.



It really made it difficult to play football. So we soon gave up. Just as we got near our tower block, the man who lived on the ground floor with a garden in front of his flat, stopped us. We called him Uncle George. He was a nice person. He lived with his niece Sara who was in a wheelchair. He told us that he had seen us and that he could give us a hand with the grass. He said: "It's Saturday tomorrow, no school, so be here at 10 in the morning."



The next day, we were all standing in front of the building at 10 o'clock. Uncle George came with his lawn mower, looked at us, and said:

"You look like you are about to go to a concert. Go back home, put on some old clothes, bring rakes if you have them, because I only have one, and try to find some protective gloves for your hands. Oh, yes, and wear something on your heads".



5

A mass-housing development in the capital of a country in Southeast Europe, which borders with the Danube River to the north.

When we came back, what a motley sight we were - a colourful gang just about ready to start "gardening". It took us hours and hours to cut the grass and put it all in large disposable bags. Sara helped us with removing the bags.

The playground was ready for the first ever football game in our neighbourhood. We needed a rest after all that hard work, so we agreed that we'd play at 11 on Sunday morning. We decided to let Sara play with us also, while Uncle George promised he'd be the first to come watch.



Even before 11 on Sunday morning, we were all in front of our building, ready and waiting. We played five-a-side. We marked the goalposts with big stones, and these led to heated arguments about whether a goal had been scored or whether the ball was too high. To calm things down, Uncle George volunteered to be the referee. My team lost. It wasn't a big deal, we were happy to have played our first football game in the neighbourhood. It's amazing how little things, such as cutting the grass, can make a big difference.

As we played, we saw several kids from the other two buildings approaching the playground to watch us. Two of them were from my school and I didn't even know we were neighbours. As soon as the game was over, one of them disappeared for a short while and then came back with a ball of their own.



As we left, they started playing and we heard them arguing about the same thing: goal or no goal. Uncle George said that we should think of ways to solve the goal issue, as fighting over it might ruin our friendship. He was right, so we all decided that we should somehow find the money to purchase two small goalposts.

At the Commercial Centre, eating ice cream, we decided that we should collect money for purchasing the goals.

We contributed with our own pocket money and our parents pitched in too. In next to no time, we scraped together the money. We had just enough to buy all we needed to make the goalposts ourselves.



One of our neighbours, Claus, who owns a repair shop in the neighbourhood, lent a hand. He did most of the work, but we helped with painting the goals, attaching the nets and other bits and pieces.

As it came towards the end of the school year, we decided to organise a final tournament and to invite our parents to the games. We asked Uncle George to be our guest of honour. He gladly accepted the invitation. Sitting in his garden chair, he invited us to join him for a cold soft drink.



He had something to tell us. He said: "Look how much you have achieved with one simple action.

You've changed our neighbourhood. You shouldn't stop here. You should do more." We asked him: "What should we do next?" "Well," he said, "that's for you to decide, so you'd better start thinking!"

On the last day of the school year, all of us who were regular users of the playground got together to start organising the tournament.



The first thing that came to mind was to make posters and invite all the residents to come for a football picnic. We put the signs at the entrance of the school. Then John from the other tower suggested we should name the playground after Uncle George,



so that it would become a place with a name: Uncle George's Playground. We all agreed to make a big sign and unveil it at the beginning of the tournament, without telling him beforehand. It was to be a surprise.





Uncle George's words that we should do more were constantly in the back of our minds.

Under the arcades of Ahmed's building, we started coming up with proposals for what would be best to do next, but nothing seemed good enough. Then, all of a sudden, Sara came up with a brilliant idea. She said that although we had some good suggestions, we didn't really know what needed to be done in our neighbourhood. In order to find out, we should ask.



The football picnic was the right time to gather different opinions all at once. So, we decided to make a survey with just one question: What would make our neighbourhood a better place?

The big day arrived. It was a Sunday. We didn't know what to expect, but it turned out much better than we could have dreamed. Neighbours were constantly showing up, entire families who brought chairs and picnic tables for all their drinks and snacks.

It seemed as if they'd all been waiting for a reason to get together. We handed out the one-question survey and asked them to write down as many things as they could think of and then put their answers in the box we provided.





Uncle George came with his garden chair, dressed as if for a special event. He was really moved when we unveiled the sign with his name on it. Some of the neighbours got to meet him for the first time, but they all wanted to chat with him and appreciated what he had done for all of us.

Then the tournament started. We named our teams according to the different colours of the balconies, which was the only thing that distinguished the otherwise identical buildings. We were the Blues. The other two teams were the Reds and the Greens. In the first game we played against the Reds. We won 3-2. Then we played against the Greens and lost 3-2. The last game was to decide the winner of the tournament. The Reds played against the Greens and won 3-2.



So we didn't have a winner. We were all on equal points. This didn't bother any of us in the slightest. We enjoyed the games, and all the neighbours watching enjoyed themselves too. The football picnic went on well past the time the football games were over. One of the parents took a photo of our team with Uncle George.



The next day, we got together to open the box with the answers to our question. We were surprised how full it was. We were even more surprised with the answers. There were so many different things suggested that would never have crossed our minds. These are just some of the proposals:

- Repair the old deck designed for community activities.
- Make the tournament a traditional event not just for kids, but for parents as well.
- Repaint the railings in front of the buildings.
- Make vegetable gardens in several of the spaces between the buildings.
- Keep our neighbourhood clean and add more dustbins.
- Install a new basketball backboard and rim on the court that has been out of use for years.
- Provide sheltered spaces for bikes in front of every building.
- Renovate the existing ramps for prams and wheelchairs.



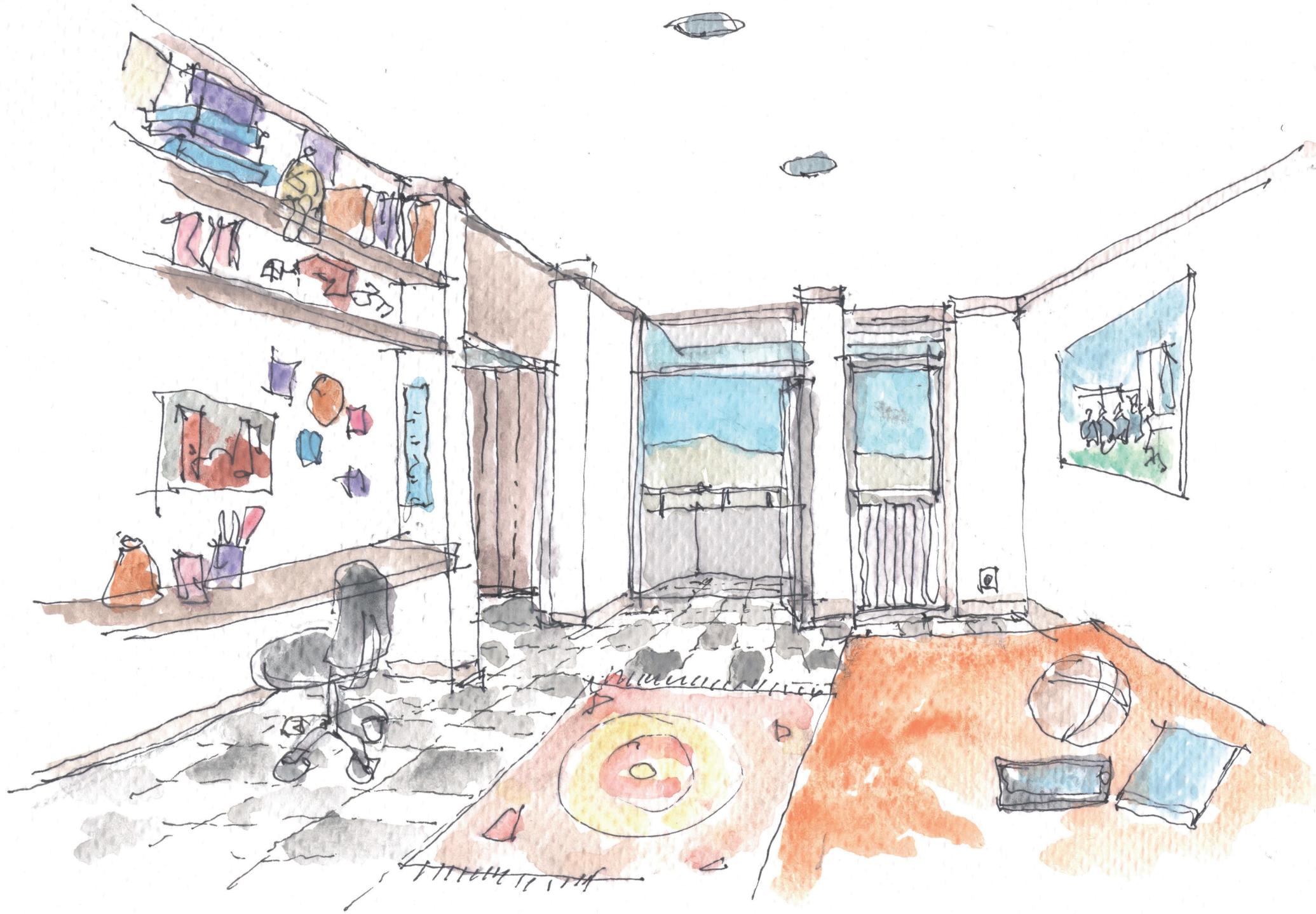
The list is still open to further suggestions.

In the meantime, we've started by setting up an urban orchard.



All of us who played on our team received a copy of the photo with Uncle George. I keep it on the wall next to my bed. You can still find me on the bed, mobile phone in hand chatting with my pals, but our exchanges are very different nowadays. We discuss what's next to be done on our agenda, from the shortlist we made based on the survey. Don't get me wrong, we do chat about other things as well!





But very often, I think about Ahmed and his football, which is what started it all. We are a very different, and much better neighbourhood now. Often, it takes just small things to make big changes. Uncle George and us, residents from the "blue" building, with the help of all the others managed to prove it. And, you know what? They don't call me Chubby anymore.

DRAWINGS TO PAINT

YOU CAN PAINT THEM ON YOUR
TABLET OR PRINT THEM OUT
TO PAINT WITH PENCILS, PENS,
WATERCOLOURS...

IF YOU WANT TO BE PART OF THE MCMH
TEAM, JUST SEND US A COPY BY EMAIL:

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HAVE FUN!

GREECE

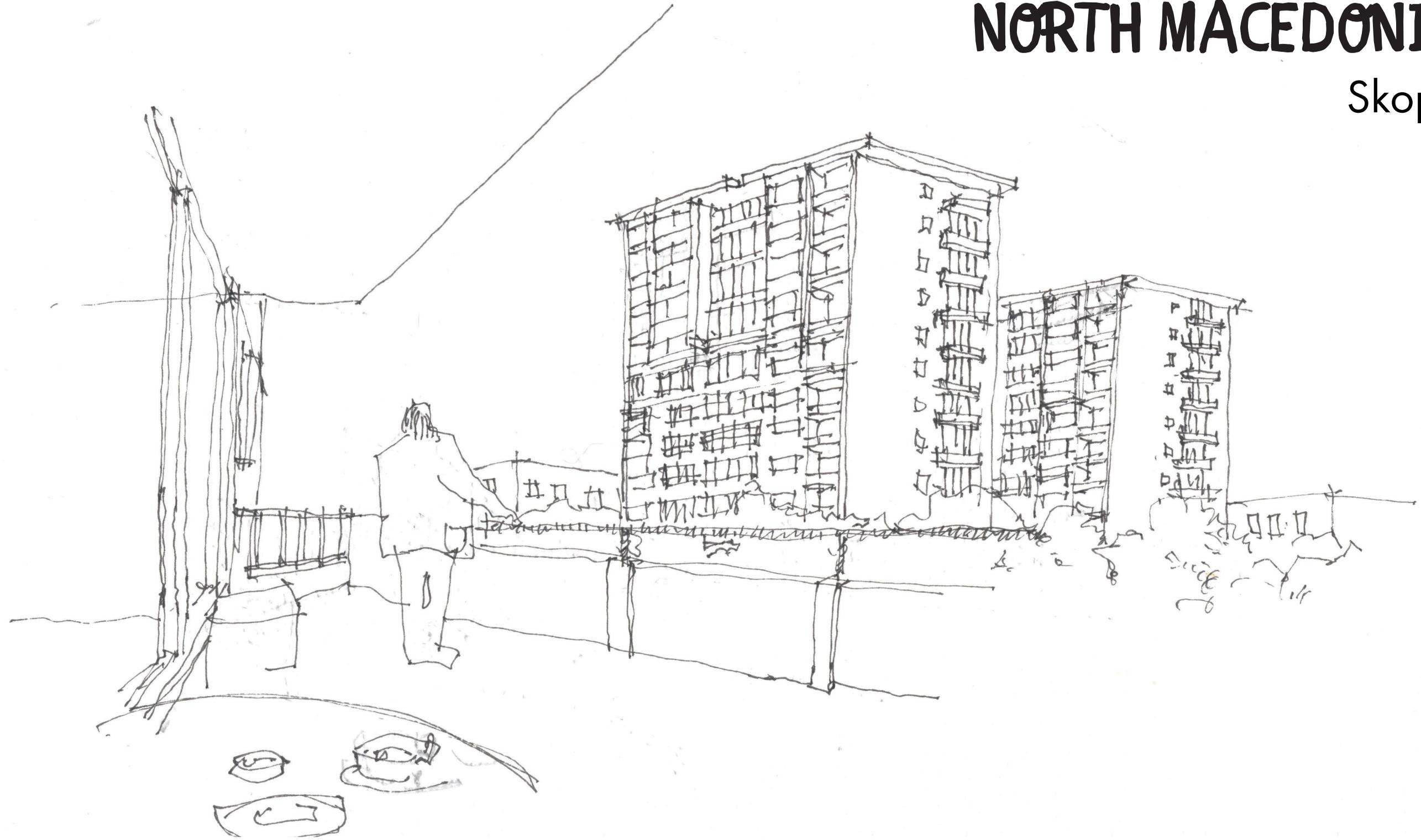
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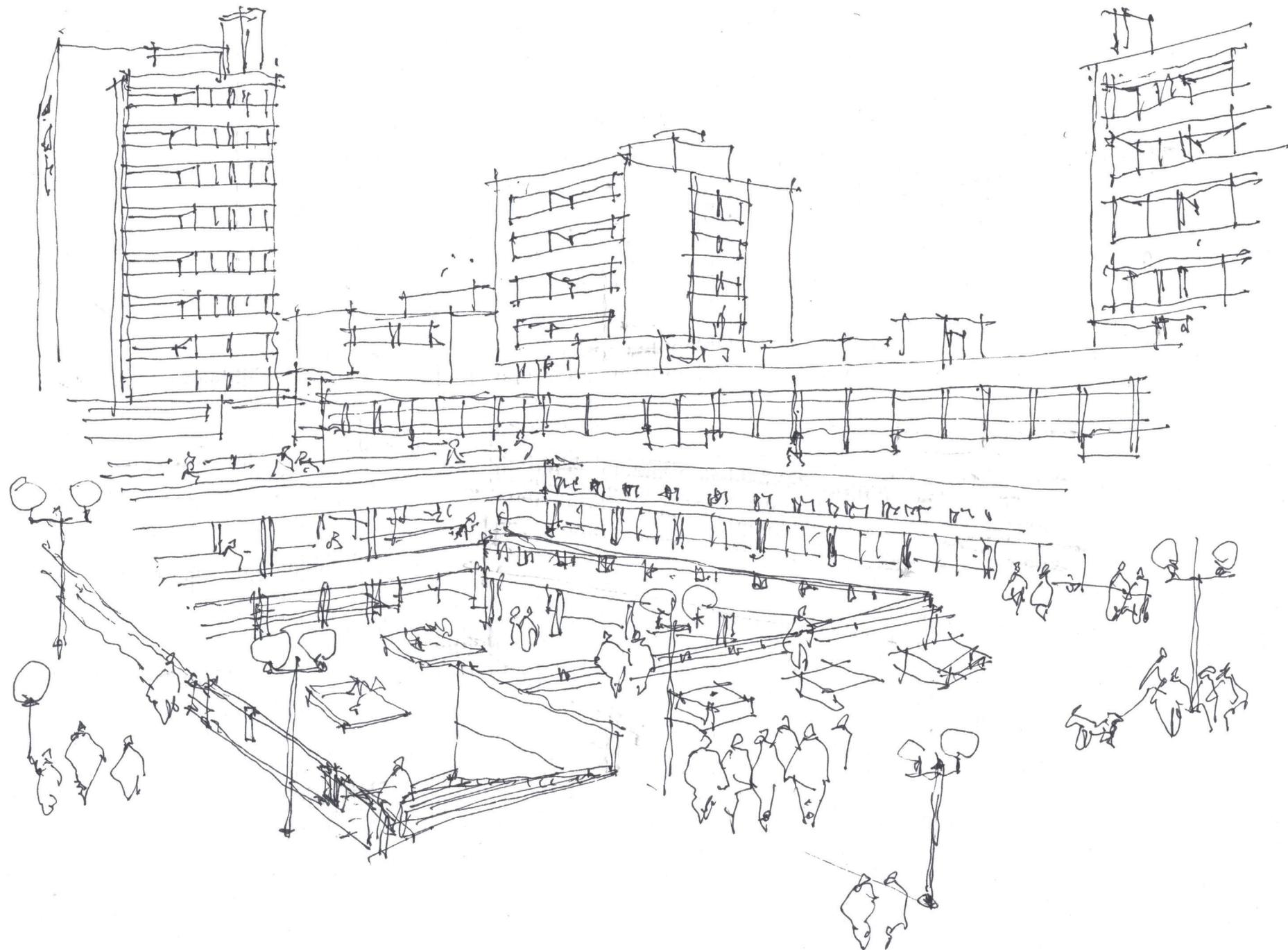
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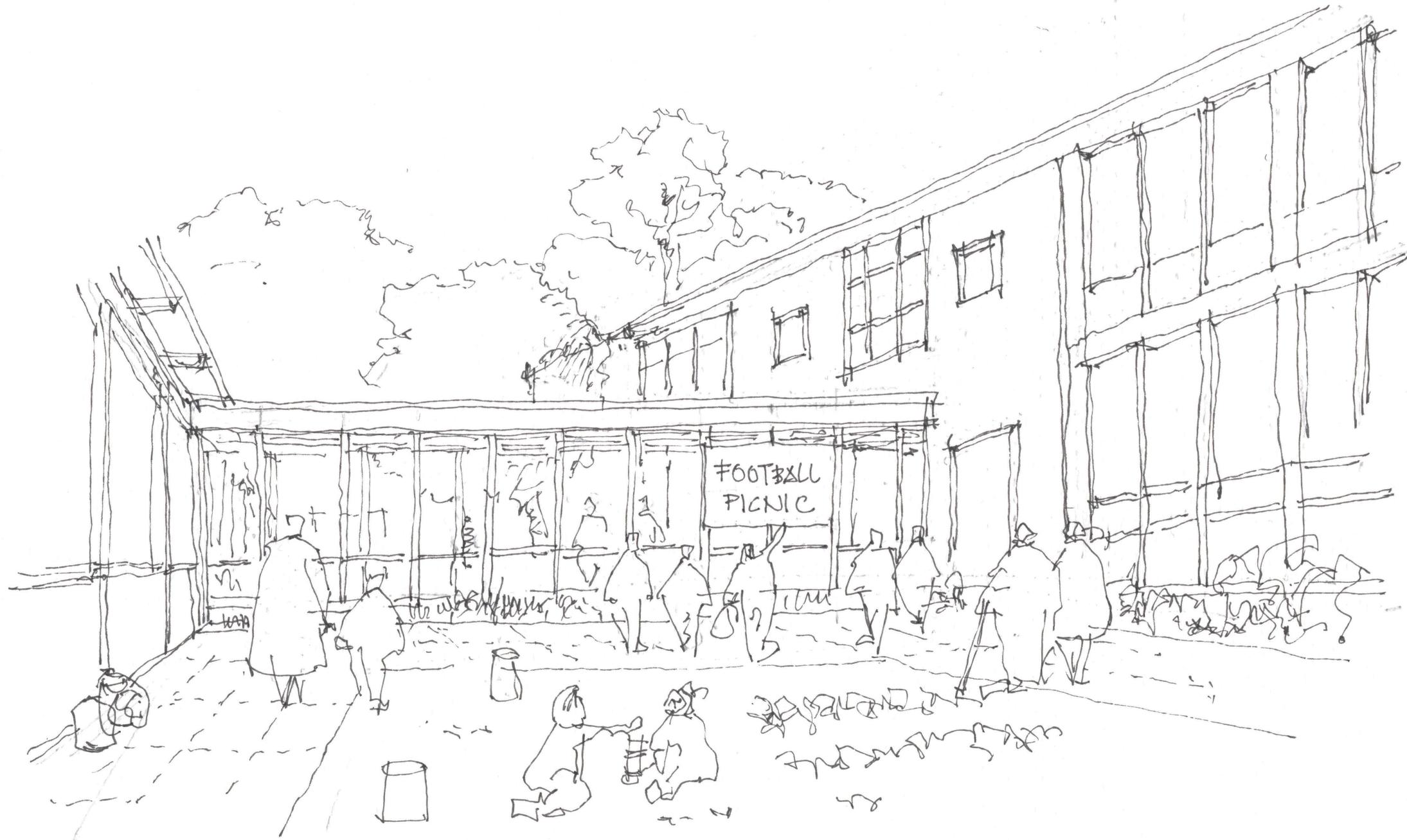
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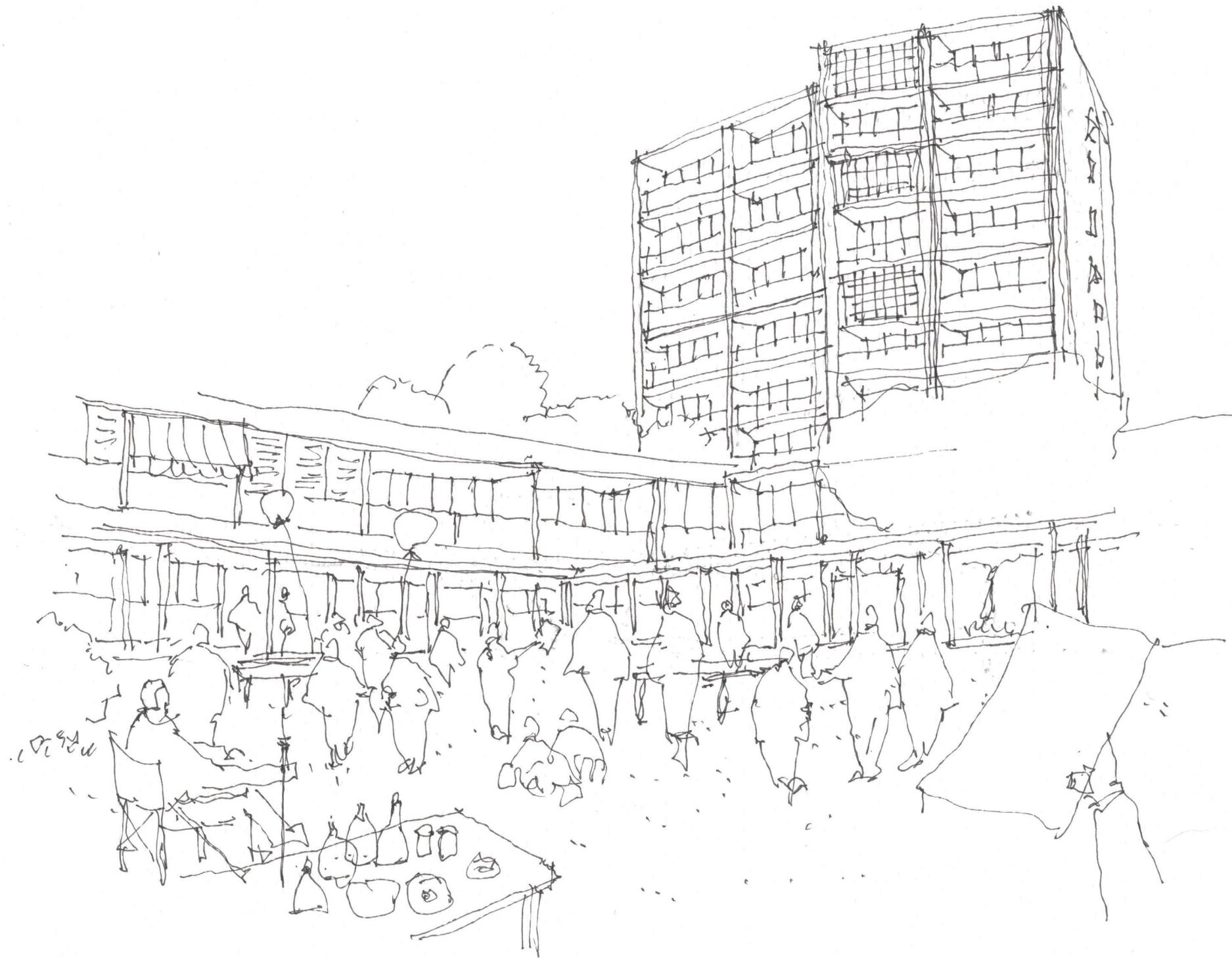
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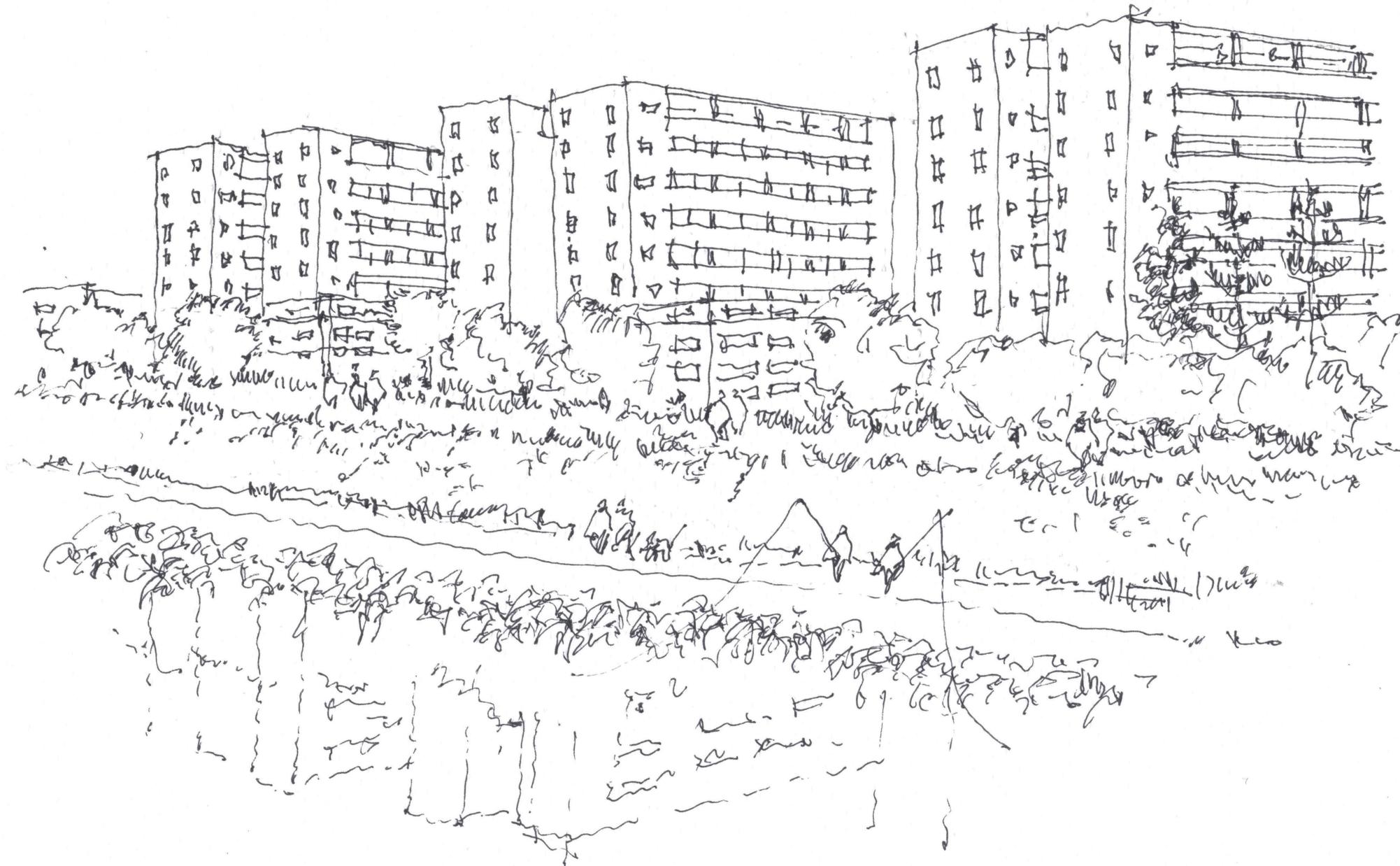
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Târgu-Mureş



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