

Palimpsest

Redevelopment of 高台民居 in Kashgar, Xinjiang

Zhiyu (Amanda) Zhang & Yangtong (Tony) Zhao

Palimpsest

is a parchment, manuscript, or writing surface (like papyrus or sheepskin) from which text was scraped or washed off to be reused for new writing. Because erasing was rarely perfect, original text often shows through beneath the newer layer.

Palimpsest: Redevelopment of 高台民居 in Kashgar, Xinjiang

高台民居

Gāo: First tone; meaning: a high place, a high cliff.

Tái: Second tone; meaning: an earthen platform, a terrace.

Mín: Second tone; meaning: the people, residents.

Jū: First tone; meaning: to reside, a dwelling.

01 Situation



02 Task



03 Action



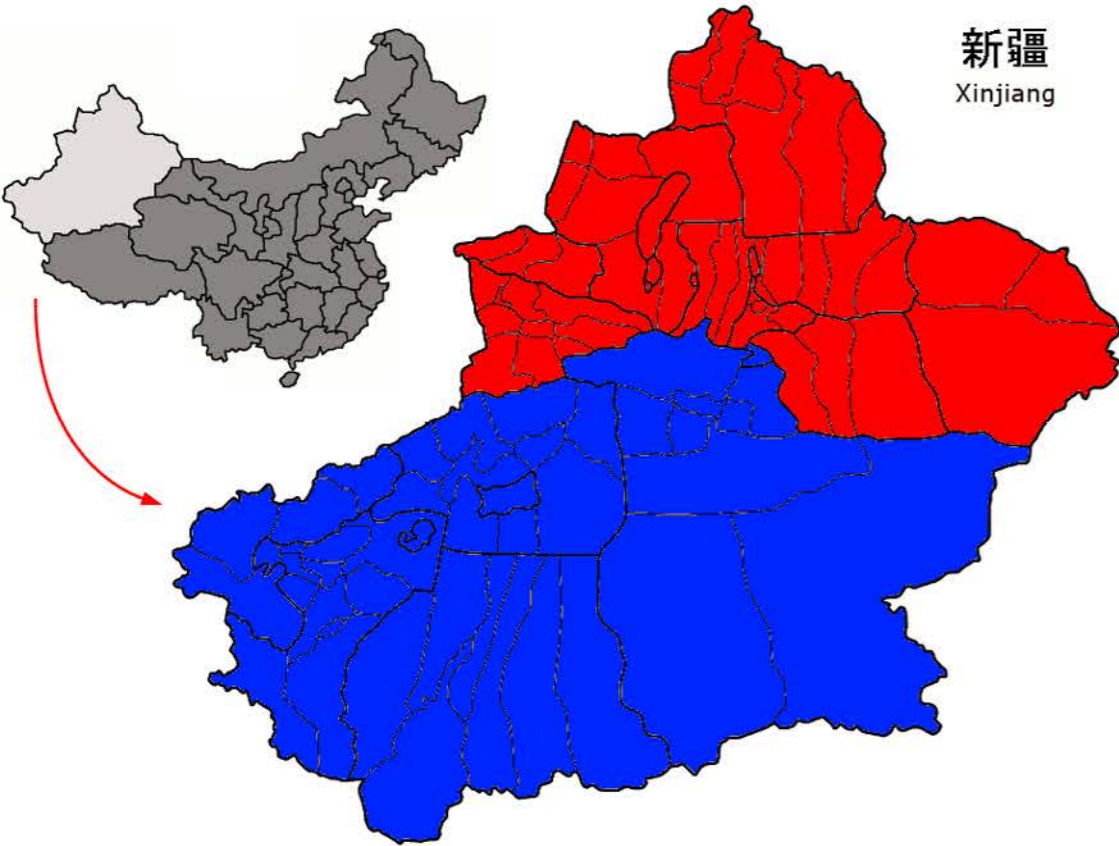
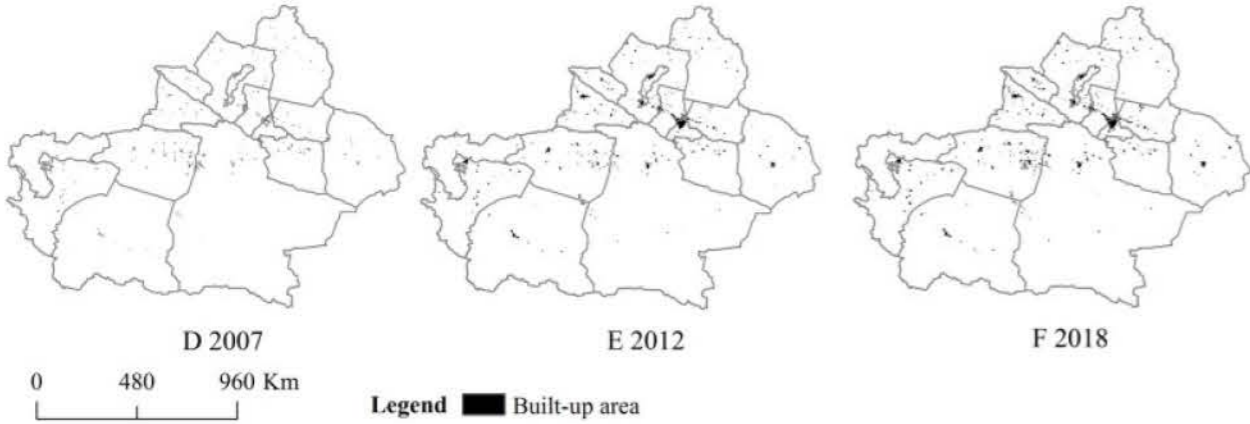
新疆

01 Situation

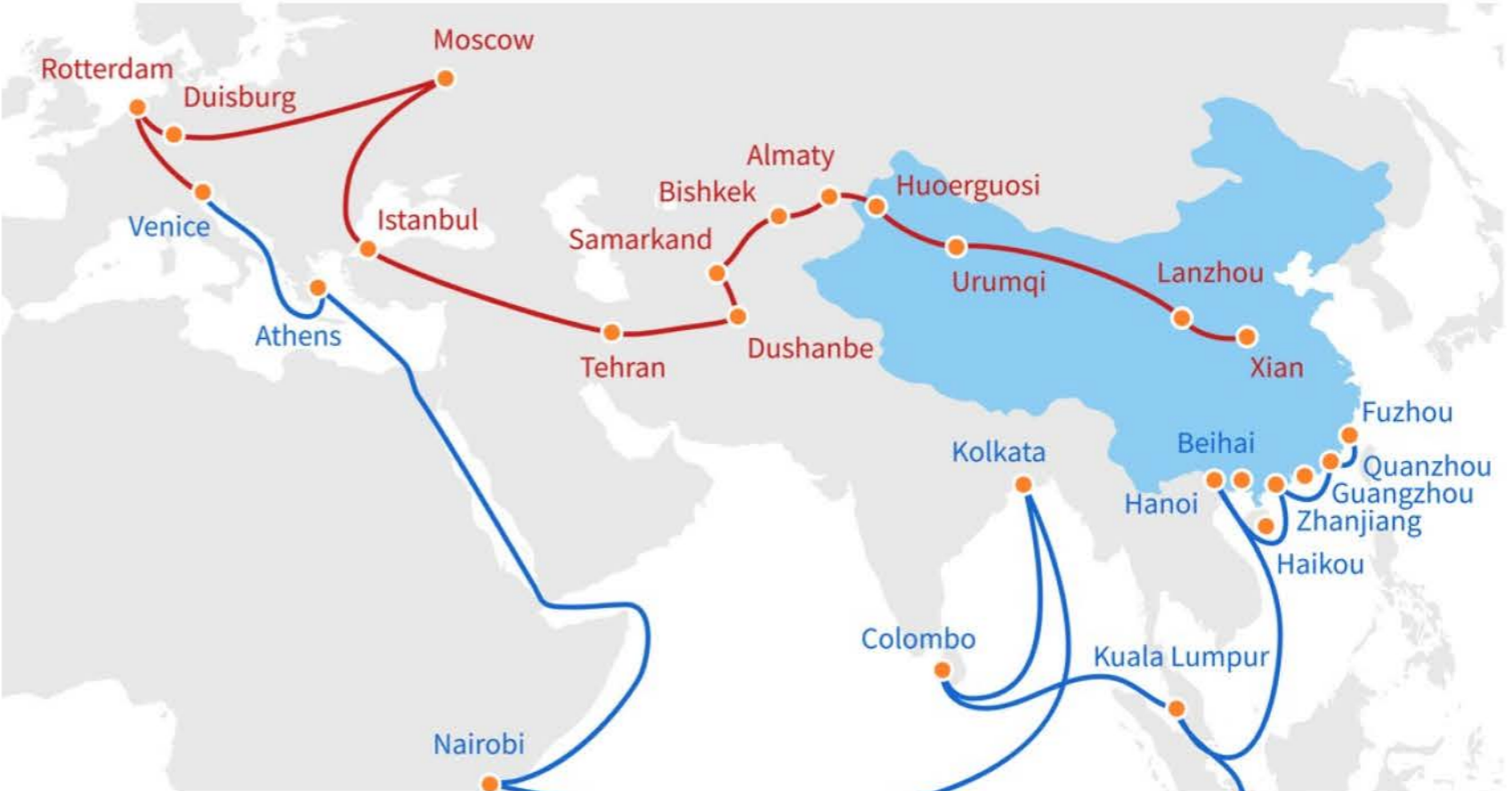
Southern Xinjiang's Slow Urbanization

Northern and Southern Xinjiang reflect sharp geographic and developmental contrasts. **North Xinjiang**, centered on Ürümqi, occupies historic Silk Road crossroads — its grasslands, resources, and trade advantages drawing infrastructure investment, industrial growth, and concentrated urbanization. **South Xinjiang**, by contrast, is structured around fragile oasis settlements along the Taklamakan Desert's edge. Kashgar and its neighbors face a persistent population-land mismatch: dense communities dependent on limited arable land and water, where urbanization remains slow and shaped by agriculture and small-scale commerce rather than industrial expansion.

Source: Li, X., Yang, X., & Gong, L. (2020), Fig. X, PLOS ONE.



- Northern Xinjiang: Dzungaria
- Southern Xinjiang: Tarim Basin / Altishahr

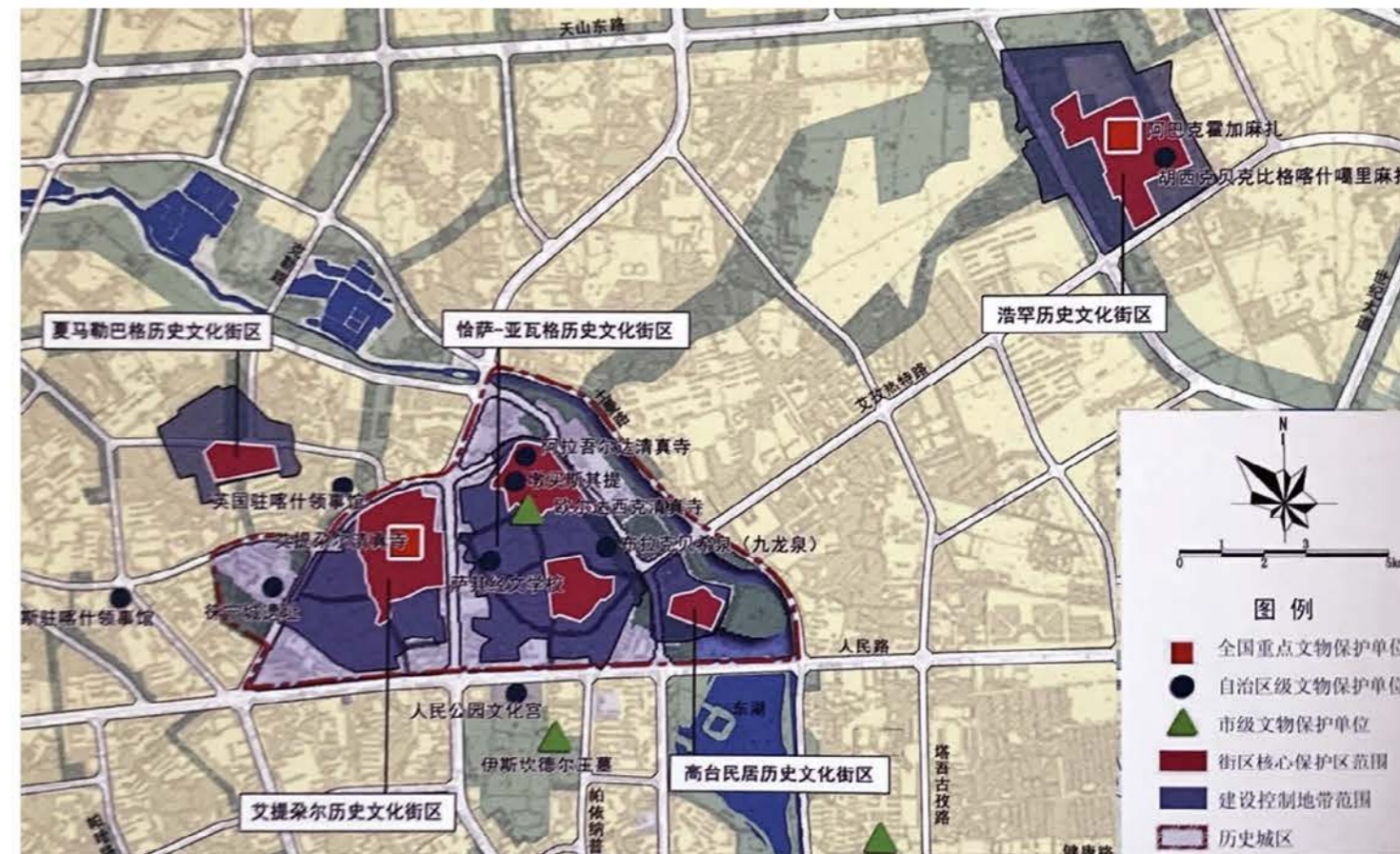


01 Situation

Ongoing Displacement in Kashgar

A 2012 master plan proposed selective preservation, yet by 2010 nearly two-thirds of the old city had already been demolished and approximately 65,000 Uyghur households relocated into uniform apartment blocks. Historic preservation would have maintained Kashgar's courtyard-based, mixed-use housing and fine-grained alley networks — a spatial logic shaped by climate, religion, and community life. Instead, tabula rasa redevelopment widened roads and introduced standardized mid-rise blocks in the name of seismic upgrades and modernization. The result improves infrastructure but imposes cultural standardization, eroding the vernacular spatial practices and social networks embedded within Kashgar's historic fabric.

Source: Uyghur Human Rights Project, The Kashgar Project, chinese.uhrp.org/kashgar-project-cn/



Source: Courtesy Shenzhen Urban Planning and Design Institute

A 2012 master plan called for historic preservation in four areas within Old Kashgar (marked in red) with "controlled construction" in most other areas (dark blue). By 2010, only the two poorer areas were preserved (marked in blue outline).

01 Situation

Tourism-oriented Development in Kashgar

Kashgar's redesignation as a national 5A tourism destination marks a shift from community-driven to tourism-oriented identity. Streets, façades, and courtyards are rebuilt to project an "authentic Uyghur image," while craft demonstrations and cultural performances are scheduled for visitors. Culture is preserved as visual product — packaged and curated — increasingly detached from the informal residential rhythms that once defined neighborhood life. Meanwhile, residents retain little control over housing, public space, or daily economic practice. Decision-making remains top-down, and cultural expression becomes managed spectacle. Identity is less protected than performed — staged for tourism consumption rather than sustained through everyday autonomy and collective memory.



01 Situation

Community Public Space Disappearing

Regulated public space in Kashgar prioritizes order and visibility over social life. The new People's Square replaces dense street activity with an open, legible plaza designed for surveillance and official gatherings. **The 2003 relocation of the Sunday bazaar and the repeated displacement of the livestock market to the city's edge** follow the same logic — markets once intertwining trade and neighborhood life are reorganized into administratively defined zones, severed from everyday rhythms. Historically, Kashgar's semi-public streets and courtyards hosted spontaneous markets, informal haggling, and collective exchange — spaces collectively produced rather than centrally staged. Even as regulation intensifies, fragments of this autonomous life persist within weekday markets, resisting spatial standardization.



01 Situation

Mosques Disappearing

In Kashgar, numerous neighborhood mosques have been demolished, relocated, or extensively modified under rationales of redevelopment, seismic safety, and standardized management. These actions dismantle a fine-grained religious network once embedded within courtyard houses and narrow lanes — small mosques that historically served as community-scaled spaces for daily prayer, informal teaching, and social cohesion. The renovation of Id Kah Mosque exemplifies a broader shift: its refurbishment and expanded plaza increased openness and visibility, but situated religious practice within a highly legible civic stage defined by surveillance and administrative clarity. Religious architecture moves from an inward, community-centered system toward an externally defined framework.



Id Kah Mosque 2019

Id Kah Mosque 2015



01 Situation

Reading Southern Xinjiang, Reading Kashgar

Palimpsest is not a judgment on policy but a spatial negotiation.

Southern Xinjiang's Slow Urbanization

Ongoing Displacement in Kashgar

Tourism-oriented Development in Kashgar

Community Public Space Disappearing

Mosques Disappearing

We reject a binary of preservation versus demolition,
operating instead within the grain of existing social dynamics.

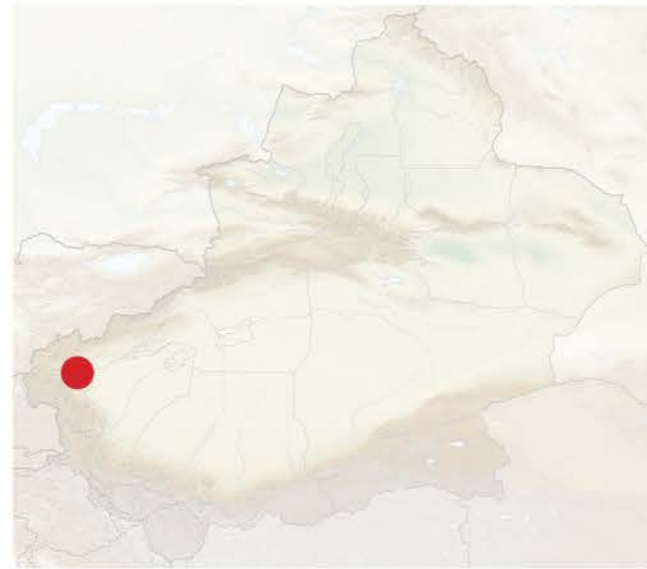
02 Task

Zoom-in Site Selection



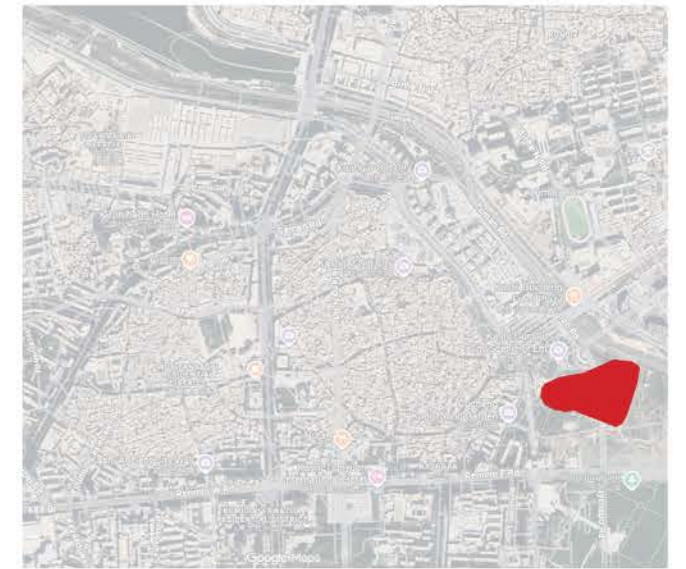
Xinjiang

新疆



Kashgar

喀什



Gaotai Ancient Homes

高台民居

02 Task

Zoom-in Site Selection



02 Task

Kashgar Old City vs. Gaotai Ancient Homes

Before Redevelopment



After Redevelopment



Disappearing Homes

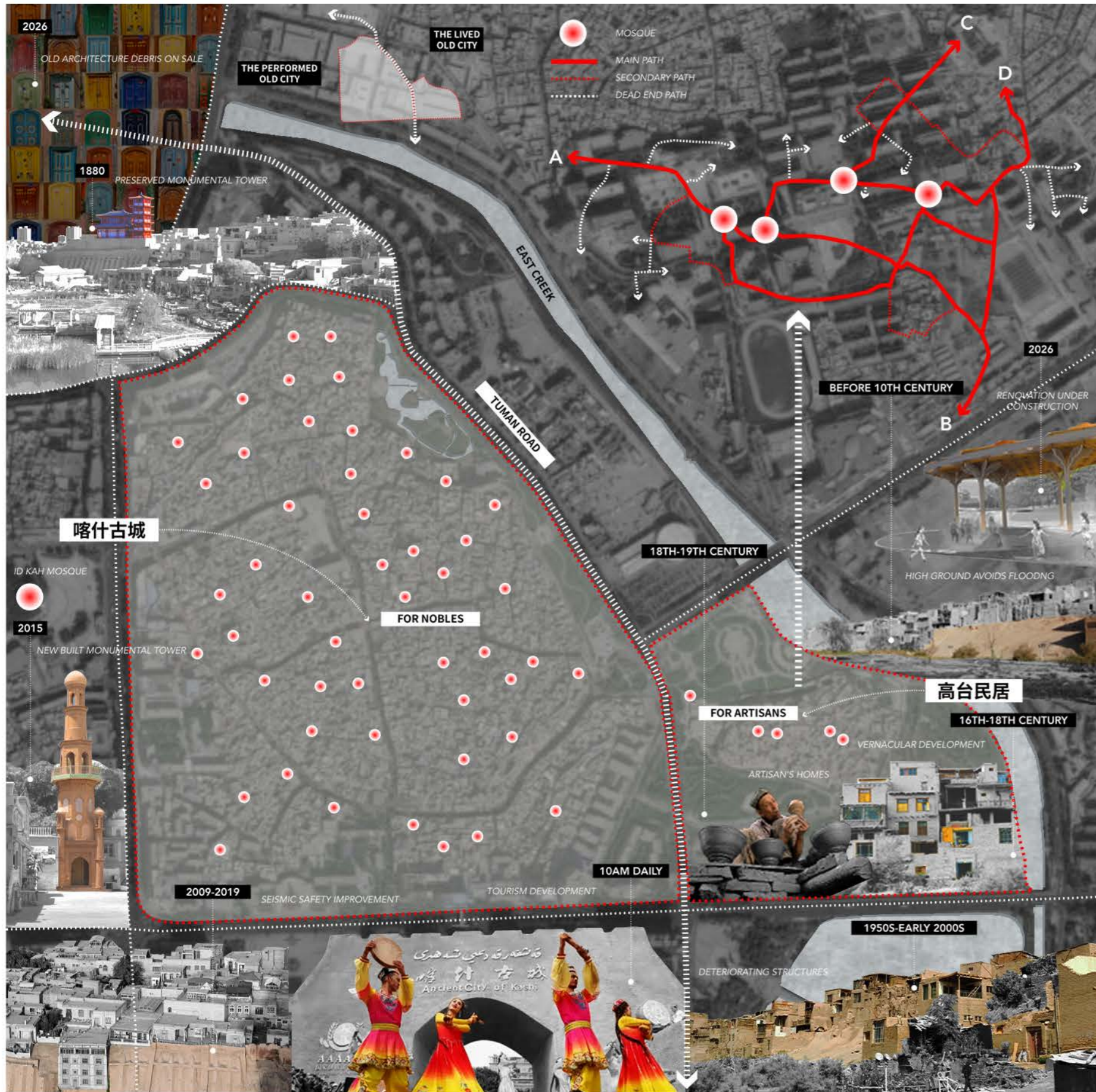


10/25/2009 (Top) vs. 08/21/2012 (Bottom)

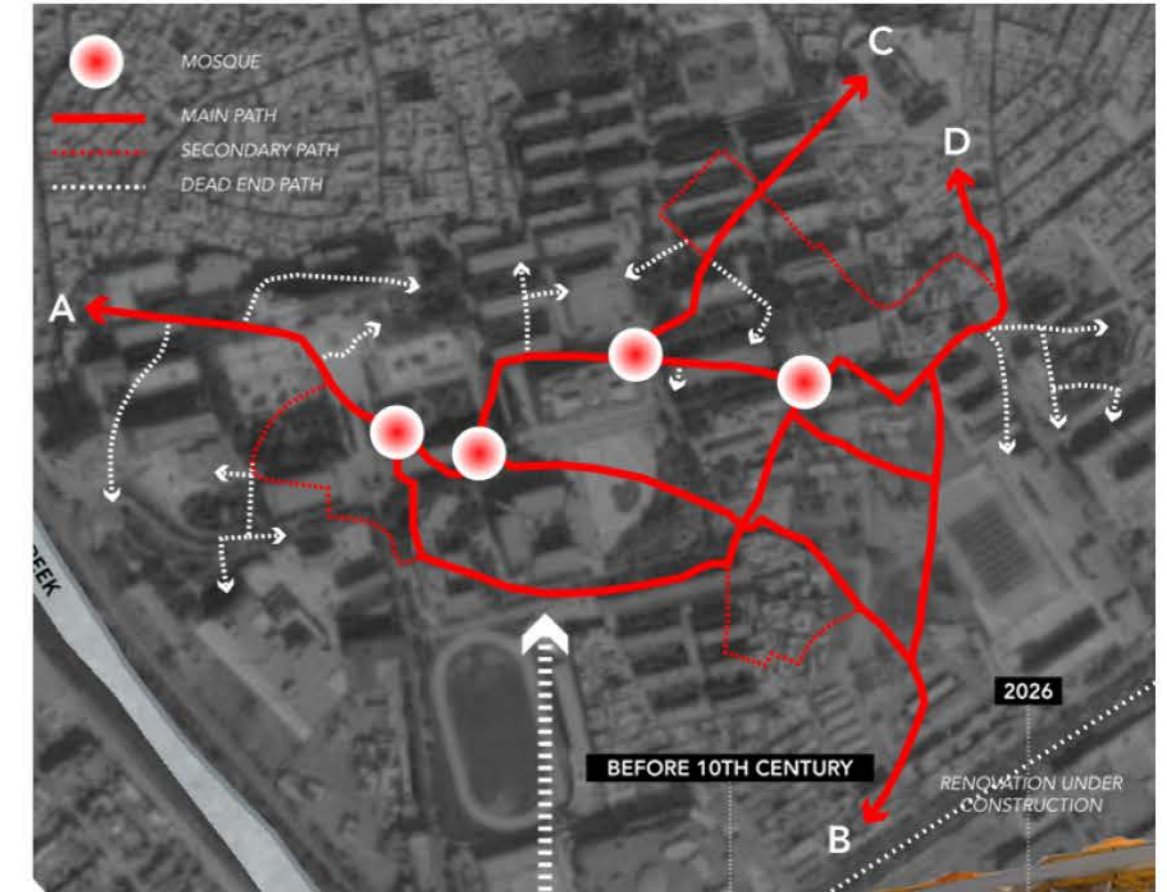


02 Task

Kashgar Old City vs. Gaotai Ancient Homes



An Untouched Historic Land with Puzzle-Like Pathways

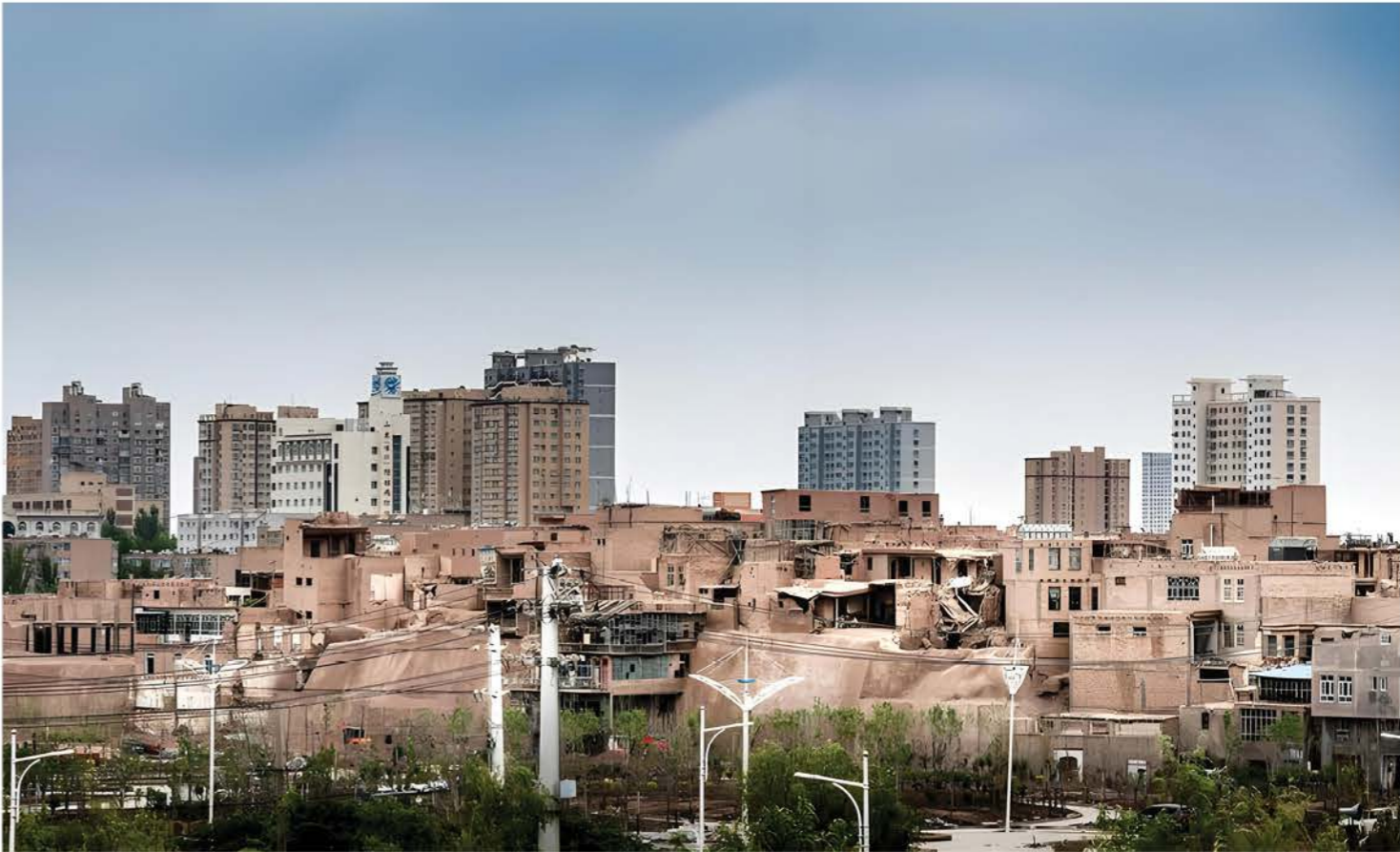


Gaotai Ancient Homes are a **historic Uyghur residential enclave** built on an elevated earthen terrace at the edge of Kashgar's old city. Dense mud-brick houses, layered courtyards, and winding alleys define a settlement shaped over centuries by arid climate, kinship networks, craft traditions, and everyday religious life. Thick earthen walls, timber beams, and small windows create inward-oriented living environments, while homes built upon earlier foundations produce a vertically and socially intertwined fabric. Today, Gaotai sits at the intersection of heritage preservation, seismic upgrading, and redevelopment debates.

02 Task

Existing Conditions of Gaotai Ancient Homes

Sections of Gaotai Ancient Homes



02 Task

Case Study of Historical Preservation Site Redevelopment in China

宏村 Hong Village, 安徽 Anhui Province

- UNESCO-listed village preserved its Huizhou architecture plus water system (moon pond, canals)
- Hongcun is structured as a "water buffalo 牛形" system
- Residents adapted homes into guesthouses, cafes, shops
- Ticketed entry system
- Tourism capital reshaped both material space and social life



Phase 1 (pre-1990s):

- Declining rural settlement
- Outmigration
- Economic stagnation

Phase 2 (UNESCO inscription, 2000):

- Recognized as part of "Ancient Villages in Southern Anhui"
- Massive tourism influx

Phase 3 (current condition):

- Hybrid economy: tourism (dominant) + residual local living



02 Task

Case Study of Historical Preservation Site Redevelopment in China

平遥古城 Pingyao Ancient City, 陕西 Shanxi Province

- Entire city preservation (UNESCO, 1997)
- Historical financial center of China, founded in the 14th century (Ming Dynasty)
- One of the best-preserved Han Chinese cities
- Ticketed entry system
- The "turtle city", cosmology + defense + governance embedded in plan
 - 6 gates with "head, tail, 4 legs"



Phase 1 decline (pre-1980s):

- Economic collapse after: fall of traditional banking + Outmigration

Phase 2 state designation:

- 1986: national historic city
- 1997: UNESCO inscription

Phase 3 tourism economy:

- Entire city becomes: heritage destination
- Streets shift to: souvenir shops + restaurants + boutique hotels
- Still 20,000+ residents inside walls, but increasing commercialization

02 Task

Case Study of Historical Preservation Site Redevelopment in China

松阳古村群 Songyang Villages, 浙江 Zhejiang Province

- A regional system of 100+ historic villages
- Known for: intact rural settlements (Tang–Qing lineage) + mountainous landscape
- Distributed preservation + architectural insertion
- Multi-village network, each with unique identity + targeted intervention
- Bottom-up redevelopment led by multiple architecture firms



王澍 Wang Shu:

- 14 new rural residences at a village, built with local materials

徐甜甜 Xu tiantian:

- Shimen Covered Bridge
- Okiyama Tea House
- Bamboo Forest Theater
- Brown Sugar Workshop

刘家琨 Liu Jiakun:

- Songyang Community Museum



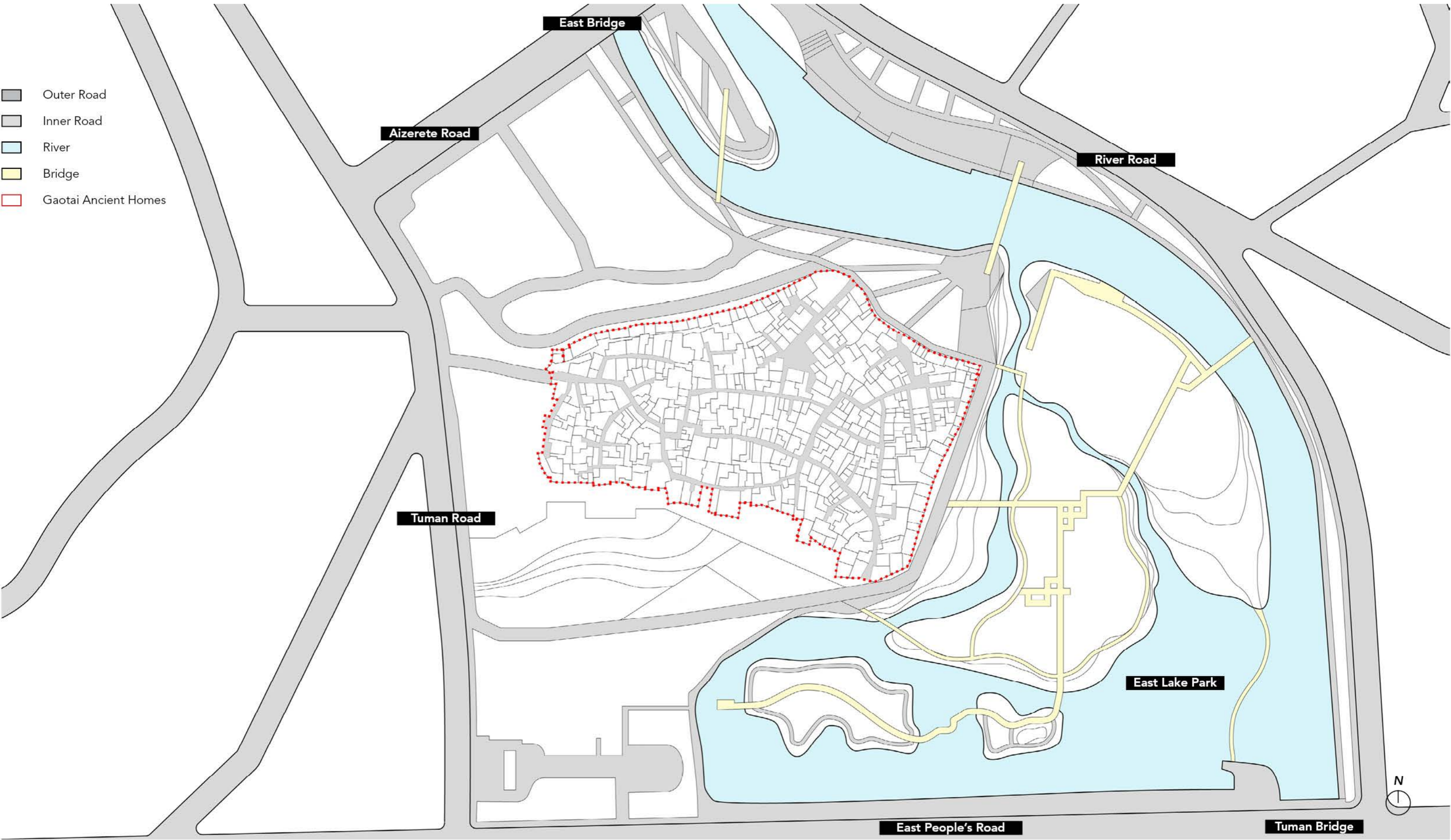
02 Task

Existing Conditions of Gaotai Ancient Homes

Top-down Site Analysis + Bottom-up Observation

02 Task

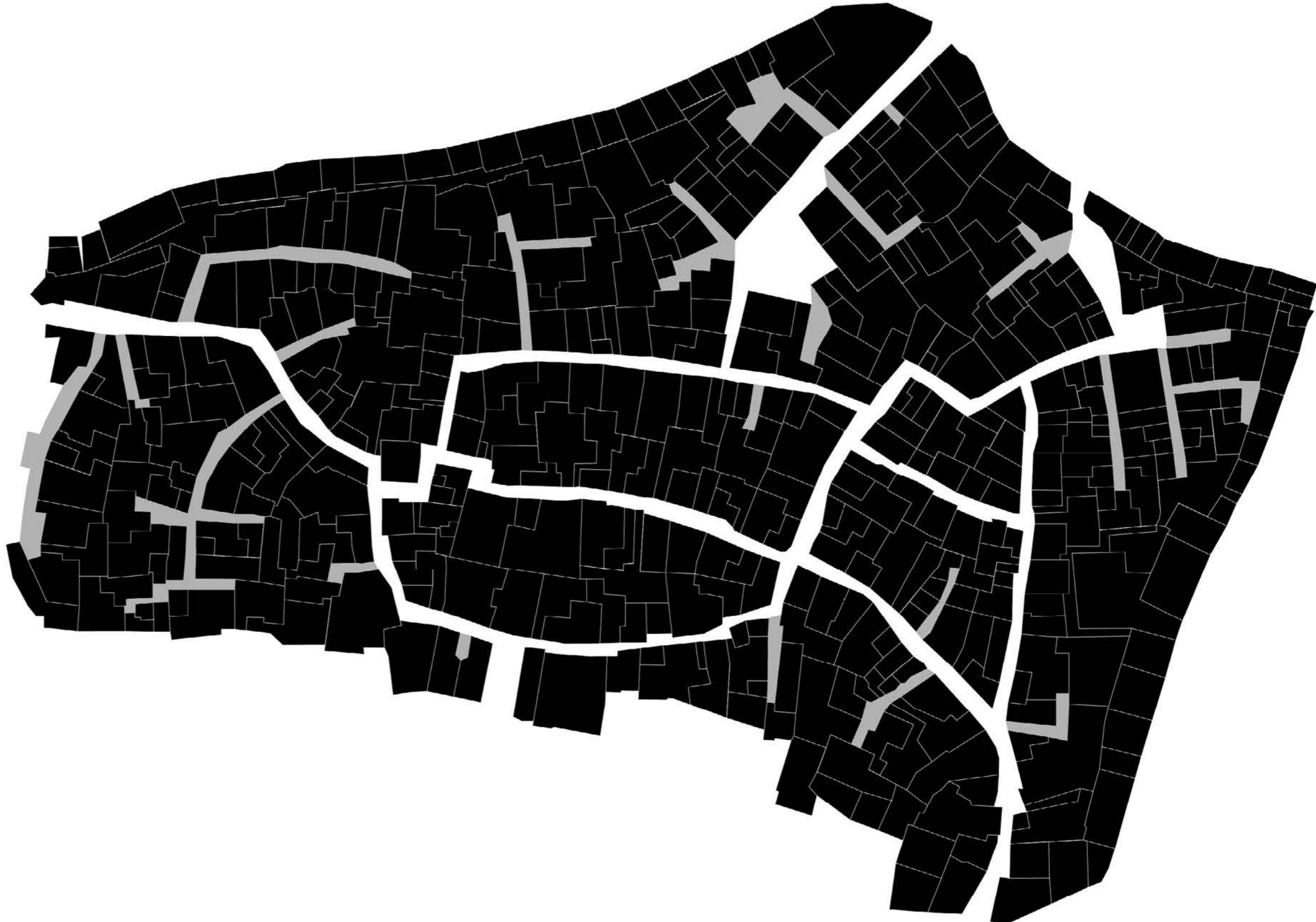
Top-down Site Analysis



02 Task




Top-down Site Analysis

- Architecture
- Dead-end Road
- Main Road



02 Task

Top-down Site Analysis

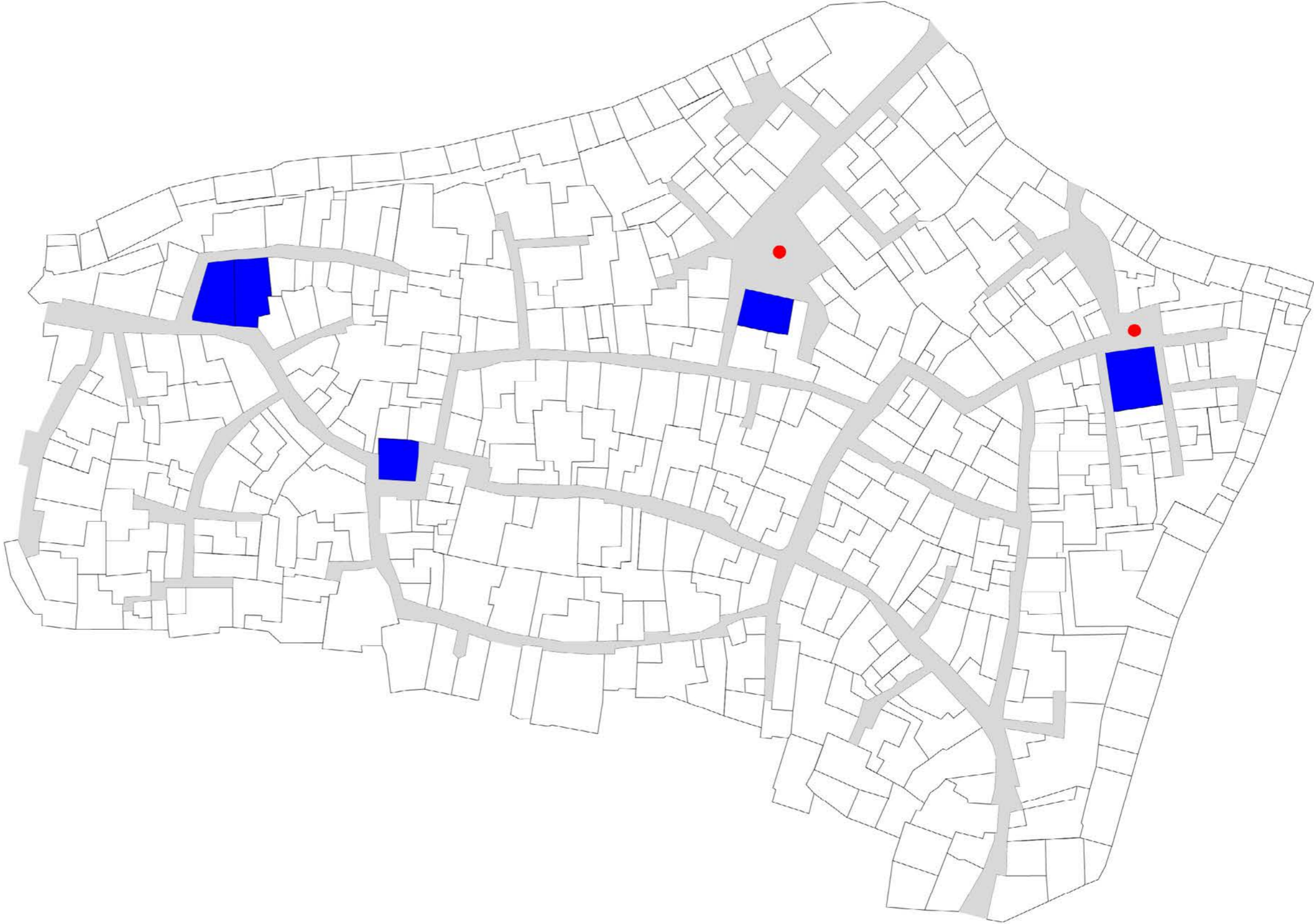
-  Courtyards
-  Architecture
-  Road



02 Task

Top-down Site Analysis

- Road
- Mosque
- Open Plaza



02 Task

Top-down Site Analysis

- Tour of Residential Heritage
- Convenience Store
- Grocery Shop
- Housing



02 Task

Top-down Site Analysis

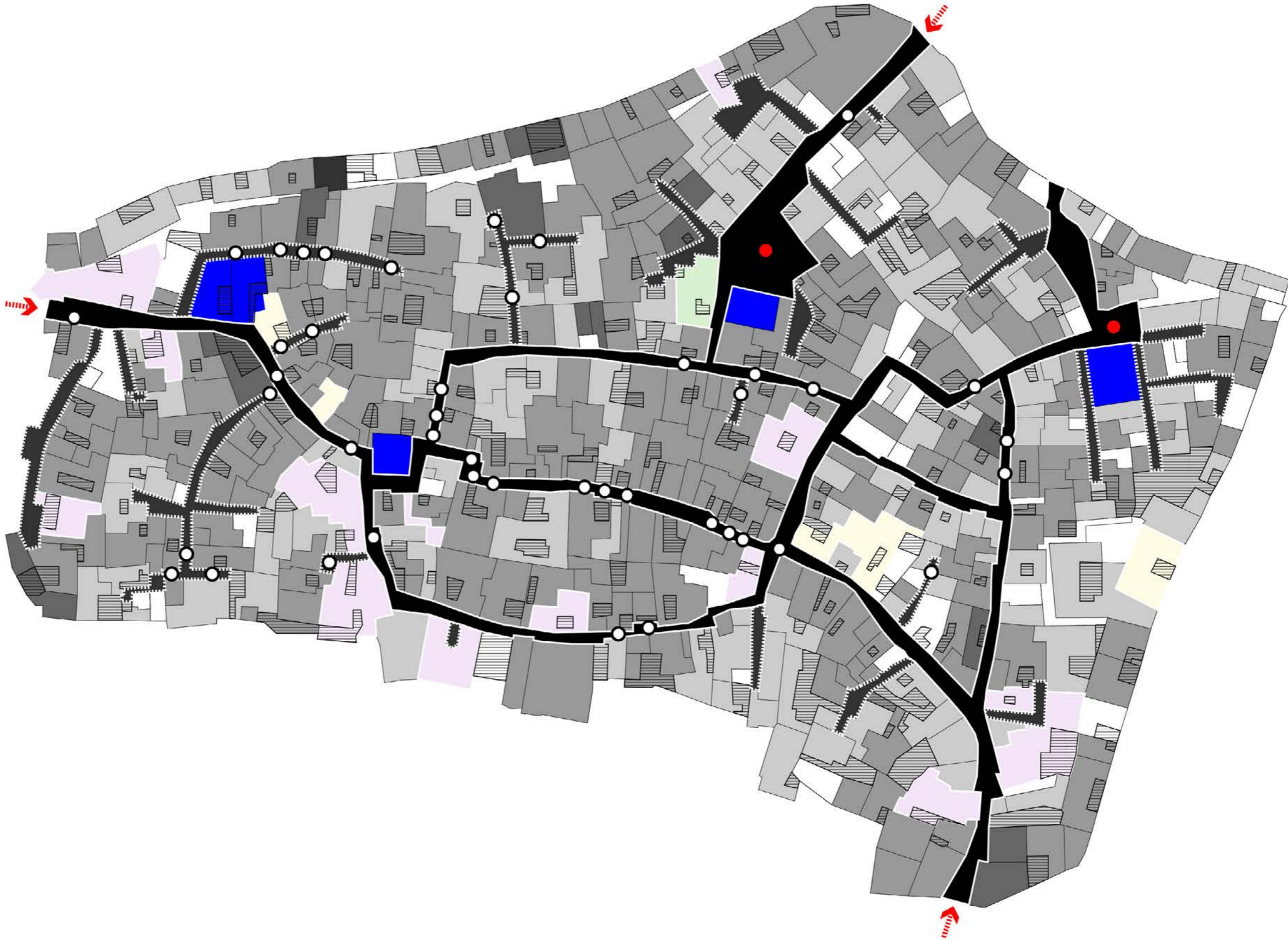
- 7 Floors
- 4 Floors
- 3 Floors
- 2 Floors
- 1 Floors
- Partially Collapsed Structure
- Overhanging Street House



02 Task

Top-down Site Analysis

- 7 Floors
- 4 Floors
- 3 Floors
- 2 Floors
- 1 Floors
- Partially Collapsed Structure
- Overhanging Street House
- Tour of Residential Heritage
- Convenience Store
- Grocery Shop
- Housing
- Mosque
- Open Plaza
- Courtyards
- Architecture
- Dead-end Road
- Main Road
- Main Entrance



02 Task

Explanation on Land Ownership & Government Redevelopment

Land Ownership: The General Framework

In China, all land is ultimately owned by the state (城市土地国家所有), meaning residents hold land use rights (土地使用权) rather than outright ownership. That said, the physical structures — homes, courtyards, extensions — are considered the private property of residents, and these rights have been inherited across generations.

Government Redevelopment: Key Obligations

If the government wishes to redevelop 高台民居, they are legally bound to:

- Obtain voluntary consent (自愿原则) — residents cannot be forcibly evicted and retain the right to negotiate or refuse
- Demonstrate clear benefits (利益共享) — economic, safety, or quality-of-life improvements must be transparently presented
- Provide fair compensation (公平补偿) under the 2011 Regulations on Building Expropriation, which can take the form of:
 1. A property swap (产权置换) — a comparable or upgraded apartment elsewhere
 2. Monetary compensation (货币补偿) — a lump-sum based on market appraisal
 3. A hybrid of both
- Support resettlement (安置保障) — covering transitional housing and moving costs during the transition

02 Task

Bottom-up Observation

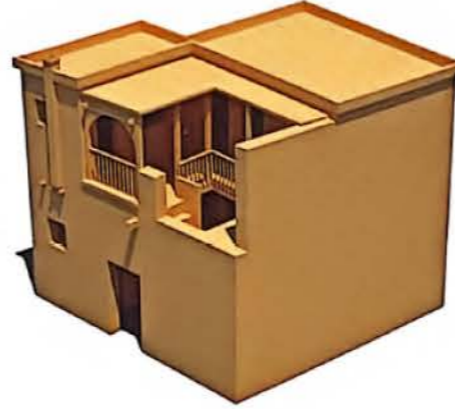
Source: Wang Xiaodong et al. 喀什高台民居 Terraced Households Kashgar. Nanjing: Southeast University Press

Profession: Hat Maker
 Household Size: 4
 Income: 250 RMB/Month
 Year: Built Before 1900, Renovated in 1976
 Structure: Earth & Timber
 Square Meter: 78

62号住宅

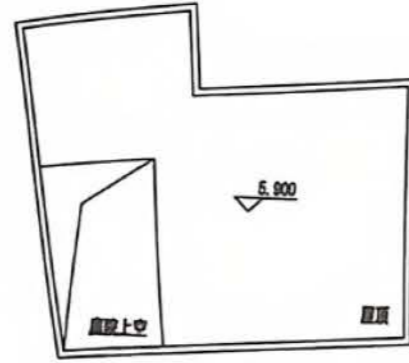
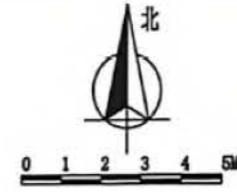


位置示意图

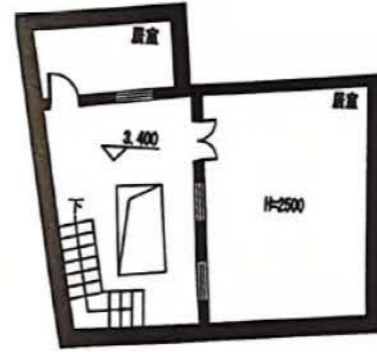


用户编号	13	户主	阿孜古丽·吐逊	人口	4人
门牌号	0062	收入水平	¥250	职业分类	绣帽子
搬迁意向	同意	是否重建		建筑主体结构	土木
建筑密度	76.50%	庭院面积	12.82 m ²	住宅基地面积	54.57 m ²
总建筑面积	77.55 m ²	一层建筑面积	41.75 m ²		

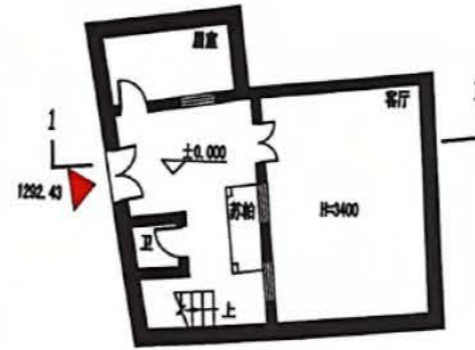
描述 房屋于1998年购得,当时花费4万,从未修缮,两层,共四间房子,房屋已开始裂缝,住户愿尽早搬迁。



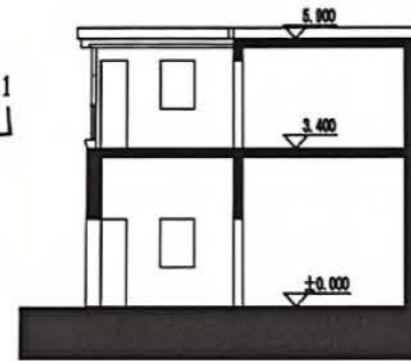
屋顶平面图



二层平面图



一层平面图



1-1剖面图



02 Task

Bottom-up Observation

Source: Wang Xiaodong et al. 喀什高台民居 Terraced Households Kashgar. Nanjing: Southeast University Press

Profession: Carpenter
 Household Size: 5
 Income: 900 RMB/Month
 Year: Built Before 2006
 Structure: Brick, Concrete & Timber
 Square Meter: 60

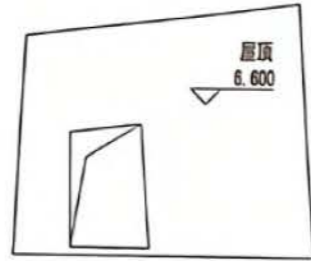
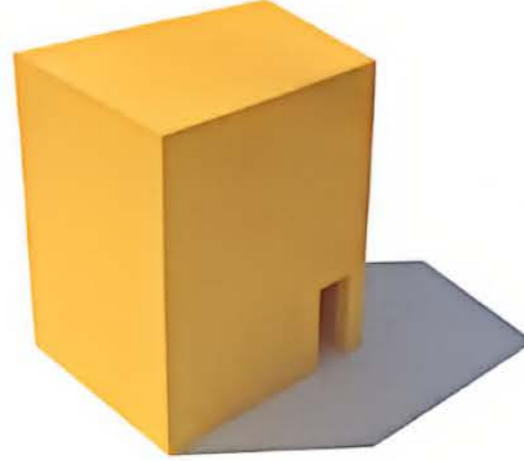
160号住宅

用户编号	56	户主	阿布都艾尼·艾合提	人口	5人
门牌号	0160	收入水平	¥900	职业分类	木匠
搬迁意向	不同意	是否重建	重建	建筑主体结构	砖木&砖混
建筑密度	58.60%	庭院面积	10.89 m ²	住宅基地面积	26.32 m ²
总建筑面积	59.7 m ²	一层建筑面积	15.43 m ²		

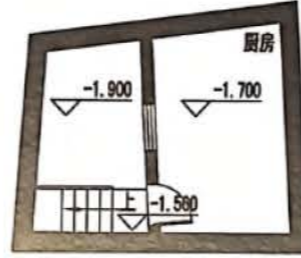
描述 房屋1986年购买, 2006年前重新建造, 房屋有两层、一个地下室, 共6间房间, 没有院子。



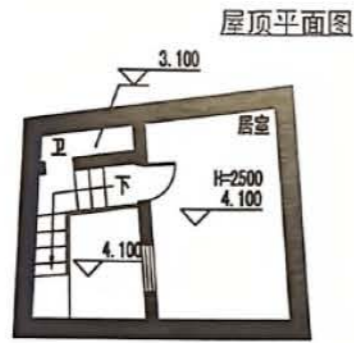
位置示意图



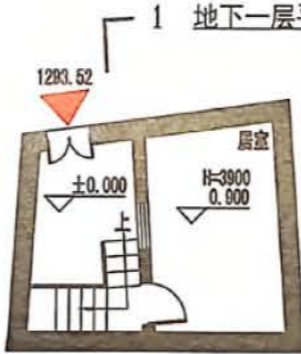
屋顶平面图



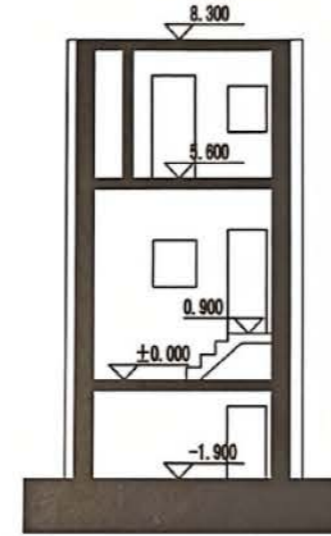
1 地下一层平面图



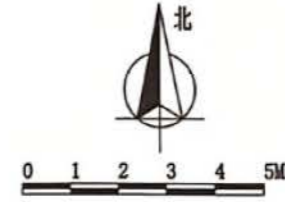
二层平面图



1 一层平面图



1-1剖面图



02 Task

Bottom-up Observation

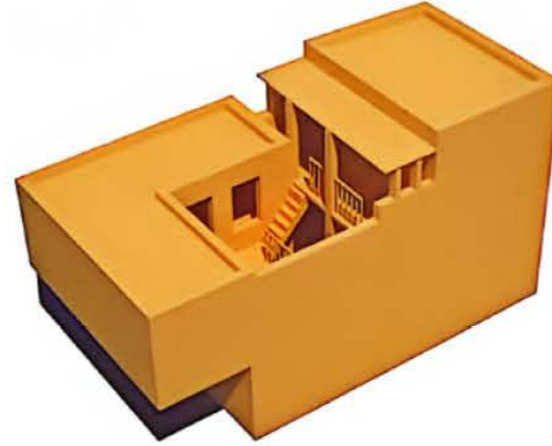
Source: Wang Xiaodong et al. 喀什高台民居 Terraced Households Kashgar. Nanjing: Southeast University Press

Profession: Chef
 Household Size: 4
 Income: 600 RMB/Month
 Year: Built Before 1900, Renovated Before 1989
 Structure: Earth, Brick & Timber
 Square Meter: 103

190号住宅

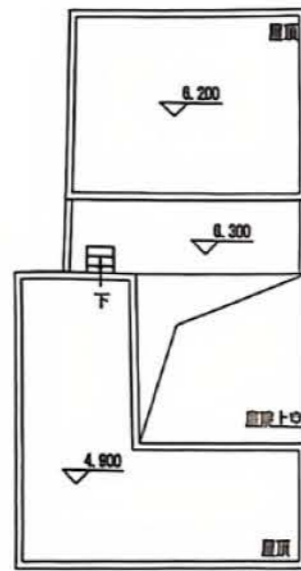


位置示意图

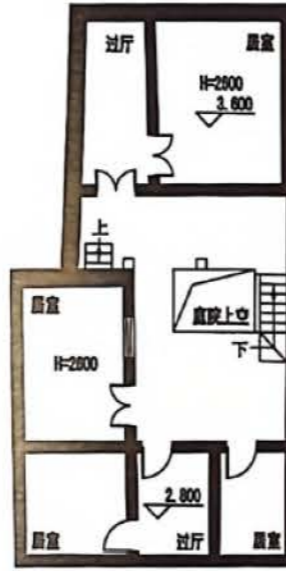


用户编号	70	户主	买买提艾力·祖农	人口	4人	
门牌号	0190	收入水平	¥600	职业分类	厨师	
搬迁意向	不同意	是否重建	重建	建筑主体结构	土木&砖木	
建筑密度	78.40%	庭院面积	12.31 m ²	住宅基地面积	57.03 m ²	
总建筑面积		103.1 m ²		一层建筑面积		44.72 m ²

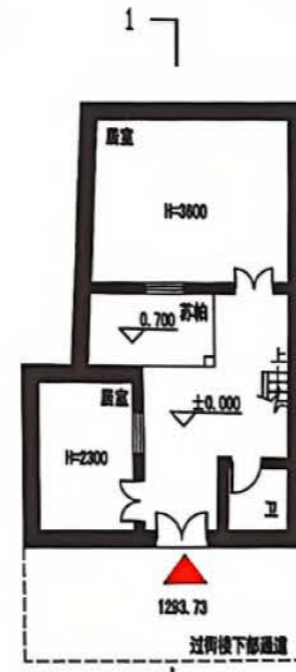
描述 房屋始建于1900年，住户居此已20年，1989年前修缮。房屋有两层，共6间。



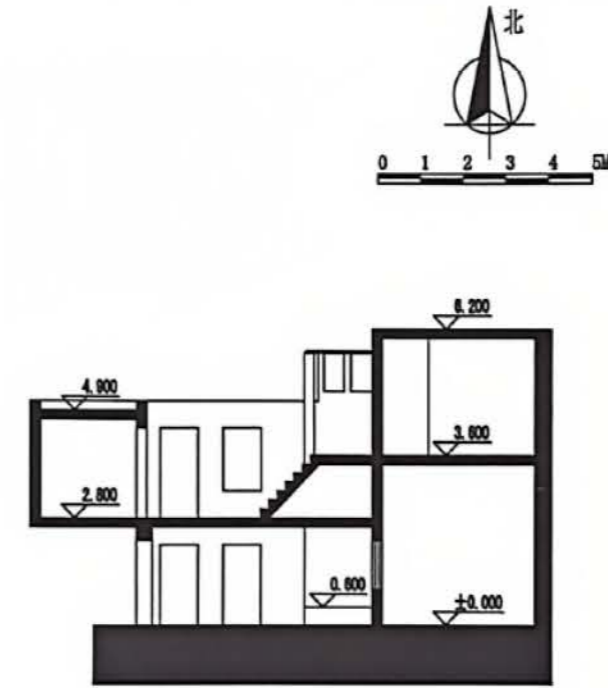
屋顶平面图



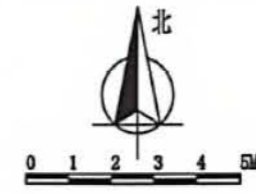
二层平面图



一层平面图



1-1剖面图



02 Task

Bottom-up Observation

Source: Wang Xiaodong et al. 喀什高台民居 Terraced Households Kashgar. Nanjing: Southeast University Press

Profession: Potter
 Household Size: 2
 Income: 600 RMB/Month
 Year: Built Before 1900
 Structure: Earth & Timber
 Square Meter: 65

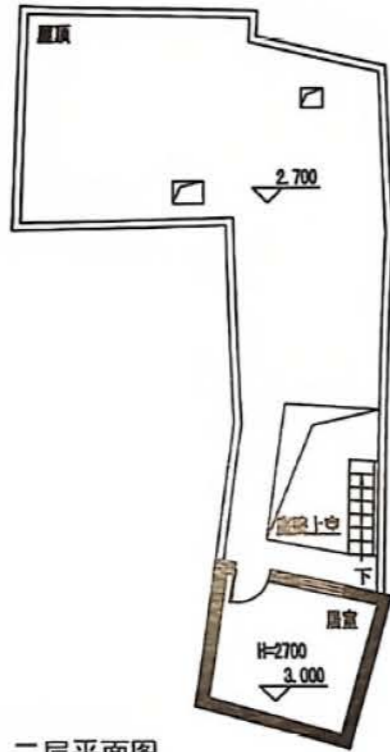
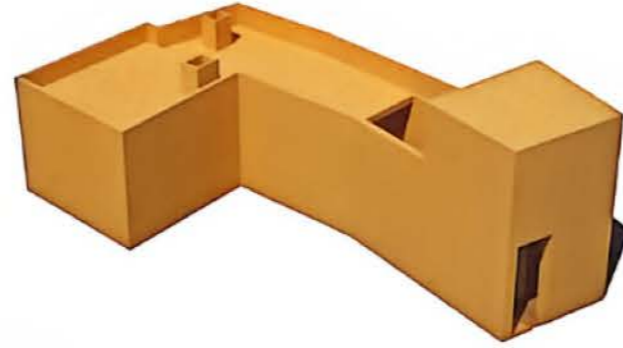
202号住宅

用户编号	76	户主	希斯曼古丽·牙生	人口	2人
门牌号	0202	收入水平	¥600	职业分类	做陶罐
搬迁意向	不同意	是否重建	重建	建筑主体结构	土木
建筑密度	77.00%	庭院面积	14.61 m ²	住宅基地面积	63.47 m ²
总建筑面积	65.24 m ²	一层建筑面积	48.86 m ²		

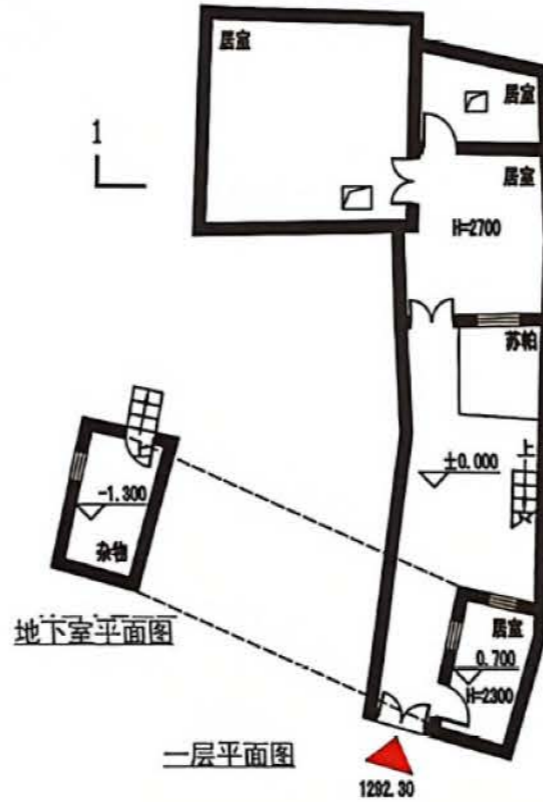
描述 房屋始建于1900年之前，具有两层，共5间。



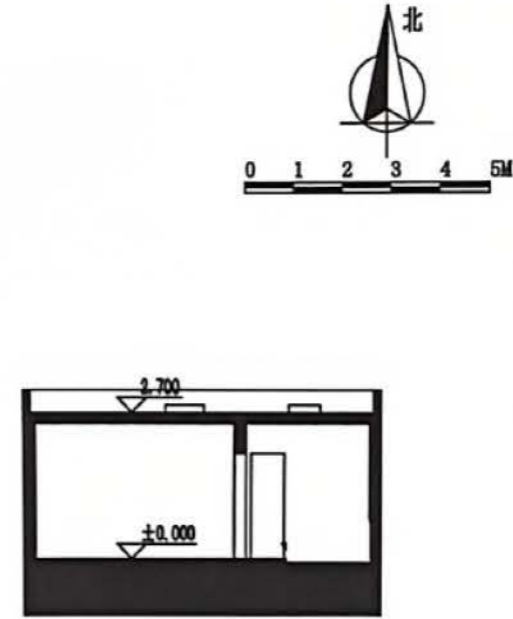
位置示意图



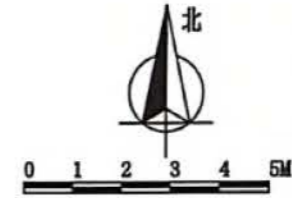
二层平面图



一层平面图



1-1剖面图



02 Task

Bottom-up Observation

Source: Wang Xiaodong et al. 喀什高台民居 Terraced Households Kashgar. Nanjing: Southeast University Press

Profession: Retired
 Household Size: 5
 Income: 2000 RMB/Month
 Year: Built Before 1800
 Structure: Earth, Brick & Timber
 Square Meter: 106

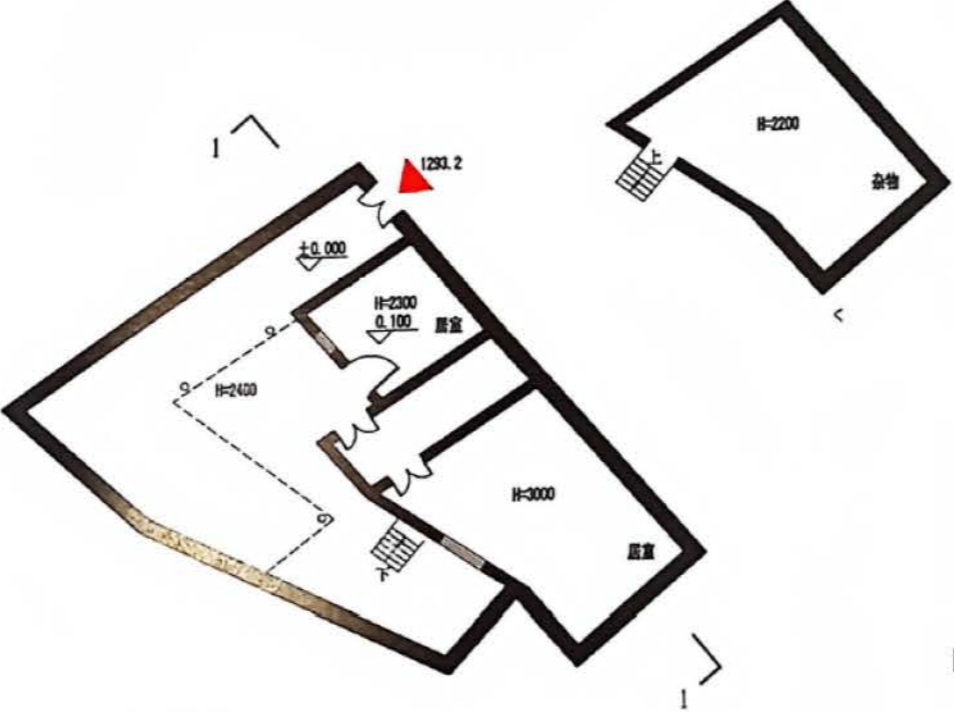
268号住宅

用户编号	110	户主	阿布都甫尔·阿米提	人口	5人
门牌号	0268	收入水平	¥2300	职业分类	退休
搬迁意向	不同意	是否重建	重建	建筑主体结构	土木&砖木
建筑密度	77.50%	庭院面积	23.31 m ²	住宅基地面积	103.57 m ²
总建筑面积	106.26 m ²	一层建筑面积	80.26 m ²		

描述 房屋始建于1800年之前，从来没有维修过，1989年分家（268号和266号）。房屋现在有两层，有一个地下室，共5间房间。房屋已经很久了。

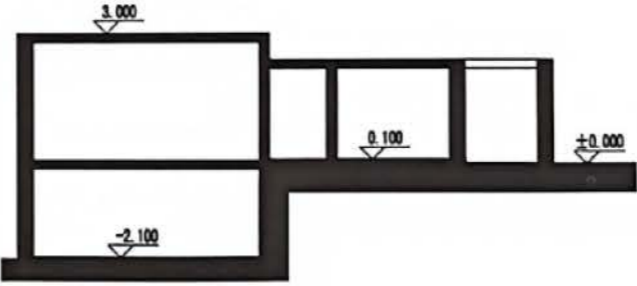


位置示意图



一层平面图

地下室平面图



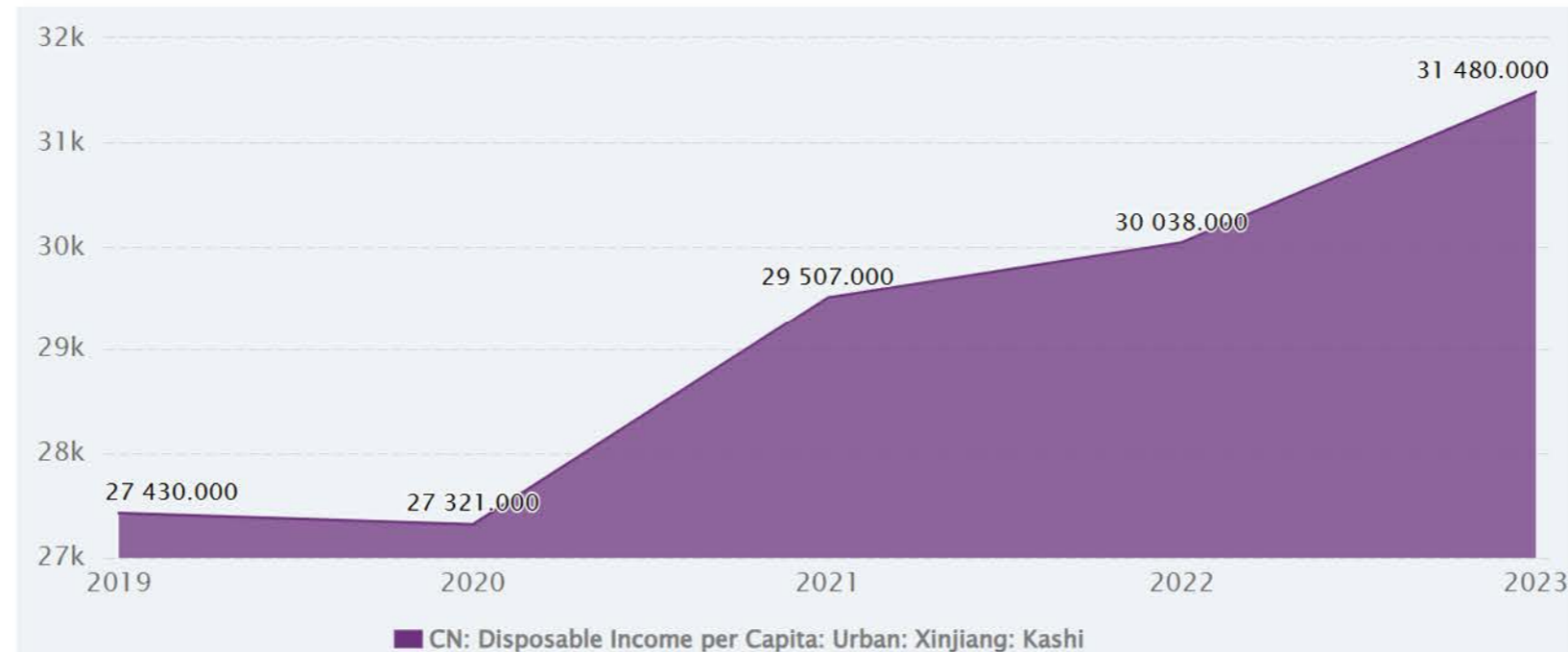
1-1剖面图



02 Task

Bottom-up Observation

Local residents generally have relatively low incomes, with many inhabitants retired, unemployed, or laid off from previous work. Although the average monthly income in Kashgar is around 2,600 RMB, those living in Gaotai Ancient Homes often fall well below this level.



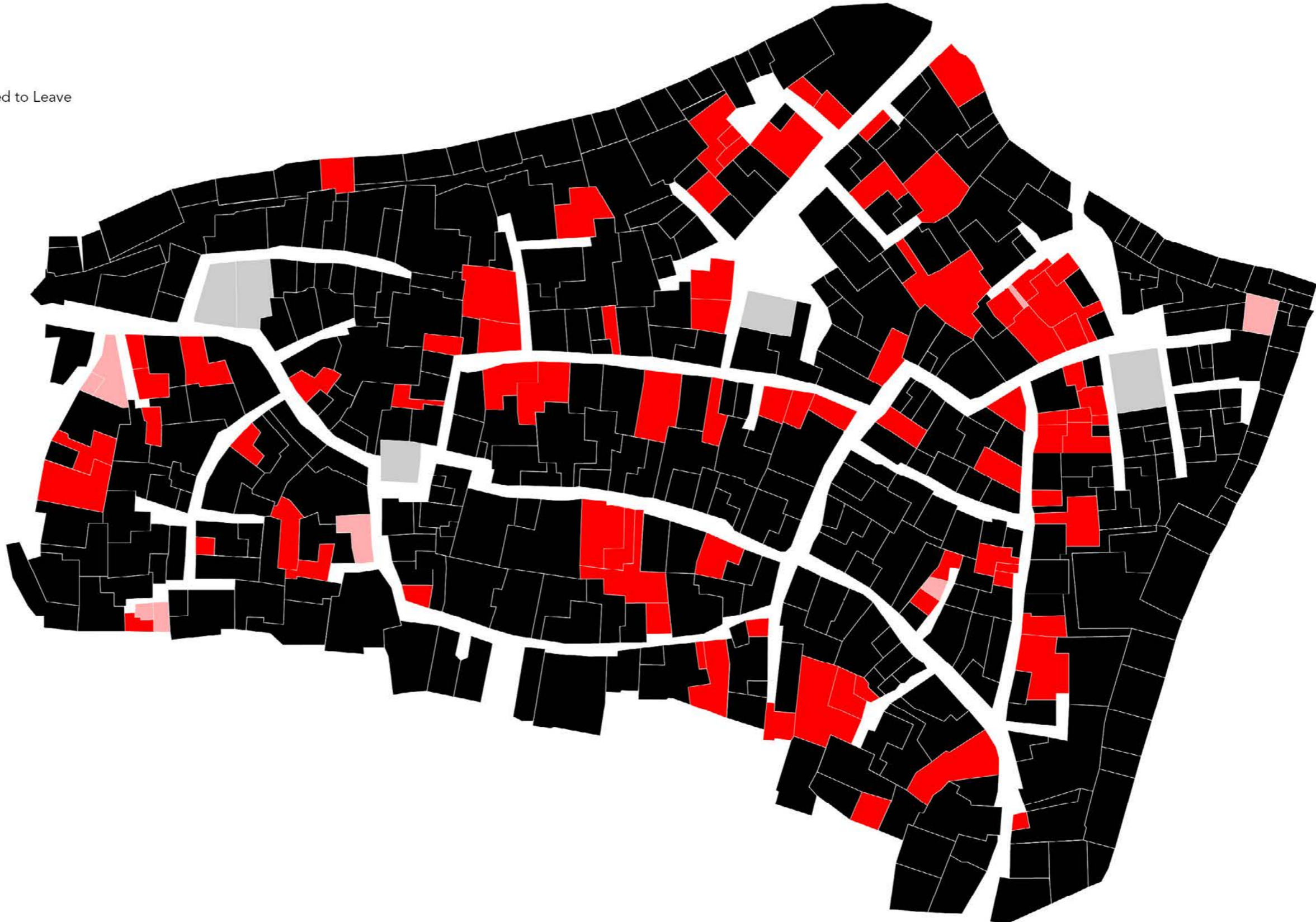
Source: Kashgar Municipal Bureau of Statistics

Tourism presents both an opportunity and a tension — one that residents themselves navigate: eager for the financial benefits of Kashgar's growing visitor economy, but unwilling to have their daily lives absorbed by it.

03 Action

Development Opportunity: People who wants to leave...

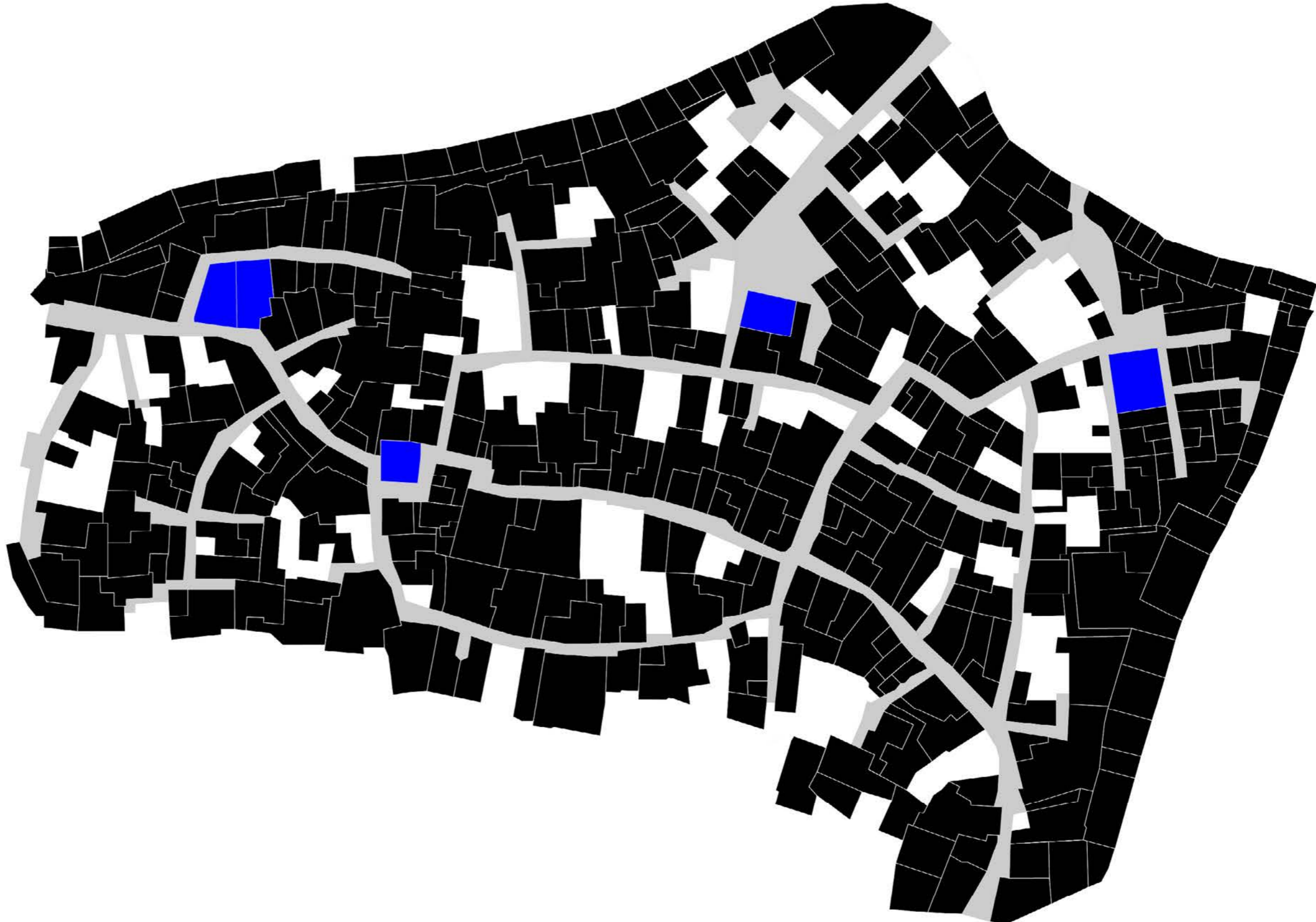
- Homes in Good Conditions Requested to Leave
- Homes with Partially Collapsed Structures Requested to Leave
- Homes Requested to Stay
- Mosque



03 Action

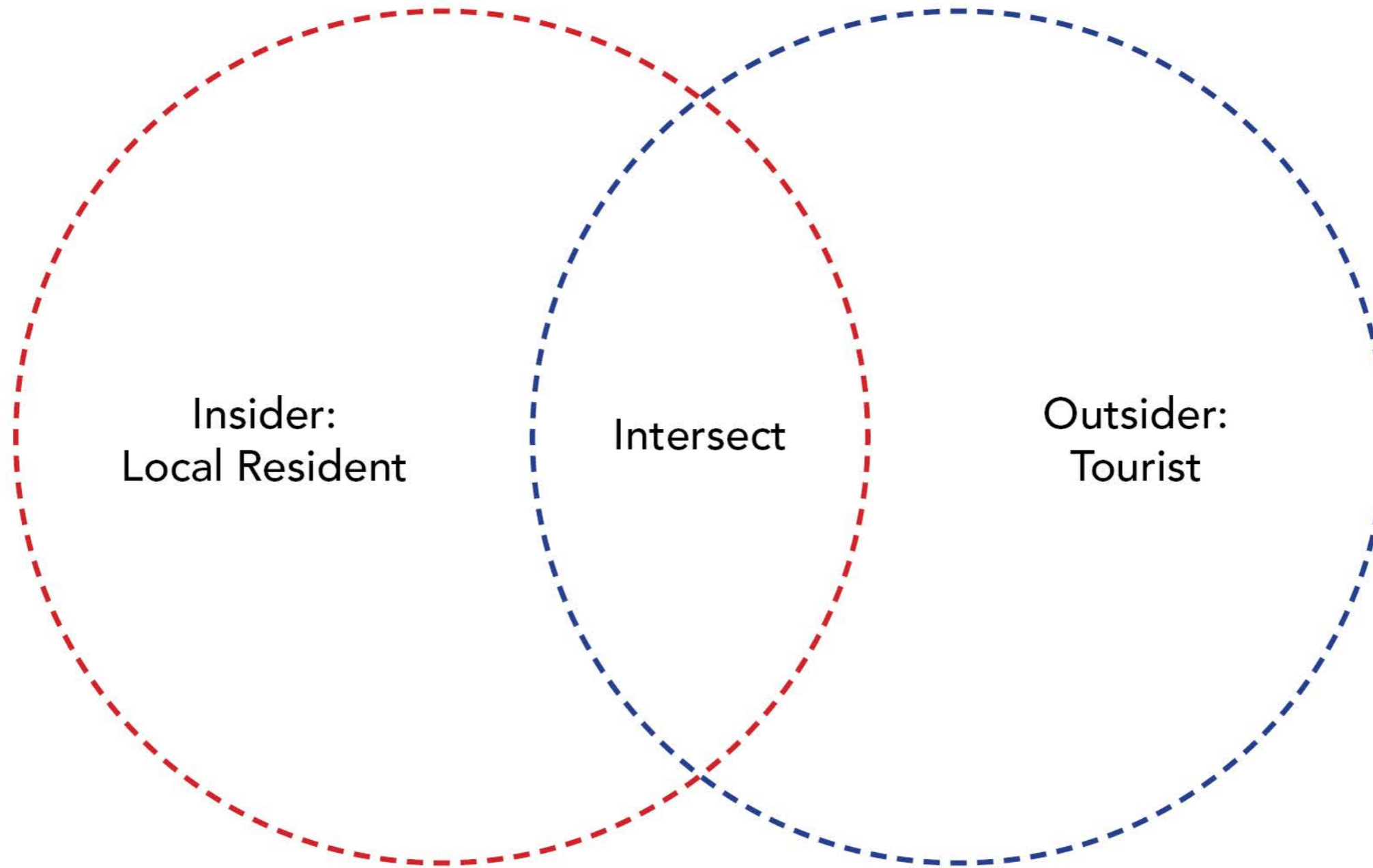
Development Opportunity: Vacancy!

- Road
- If Removed Homes Requested to Leave
- Mosque



03 Action

Symbiotic Preservation

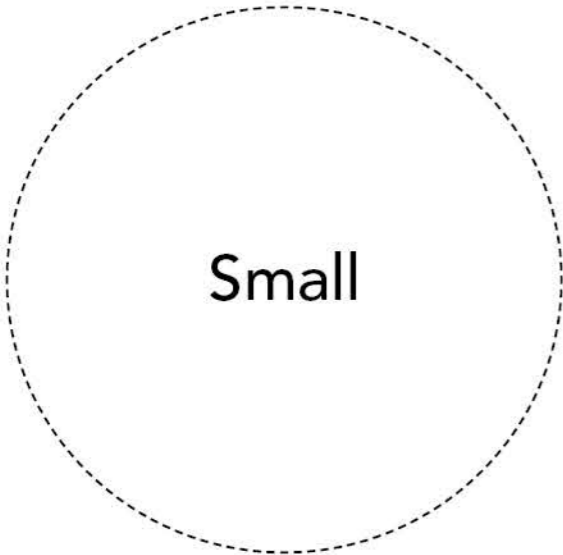


A heritage development model that separates outsider-oriented tourism space from insider community dwelling, while introducing occasional zones where the two intersect

03 Action

Scales of Development

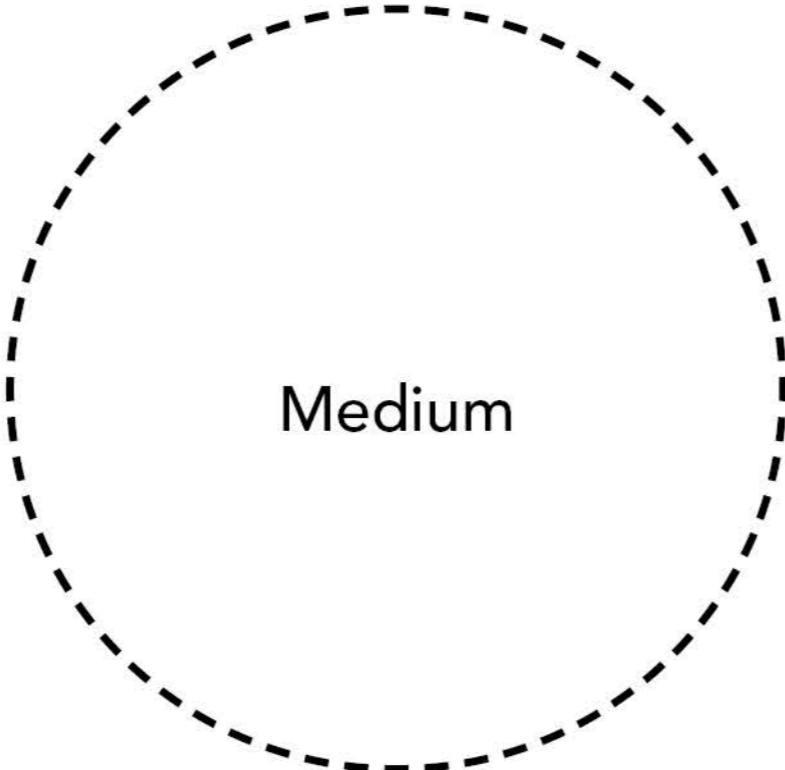
Bazaar



Small

*thread new programs into the gaps
between occupied homes*

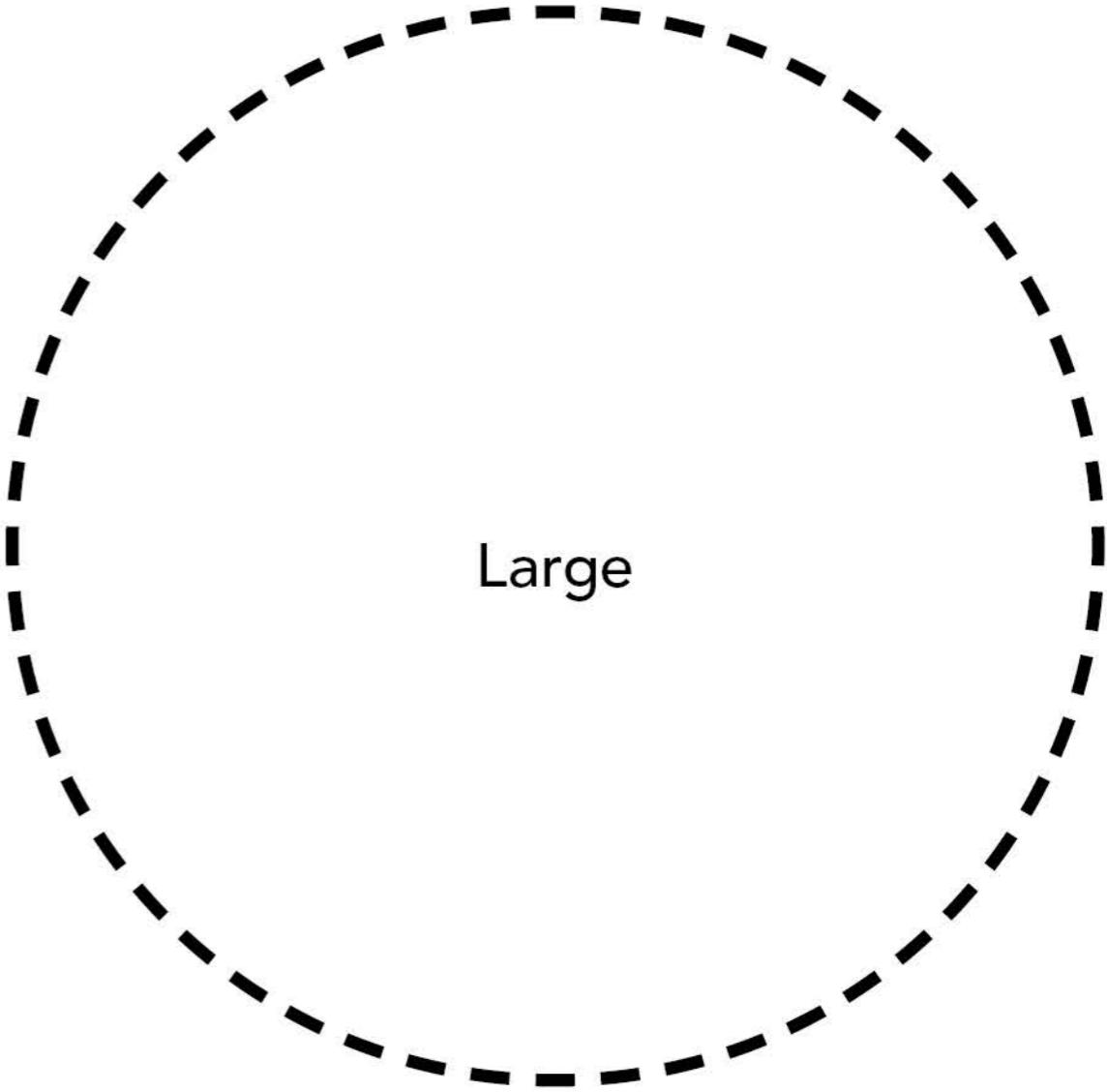
Expansion of Mosque
School
Art Workshop
Museum of Kashgar



Medium

*clear voluntarily vacated plots, then
introduce new architecture*

Trolley Transportation System



Large

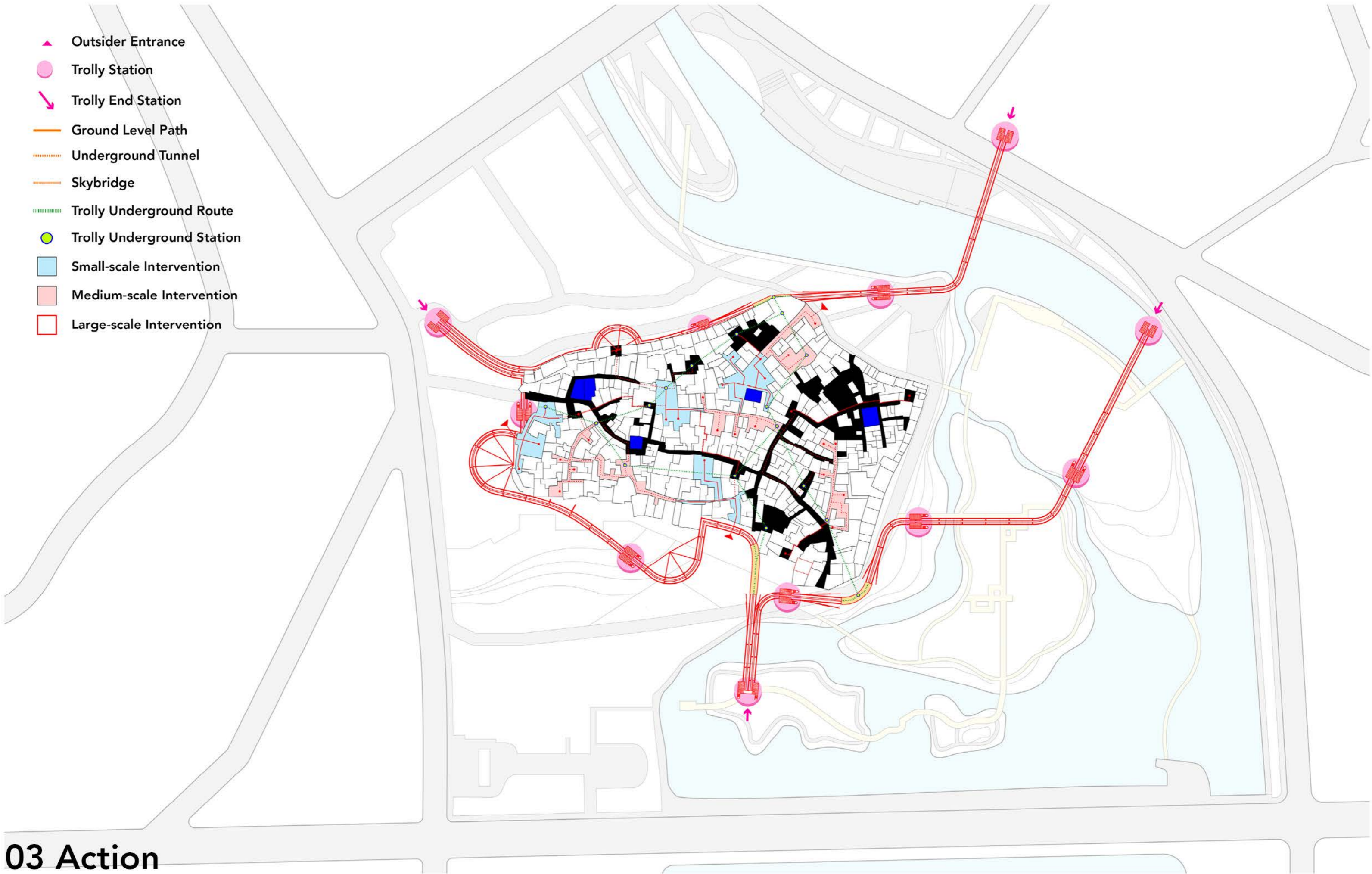
*anchor entirely new transportation
stations at key nodes*

- Trolly Tunnel
- Exterior Trolly
- Museum of Kashgar
- School
- Expansion of Mosque
- Art Workshop
- Bazzar
- Mosque
- Insider Entrance

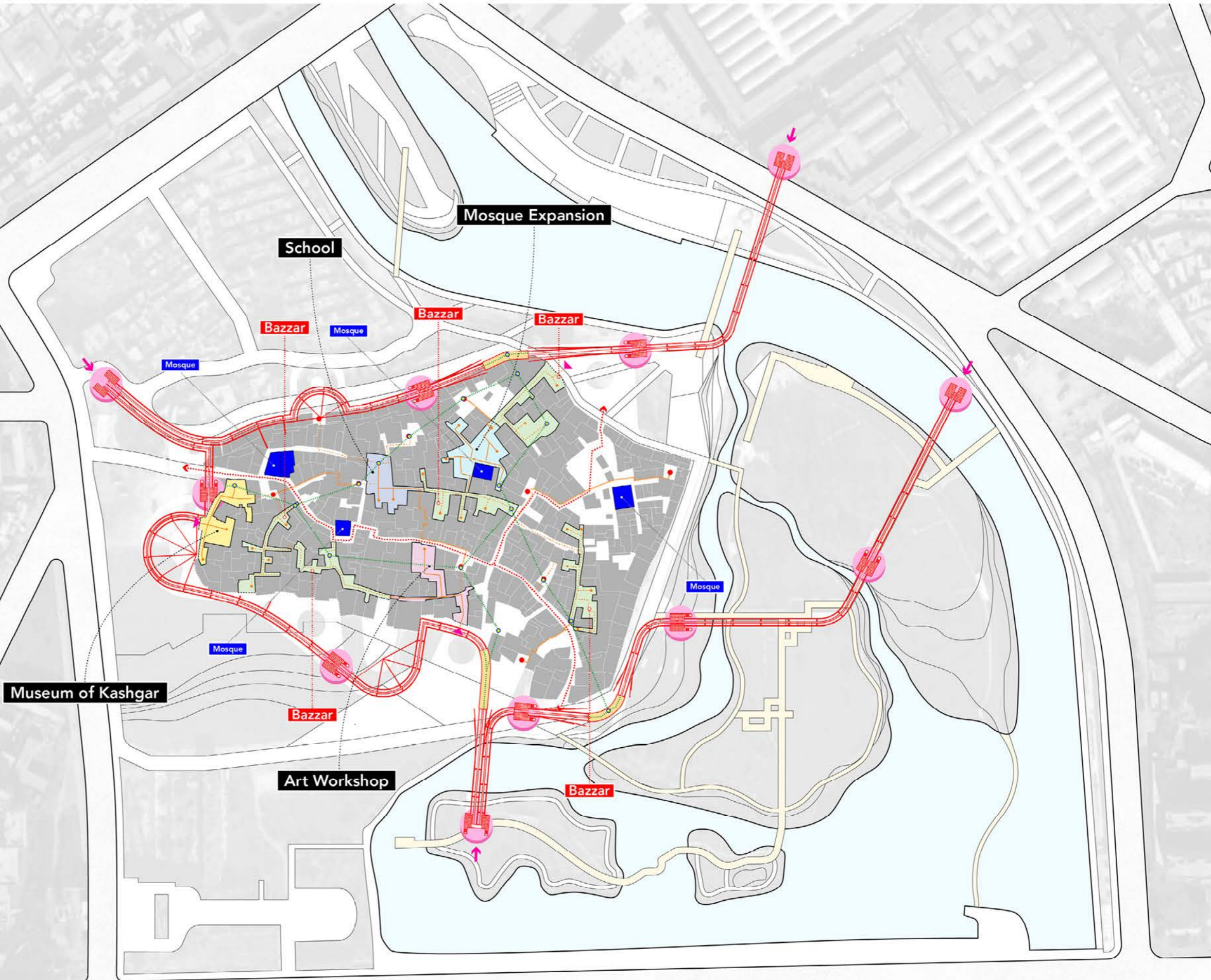


03 Action

- ▲ Outsider Entrance
- Trolley Station
- ↘ Trolley End Station
- Ground Level Path
- ⋯ Underground Tunnel
- Skybridge
- ⋯ Trolley Underground Route
- Trolley Underground Station
- Small-scale Intervention
- Medium-scale Intervention
- Large-scale Intervention



- Trolley Tunnel
- Exterior Trolley
- Museum of Kashgar
- School
- Expansion of Mosque
- Art Workshop
- Bazzar
- Mosque
- Layering Tower
- Bridges
- East Lake
- Outsider Entrance
- Insider Entrance
- Trolley Station
- Trolley End Station
- Ground Level Path
- Underground Tunnel
- Skybridge
- Trolley Underground Route
- Trolley Underground Station



03 Action