

The Embassy of Care
Kulcsár-Kilyén Róbert

consultants:
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Abstract

The history of Istanbul neighbourhood, Balat, on the western shore of Golden-Horn has been determined by the presence of minorities since ancient times. The traditionally Jewish districts composition went through a frequent series of change in the previous centuries.

The story of the neighbourhood has a Hungarian line too. The Transylvanians maintained an independent embassy in Balat. After the Habsburg Empire took over control in Transylvania, the embassy was maintained by the kuruc community of Imre Thököly and the members of the Rákóczi emigration. The building, owned by people from Istanbul since the second half of the 18th century, now stays in a ruined situation hugged by the Macarlas Yokuşu (Hungarian stairs).

The de-industrialization of the 80s pushed into poverty the socially anyway unstable Jewish, Muslim, Armenian and Romani minorities. The local population could not join the economical activity generated by the gentrification process of the streets close to the shore. Unemployment, education, and generally the overall perspective for youth in Balat is problematic.

The Transylvanian embassy's surrounding is a green island in the dense urban texture, in an exceptional situation on the top of the Fatih valley. The aptitude of the site, the potential of the monument, the usage and tendance of it, the resusciation of the cultural past should manifest itself in a way, where it reacts to the social processes of the neighbourhood and tries to become a living, useful place in Balat.



Balat, Molla Aşki Teras, the site with the Golden Horn in the background
Pi Tóth István's photograph

Place

Balat

Balat has been a traditionally Jewish quarter in Fatih district of Istanbul. On the European side of the Golden Horn, the area has been populated by Romaniote Greek Jews, from the times before the conquer of Istanbul. Later, the community merged into the Sephardi Jew (spanish) group. The neighbourhood keeps the vestige of the Jewish past in a number of special Synagogues.

Other groups of minorities from the past centuries living in Balat include Armenian, Bulgarian, Romani, Greek, and other small communities, bringing a diversity of culture and religion to the quarter. ⁽¹⁾

Throughout the periods, minorities experienced a lot of changes due to the events within or outside of the actual ruling empire in Istanbul. A gradual and significant loss of economical and social vitality in the neighbourhood was caused by the changes Turkey went through as it transitioned from an empire to an industrialised state. Over the decades of the 20th century minorities from time to time became targets of political and social acts.

The decreasing importance of the Golden Horn, as a seaway also contributed to the abandonment of numerous properties.

In the last tree decades, a number of projects has been realised. After the city of Istanbul started to clean and set right the Golden Horn area, a series of programmes financed by the European Union aimed the restoration of several buildings. ⁽²⁾

Due to the investments, and the charming atmosphere of Balat, some streets, especially at the waterfront area became more and more popular amongst tourists, artists, students. These streets experienced a high level of gentrification, a row of cafés, galleries, auction houses, restaurants opened their doors.

The surrounding neighbourhood is struggling to join the economical vitality of the ‘trendy’ streets. The contrast is quite strong from street to street. Just a corner from a stylish café, lives a neighbourhood, where the unemployment rate is rather high, social problems are part of the daily life, education and the perspective of life amongst youngsters is poor.

Historical building of the Transylvanian Ambassadors

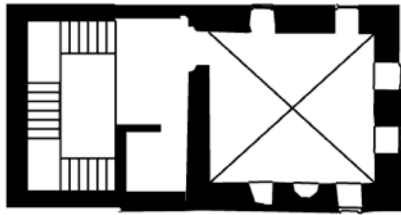
The site lies on the hilly area, between two steep streets: Macarlar Ykş and Pastirmaci Ykş, with a breathtaking view to the Golden Horn valley. At the top of the terraced field, is the Molla Aşki Mosque. The historical building has two main floors, one with entrance to the bottom terrace, where now a teahouse functions and with the main floor approachable from the top terrace.

Our first memorandum of the building mentions it as a Sibian School before 1610, with a basement floor divided into two rooms and a staircase in the back and a big classroom, covered with a domical vault, with an additional smaller one upstairs. By 1640 some major changes have been done, the basement floor gaining the layout we see today. On the main floor they expanded the small room into a bigger one.

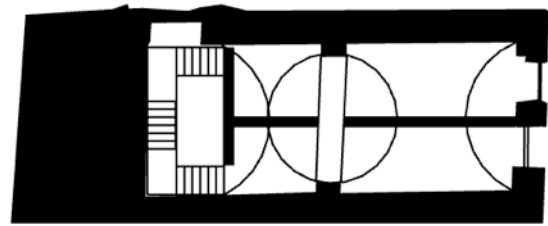
In 1643 during a series of restoration work they changed the smaller room and established a hammam.

After the disengagement from Hungary, Transylvania started to build diplomatic relationship with the High Porte. I Soliman sultan donated the house to the Transylvanians, giving them diplomatic immunity. The house could even host christian refugees because of their resilience toward ottoman rule. As of 1956 the the stone and brick building did not really change, but at this time it is extended with wooden porch and rooms.

Apart from the Embassy building , on the top terrace, stood a wooden, multistoreyed (2-3) building including guestrooms, kitchen and barn. The basement floor is supposedly used as a barn too at this time. ⁽³⁾



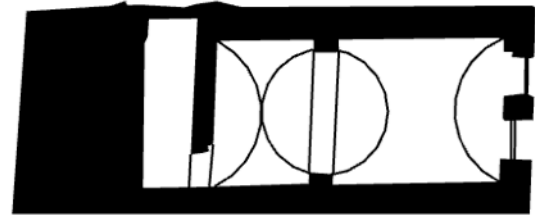
main floor
1610, Sibian
School



basement floor
1610



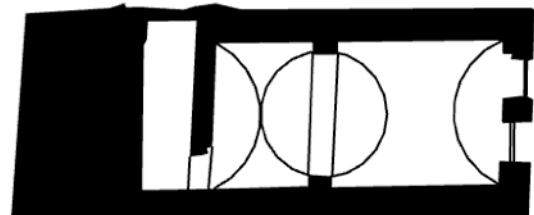
main floor
1640



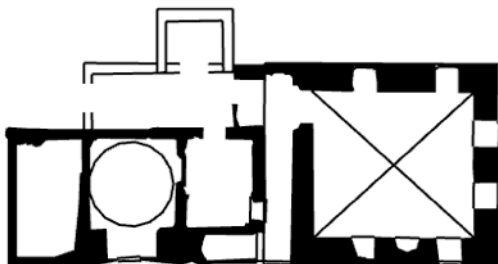
basement floor
1640



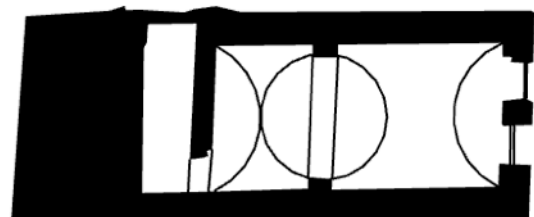
main floor
1643



basement floor
1643



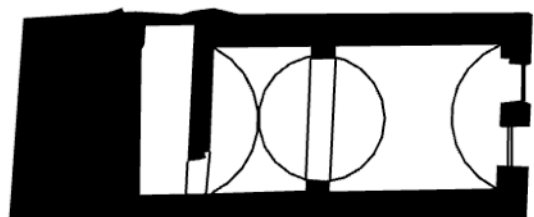
main floor
1656, wooden annexes



basement floor
1656



main floor
current state



basement floor
current state

Currently only the stone and brick building stands in a rather ruinous state. Especially the hammam part suffered a higher degree of decline, the heating room completely missing. The big classroom is divided into three small ones, the domical vault is covered with plaster. The site is mostly used by a tea house, the historical building is unused.

Concept

The Historical building of the Transylvanian Ambassadors has exciting layers of history that shows in its current, physical state too. The site is an exceptional green island in Balat with a very unique view. Everything is given for this place, to be a living, recreational park of the neighbourhood.



Located on the historical peninsula, being a focal point in the history of several minority groups, the developed urban fabric failed to host industrialization. The hard economical situation of the neighbourhood contributed to a row of social problems. Besides having a hard time maintaining their built environment, locals are struggling with unemployment, drug related and other illegal activities. The biggest problem is the lack of perspective in life amongst youngsters.

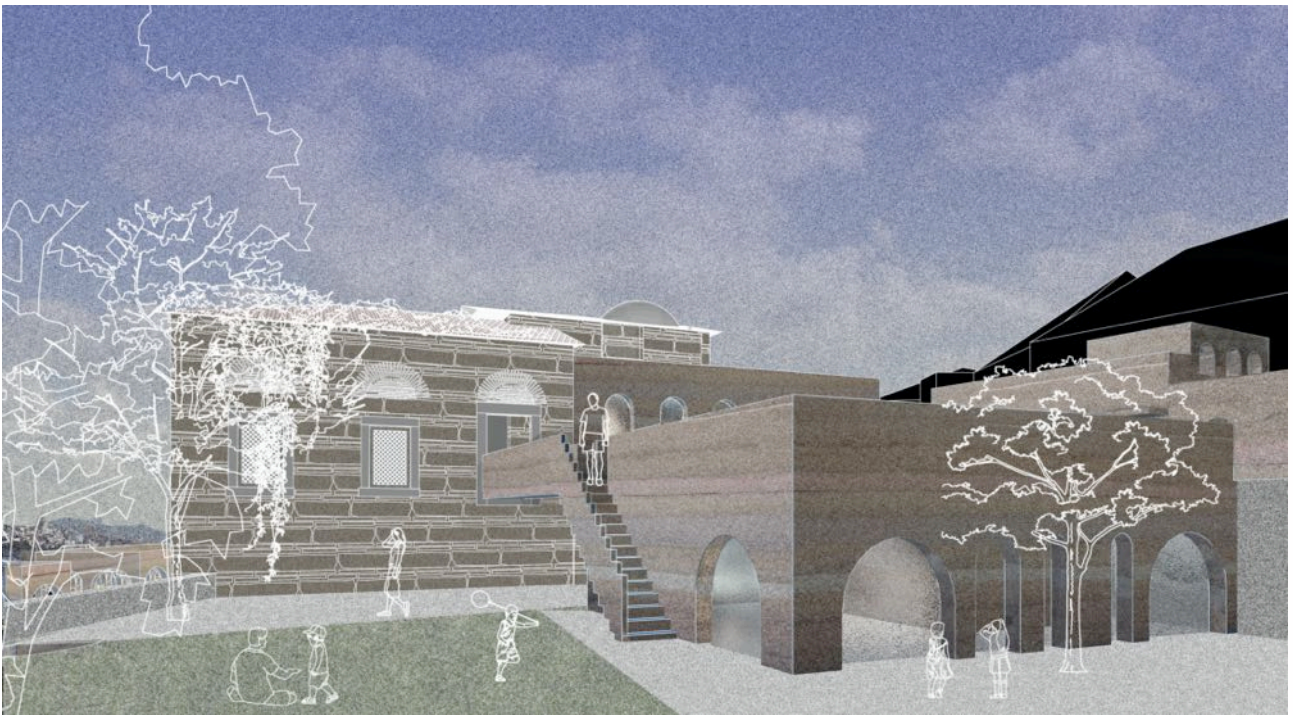
Taking Balat's current state into account, when thinking about the reuse of this historical building, the only way to do it, is involving the locals in it. Unfolding and presenting the historical layers of the place is important, but this neighbourhood needs this place too much, just to be a 'museum'.

The Embassy of Care is an institution, that can host any organization that wants to do a social impact. The applicant can have a residency at the Embassy for a period of time, can use the facilities there with one provision: it must involve the locals of Balat, especially the children.

The Embassy is an educational, cultural, playful place, where locals can learn, spend quality time after school, widen their perspectives and meet foreigners. The conserved historical building besides hosting an exhibition of its own history, is a living space. The restitution of the hammam has a sustainability importance too.

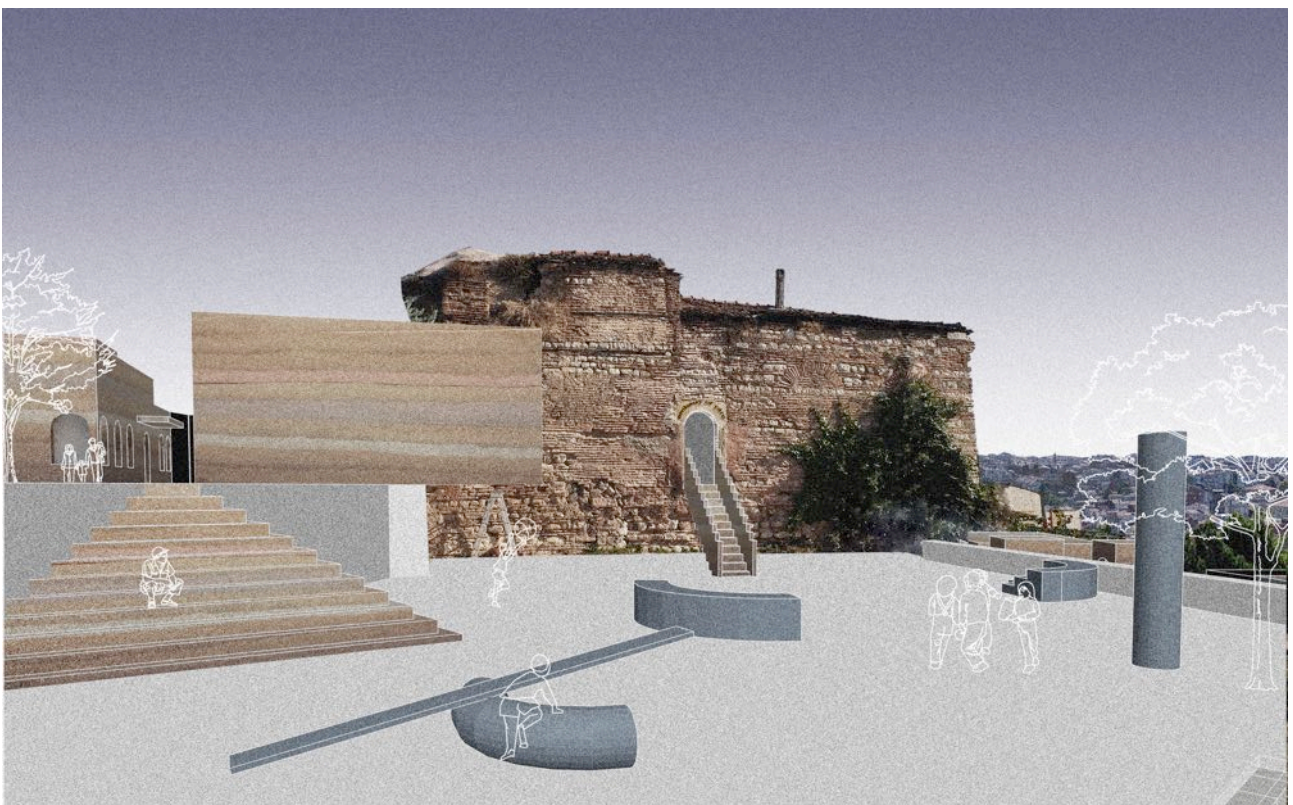
The site of the Embassy is a playground, a park with trees, a tea terrace with a panorama, a great place to be. The concept's main goal is to make the site a living, important place in the mahallah (neighbourhood).

The plan



The Historical building of the Transylvanian Ambassadors, is mainly cleaned and conserved in its current state, with static and technical correction. The main restitution is on the main floor, where the big room with the domical vault is restored. This room hosts the permanent exhibition on the history of the house and Hungarian culture.

The hammam is restored too in its original function. This restoration has a sustainability role too, so employees can be hired for full time.



The basement floor is a multifunctional space, on one hand it can be used as a dining room, on the other as an exhibition room. When there is a dinner, the teahouse from the terrace provides the catering. This place can be used by the teahouse occasionally too. The ramp is restored too.

The Embassy Residence is a guest house for 5 persons. Basically anyone can apply to live here for a time: artists, teachers, social workers. The only provision is to have involvement with the social life of the locals.

The Workshop Room is able to host a variety of activities from arts to sport. It is an important educational center in the mahalla.

The Playground. In the area there is a lack of safe place for children to play. Most of the time they play on the narrow streets of Balat. The site of the Embassy is always open for the youngsters of the mahallah.

Panorama Terrace and Park. The site has a great potential because of its location. It is a big unbuilt place ready to satisfy the locals recreational needs. The teahouse and restaurant that is currently there, stays, but it is moved away, leaving more space for the panorama.

The site has 4 entrances, two of them are for vehicles too. Besides the existing pedestrian routes, an addition is a path from the terrace in the direction of the Golden Horn.

There are no separated, privatised places within the site. With the restitution of the original entrance on the olda house, with a bridge connecting the playground with the workshop room, even the historical building can be crossed all the time.

There are four different atmospheres of the site, without any physical separation: park, playground, tea terrace and the institution's yard around the workshop house.



The new buildings and the annex (hammam) are built with monolithic method, of layered, pigmented concrete. The material can easily be distinguished from the old structure, but reacts to it's layered history and appearance.



The Historical building of the Transylvanian Ambassadors has been surveyed in a programme between **Yildiz Technical University** of Istanbul and **Budapest University of Technology and Economics** in 2019, september 25-01.

Following the survey, we continued our research and thinking process in Budapest on a workshop in 2019, october 14-20.

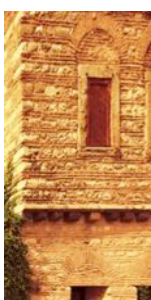
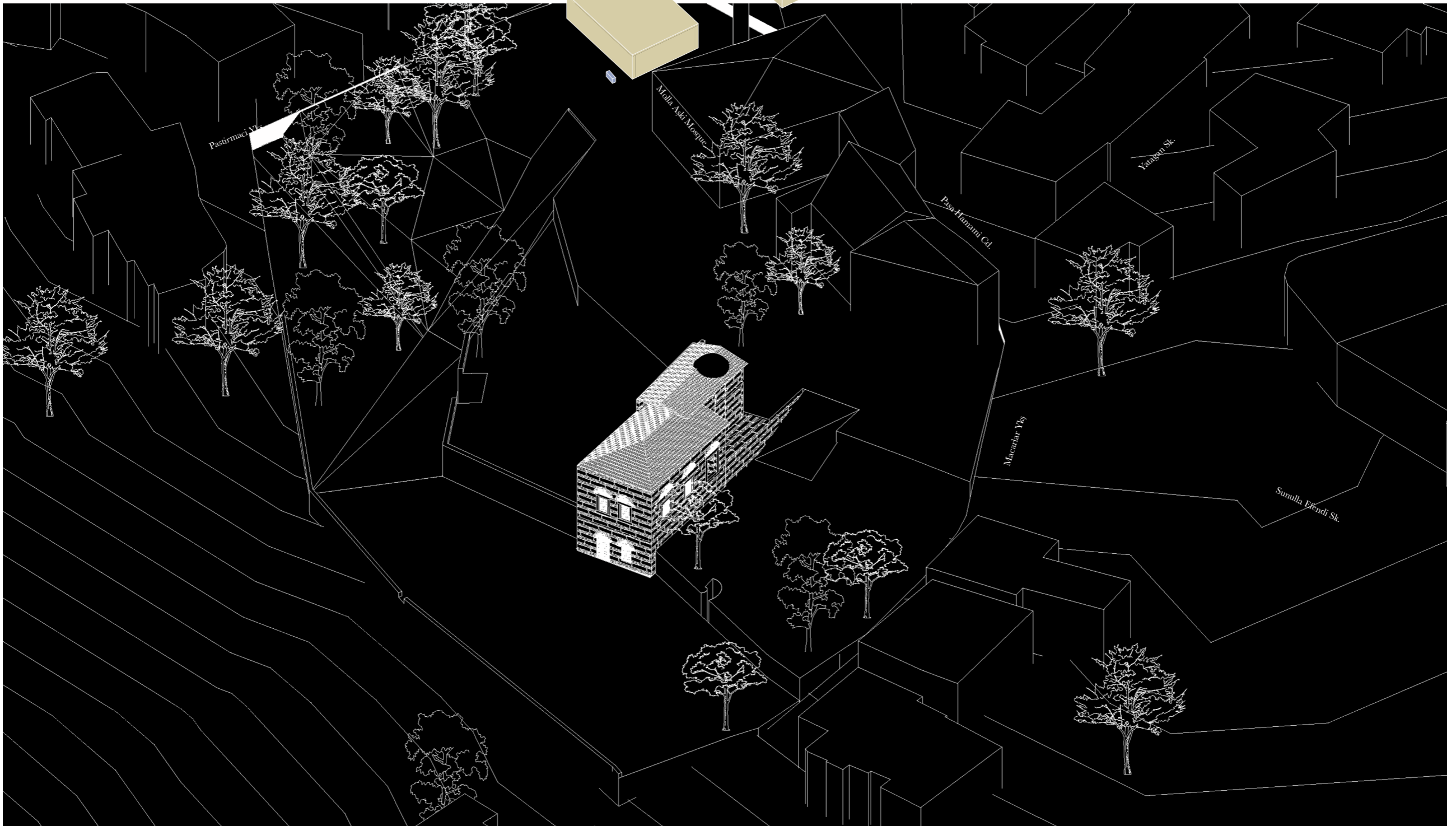
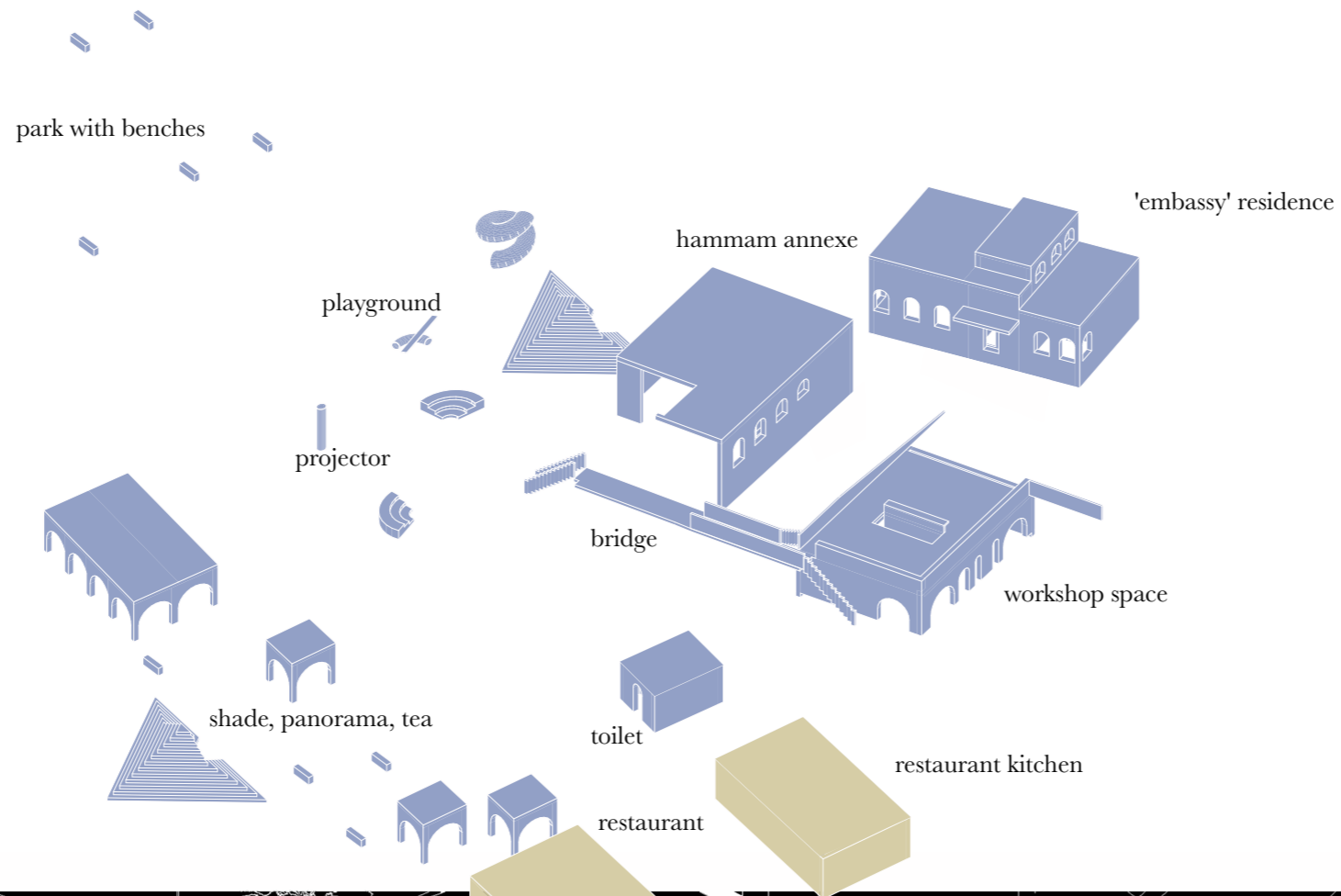


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The Periodification drawings were made based on Dr. Nur Urfalıođlu's presentation, held at the joint workshop between BME and Yildiz Technical University of Istanbul, held in October, 2019.

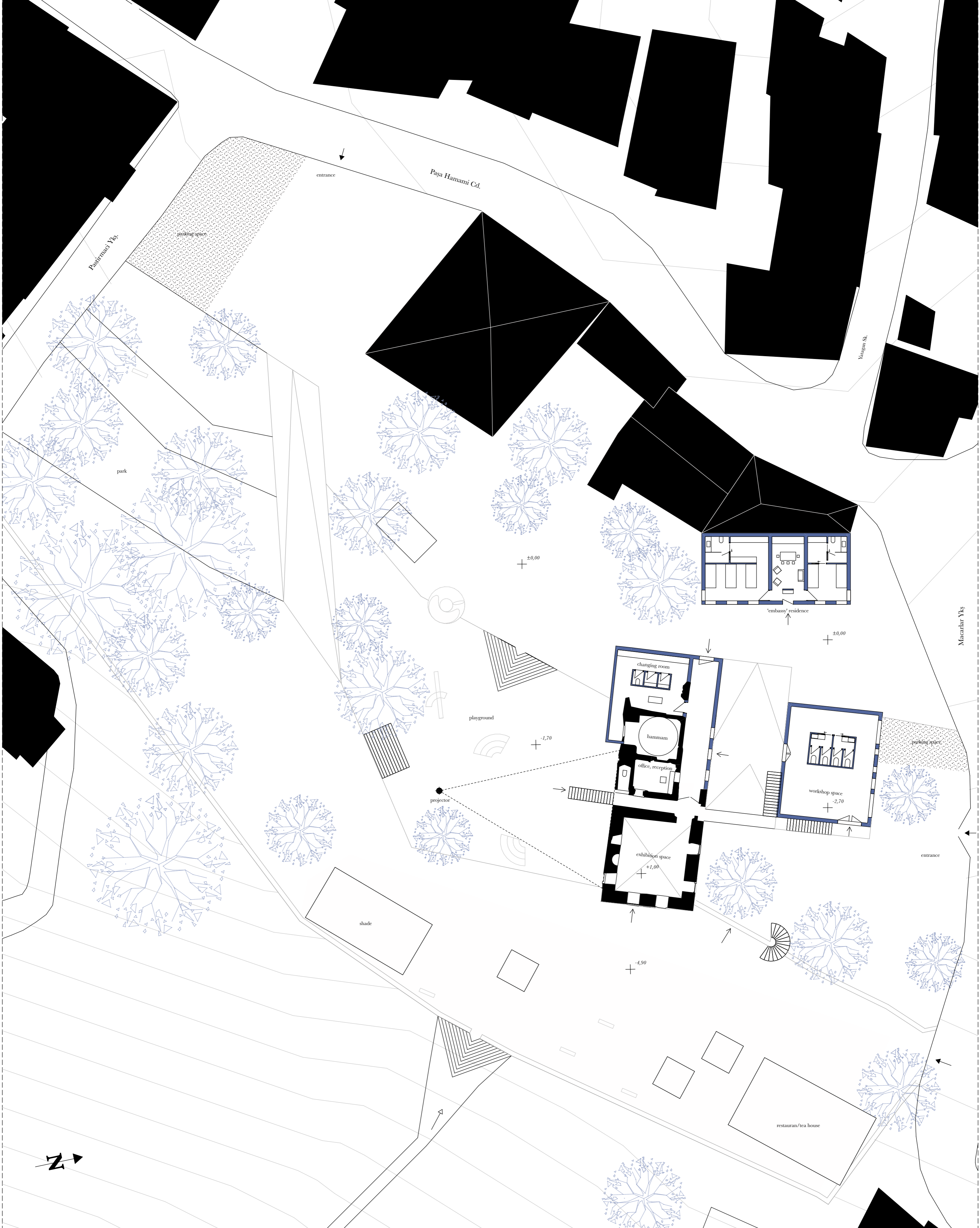
Photo of Children in Balat: tummyfull.blogspot.com



HISTORICAL BUILDING OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN AMBASSADORS
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 Istanbul, Turkey - 25. 09. - 01. 10. 2019 - Budapest, Hungary - 14 - 10. 10. 2019.

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site plan

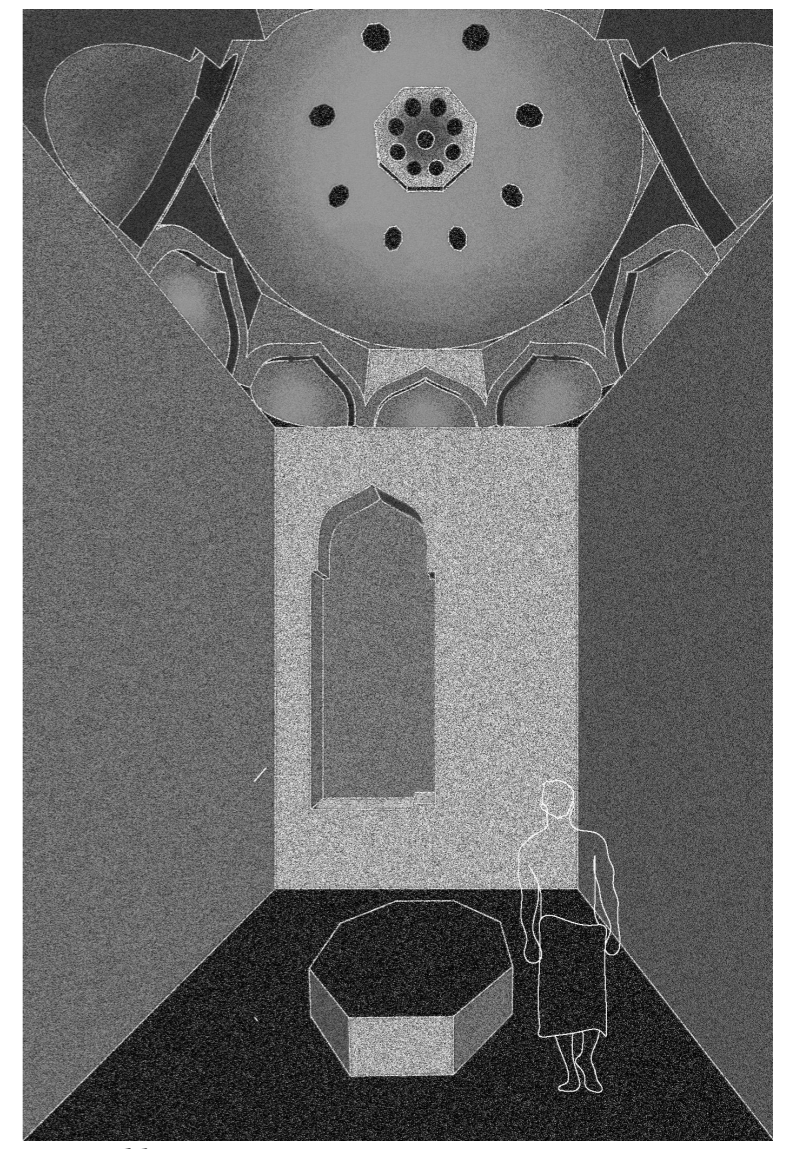
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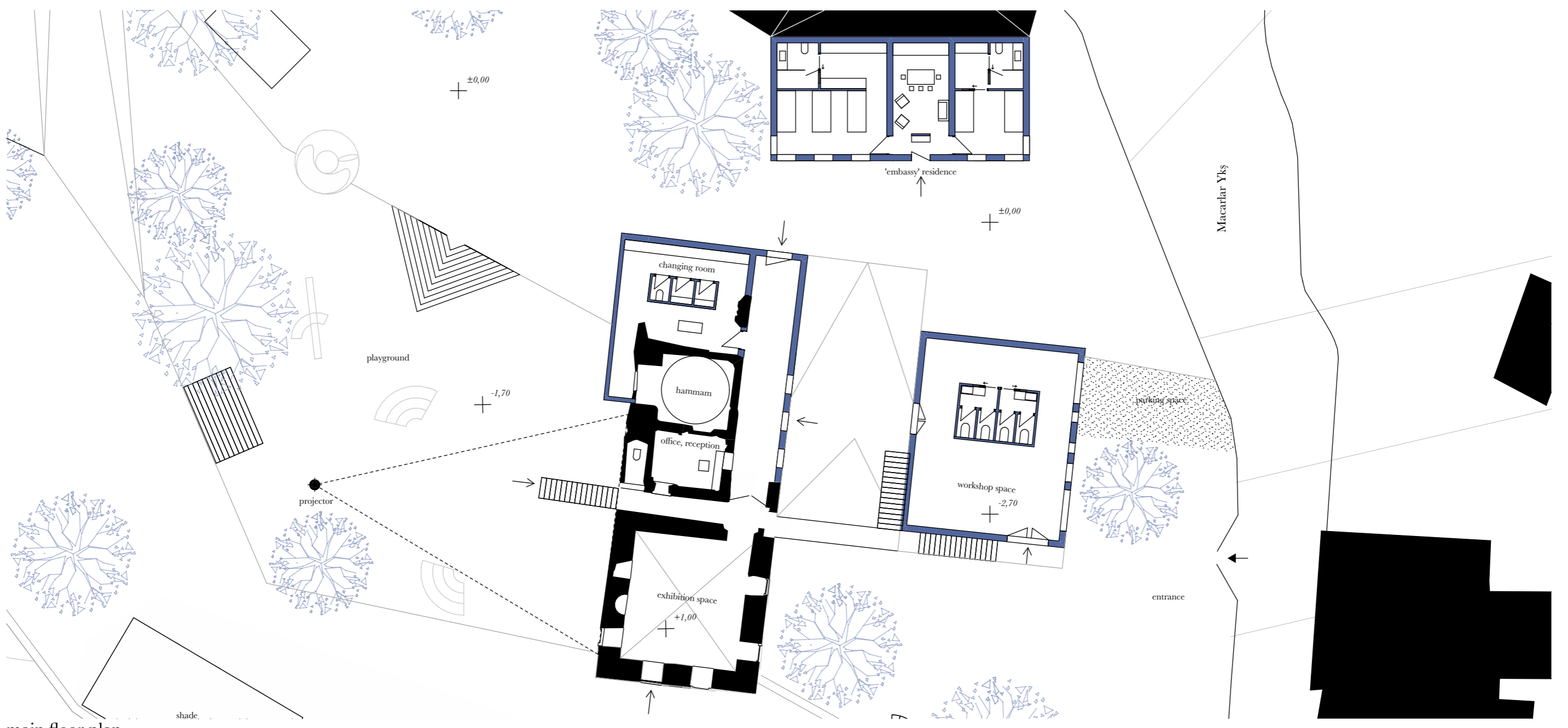




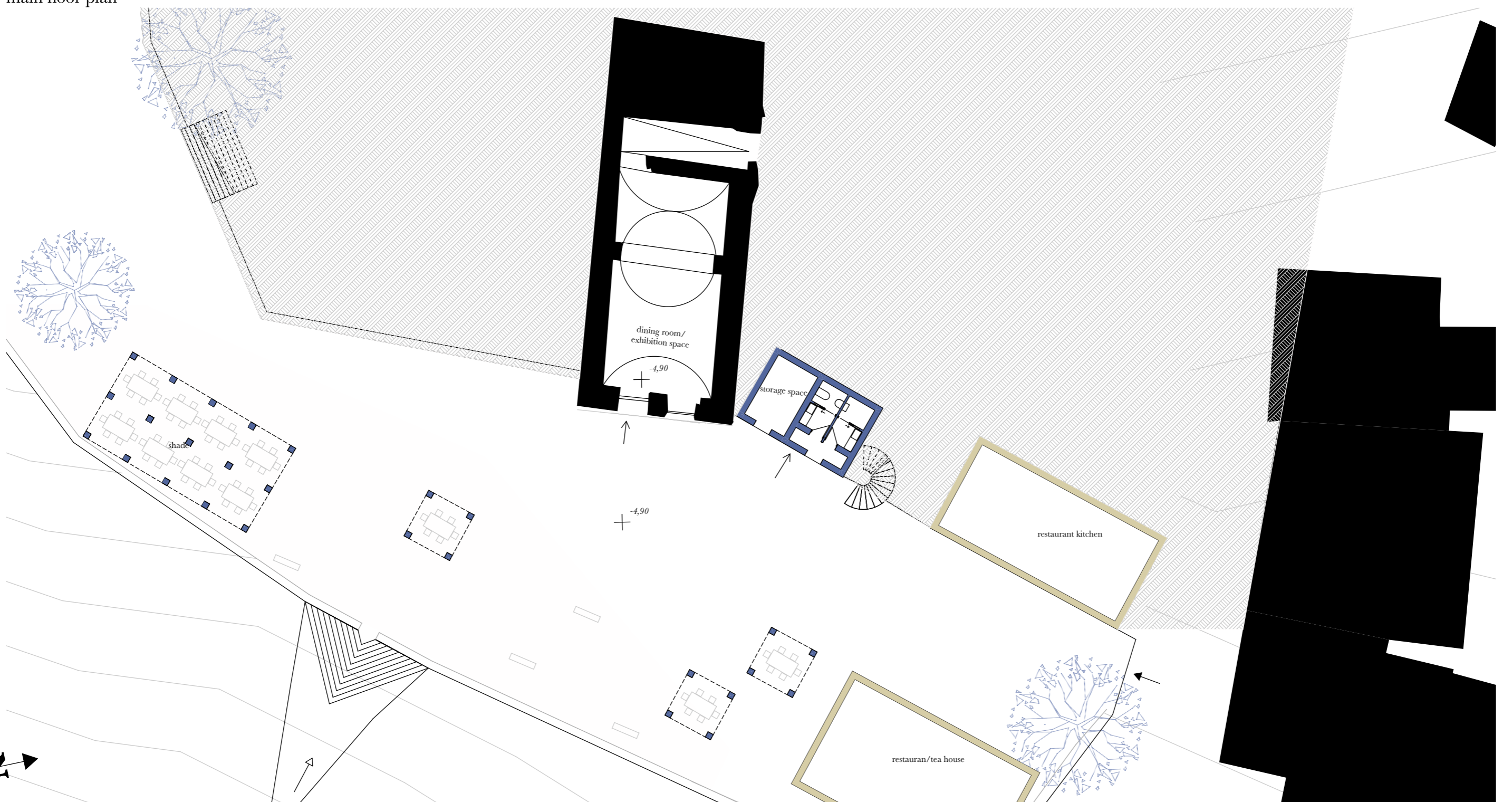
playground and entrance



restored hammam



main floor plan

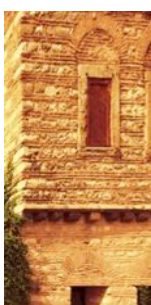


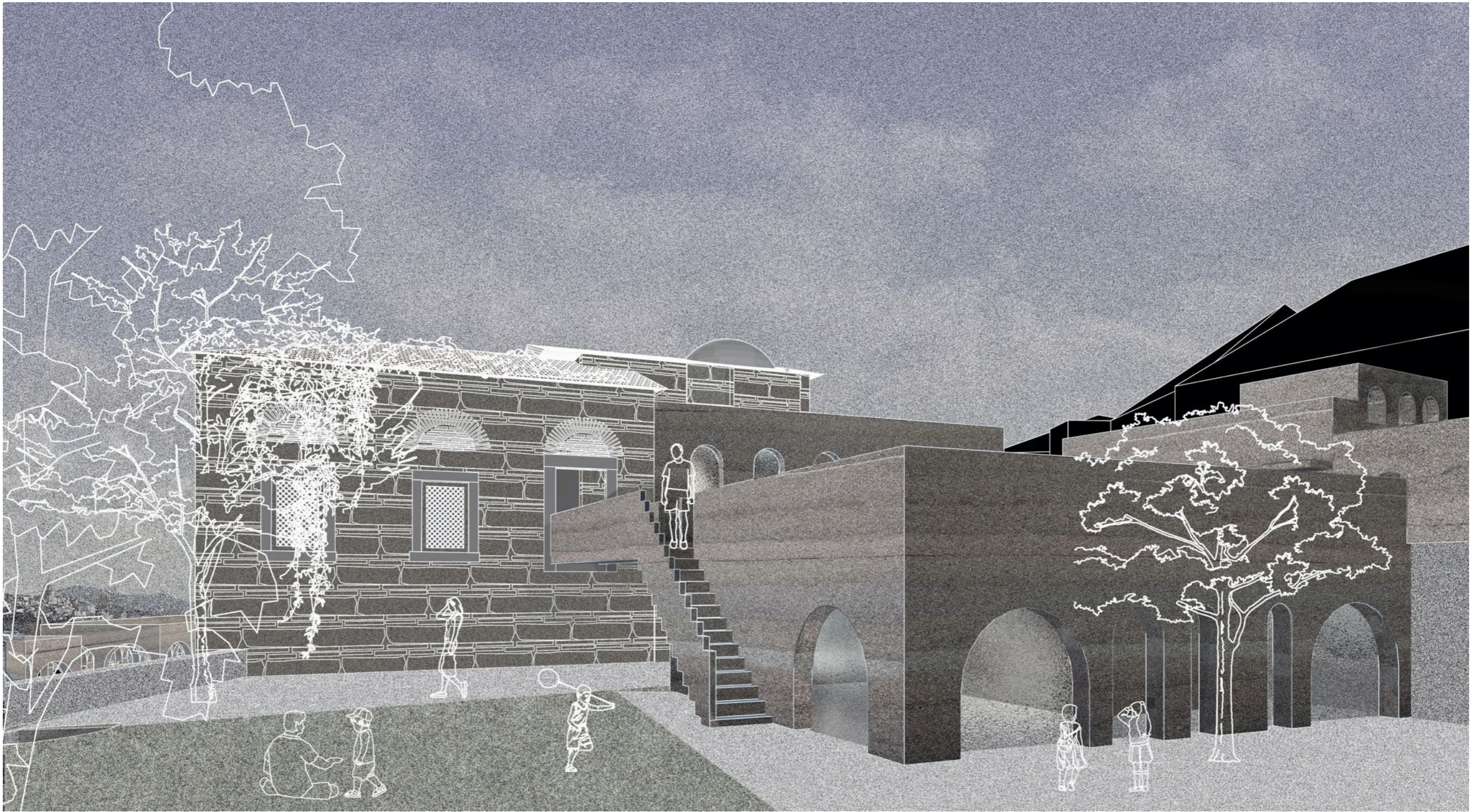
basement plan and terrace

plans

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