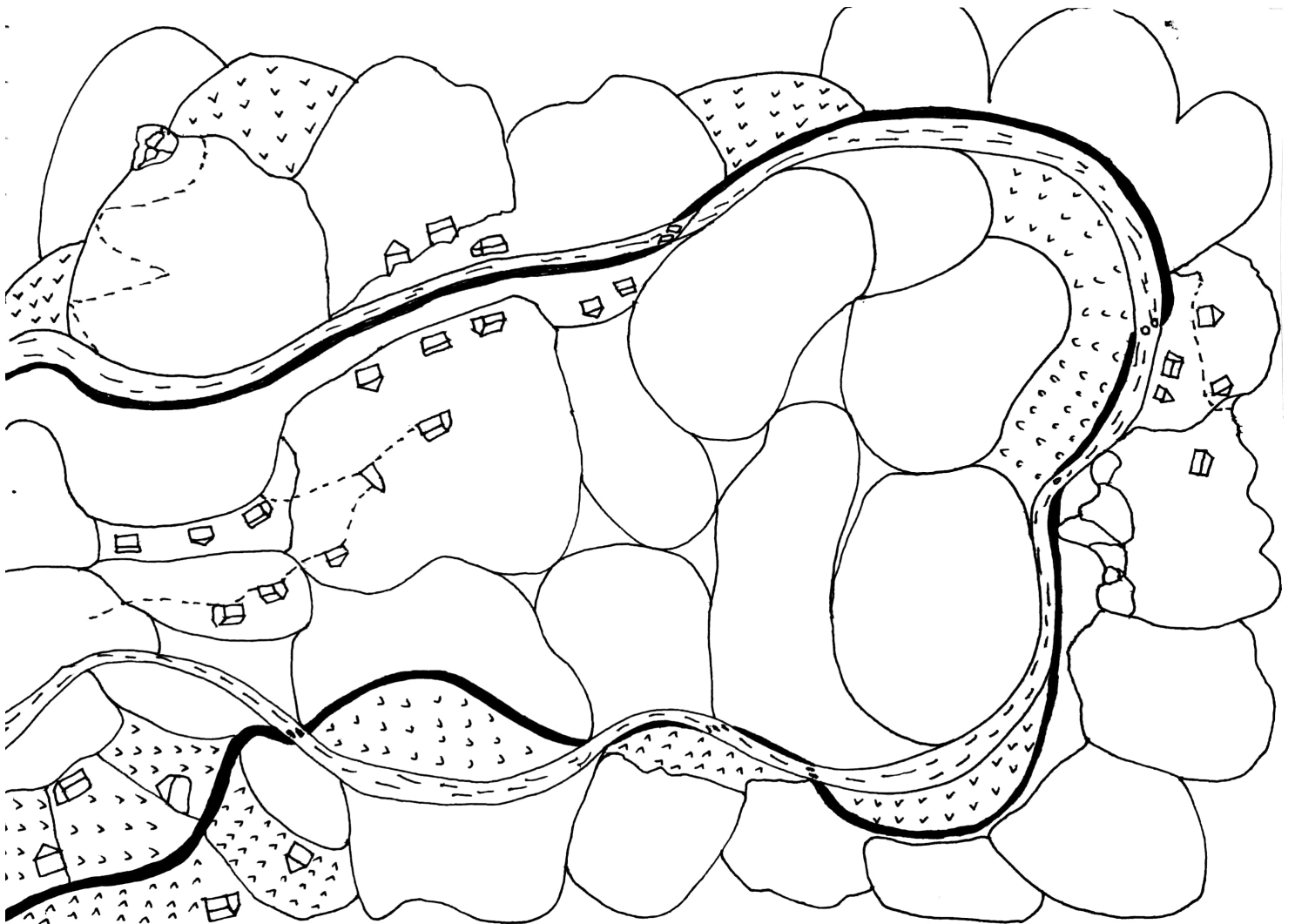


*"Even the highest mountains
are no nearer the sky than the deepest valleys.
There is no more sky in one place
than another."
The Sky, Wislawa Szymborska*

DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS

2023 Fall Diploma AHO
Huanlingzi Lei



ABSTRACT

My hometown is a small city in Guizhou Province in southeastern China. Sometimes I dream about things taking place there. The connections become stronger when I am farther from there. Since I worked in one of the biggest metropolitan cities, Shenzhen, I have been thinking about how I can be an architect in my hometown. Even though architects are an unnecessary profession in the small city, the connection with this land leads me to make architectural attempts.

Urban explorer Rem Koolhaas warned us about the dying of rural in the Guggenheim exhibition *Countryside, The Future*. The countryside is an all-time topic, with political Rural Vitalization, civic Rural Reconstruction, and artistic interventions, but I am more interested in why some people are deeply rooted in villages where many traditions rest. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy¹ and Juhani Pallasmaa² both mentioned T.S.Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919). In this essay, Eliot argues that about how inheriting tradition cannot be inherited, and if you want it you can only needs obtained it by great labor.³ Tradition is necessary for us in order to maintain identity and connection in the world. It has however to re-created and re-invented, as Pallasmaa says. How can we access traditions and villages?

The village where my father came from is the initiative for this diploma project. It is about everyday life in an inclusive mood with the landscape around it. I made the word "Villopia" up with village and utopia. It is a concept of reconstructing utopian life in a village and making it accessible for those who are far from it to understand. This view is based on my memories, experiences, and observations, which are the main tools for "looking at" connections in an ordinary, disappearing village. I depict the mood of viewing the topography and being in the landscape. All the interpretations become memory journeys. It catches traces of lives through architectural approaches and demonstrates how we live with the vicissitudes of time in the spaces. Villopia experiment is launched as an architectural test for bringing village lives to an urban area. A flora table is made in this experimental renovation project to connect people there with here, the past with the present, and people with flora.

The whole project is to register things in a normal village. In *Deep in the Mountains*, the pre-diploma provides different perspectives to look at villages and architectural program for the diploma. In *Villopia – The Portrait of a Village*, different drawings and models are the new portraits to get to know the village. *Living with Flora* is an experimental project to realize rural lives in urban areas. Materials of working process and inspirations are also included. Architecture and landscape become performance stages for living beings' lives. Invisible traditions are continued through the life performance. As an architect, I can't stop the loss of the village, but registering is what I can do for everything living in the village.

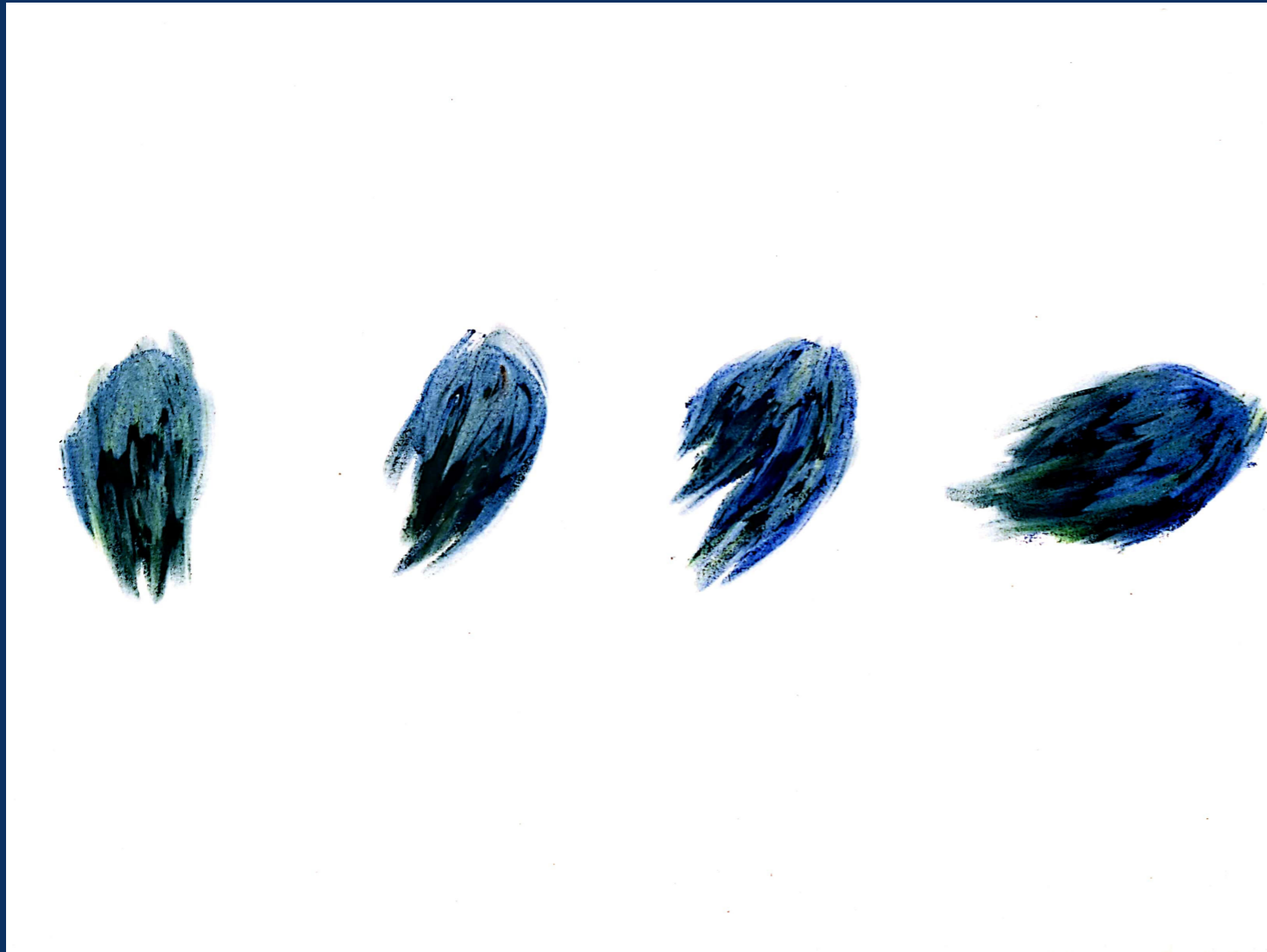
¹ Peter Zumthor, Marie Lending, *A Feeling of History*, Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, 2018, 72

² Juhani Pallasmaa, "Tradition and Modernity, The Feasibility of Regional Architecture in Post-Modern Society", *Encounters 1: Architectural Essays*, Helsinki: Rakennustieto Oy, 2005, 268

³ T. S. Eliot. "Tradition and Individual Talent", *Selected Essays*, New York, new edition, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964.

DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS

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Village

Definition: a settlement usually larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town

Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French vilage, from vil manorial estate, farmstead, from Latin villa

"Village." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/village>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023.

A place where the villagers live together.

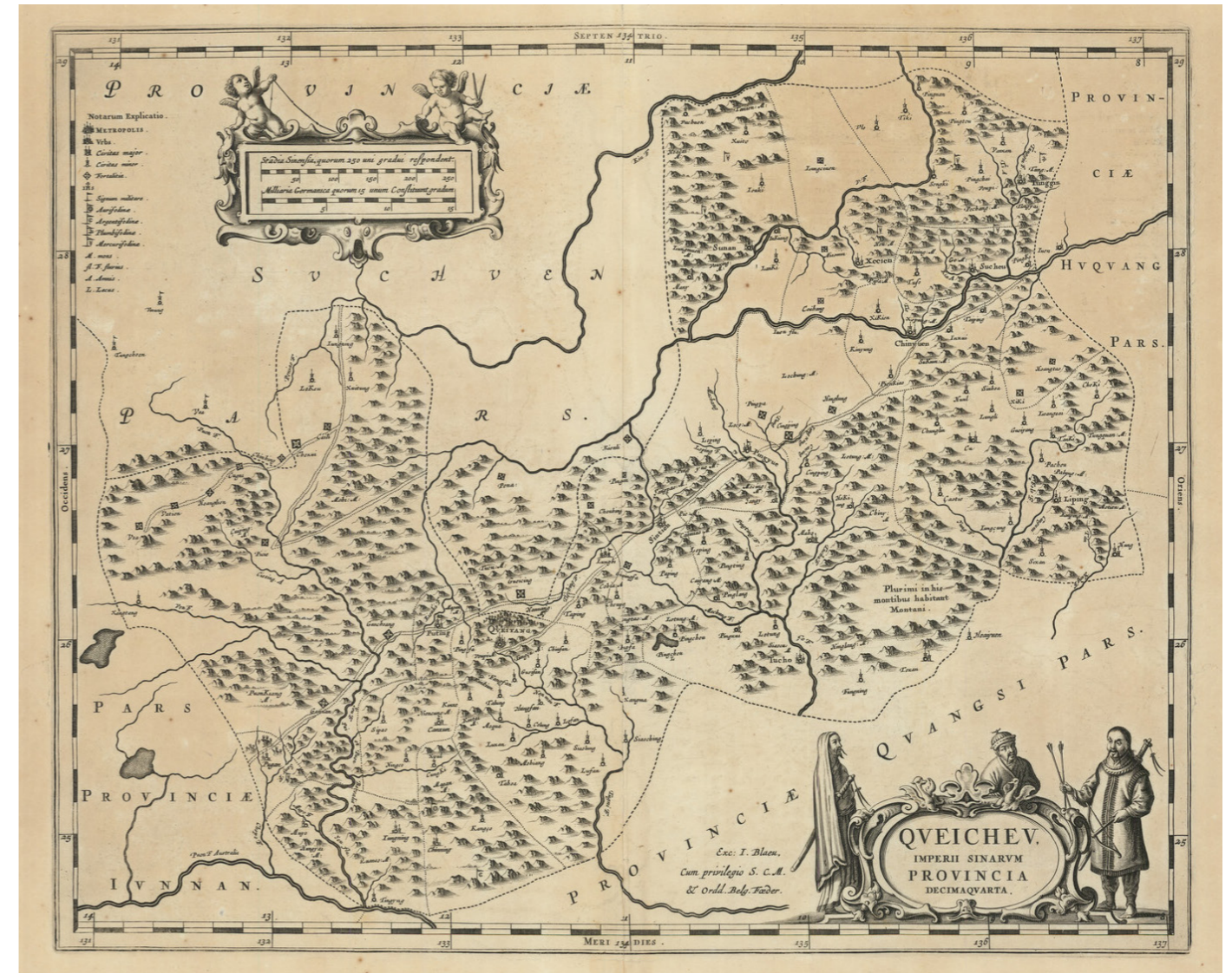
"Village." Chinese Dictionary, <https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E6%9D%91>

村	Village
乡村	Home Village
山村	Mountain Village
农村	Farming Village

In this old map from the 17th century, depicting Guizhou is a mountainous region with many ancient fortresses.

The average elevation of Guizhou is about 1100 meters, of which 92.5% are mountains and hills. The development of karst landforms in Guizhou is very typical. The karst (exposed) area accounts for 61.9% of the province's total land area.

(Guizhou, China) Queichev, Imperii Sinarum Provincia Decimaquarta, Amsterdam, 1655



VILLAGE

Perspectives

Rem Koolhaas's comments on disappearing countryside gave us a warning about the future environment where we can live. In my pre-diploma, on one hand, I wish to know why some people have a more profound attachment to the village than modern city life. On the other, I'm afraid of homogeneity and simplicity which would become the only option for us to live. I can't live a primitive life, but we can't only glimpse our future in the cities. So, villages is our possibility to re-think our modern lives. I don't separate we and they who live in villages or cities because I am in a neutral position to think. There is also a transition between insider and outsider in different perspective to notice and figure out.

Norberg-Schulz says the place is the basic element for people to sense, percept, and happen. The villages root sensibility, while cities make us feel more placeless. Why village can have characteristics for people to sense? John Berger spends decades in French countryside and says "Quincy, the extension is vertical, and it's to do with time, and that's where the dead take prop."¹ In Varda's film, *Visages, Villages*, photos on buildings as media to record who is living here now. Can you imagine? For an old man, his home is the whole universe. Architect Siza wanted to use traditional straws for the roof in Cape Verde while the villagers want tiles. The most complex comment is "Siza has a big house in Portugal, why should we live in a house without tiles".² If Siza is going to live in that house, will he still want to use the straw instead of tiles? Directors, artists, photographers, architects and villagers see contradictions, sufferings, and poems, but there is either an answer or a judgment.

"The tool that human used to deal with the nature is changing from sense of place to placelessness." First, our perceptions come from experiences with places. "Deepest level is the unselfconscious experience which is the essence of a sense of place."³ These individual insiderness can't separate humans

from other creatures and also can't categorize the place into various aspects. A self-conscious and open-minded outsider who is shallower level of experiences, can do. Max Scheler says, "To find one's place in the world, the world must be cosmos". The place is a basic element in the ordering of our experiences of the world.

In *From the Soil*, Fei addresses how Confucianism structures morality in Chinese rural society. 礼 (ceremony) is ruled by ritual and criteria for rural community patrilineages, law of justice, a society without litigation, an inaction government, and Elders. When people gradually transitioned from an identity society to a contract society, that is, the transformation of vernacular society to modern society. At this time, the conflict between the modernization constructed by the law and the vernacular society is highlighted in the social structure, organization, interpersonal relations and production methods. A human-centered society relies on the relatively stable transmission of traditional ways to accomplish its mission throughout life and does not need additional coercive factors to regulate human activities, such as laws, or language to communicate. Behavior precedes thought. How to find a balance between morality and law, how to keep the traditions in modernism, how to transform a village in the deep mountains into The Peach Blossom Garden⁴?

Re-drawings of village

The landscape is the platform of the village, extending vertically and horizontally to where the human body reaches. Every landscape is a place, but not every place can be a landscape. It is where daily lives and death inhabit. There is no classification of land use which vague all the things without centralize any human or objects. Daily lives happen in-between light and darkness which is shaped by the creatures and the earth. From view of sky up the field to scattered lights in the forest, light penetrates through the materiality of mountains.

1 From film, *The Seasons in Quincy: Four Portraits of John Berger*, 2016

2 From film, *The Architect and the Old Village*, 2003

3 Edward Relph, *Place and Placeness*, New York: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

4 A traditional Chinese story is about a person found a village accidentally where a group of people live a beautiful life deep in the mountains with peach flowers blossom. When he left the village, nobody could find the place again.

There is not a beginning or end when you travel in the infinite Landscape, but infinite life. The road is not a geometrical line cut into the earth, but interspersed into the mountains, up rivers, and beside fields. Landscape is a farming schedule in a Lunar Year guiding people to live by seasons and ceremonies. Time is not displayed by technological machine but by cosmos. Recreation starts at the moonrise and ends at the moonset. The folktale also shows how villagers live with death in the landscape in a "scary" way. At summer night, the ghost fire (will-o-the-wisp) is always seen when you walk in the countryside road. When you stand, the fire stands. When you run, it runs. It is said to be the soul of the dead who don't want to leave the world. In fact, the substance from the dead fires because of the high temperature.

If the landscape is an extension of the body, the house is the inhabitation of the body. Vernacular house is the consequence of socio-cultural factors to meet the needs of daily life, community structure, and rituals which reflects more the structure of society, production relations and the relationship between people and natural species. House creates introversion where humans can settle in a small, safe space. Darkness is the main decoration for the house.

Policies of development change the way we live. River channels were changed to make more farmland to feed in the 1980s. A dam has been built for the city to supply more cleaning water, and most of people left which resulted in disappeared villages in the 2010s.

Utopia and dystopia of village may both happen. This imaginary way of thinking is whimsical but also based on what we did and what we are doing now. Tourism-driven based village is the most practical way to develop rural areas. Due to the dam, the villagers left the village where is no human trace anymore. But the dam providing water to the city left a city imprint. Frequent natural disasters such as mudslides may happen to break the last possibility to live here. Scattered houses wander settle along the river, one of them may

be beside the valley and one may be up the middle of the mountains. They are taking care of living, the way of living, and the way how to live with the landscape.

The Objects

I am interested in the place to sense, space to percept, and parallel time to happen. Time here all intertwines together. When we talk about the past, it is the present memory. When we talk about the policy, it is the past decision. When we talk about scenarios, it is a combination of experiences and imagination. Rather than direct architectural interventions, I wish the method is to find objects between the village and me that make things happen but not design to happen. In the beginning of diploma, drawing will be the tool to visualize.

In The Peach Blossom Garden, there is its own system of village which is not attached to the city. As an architect, we are always looking the village from the urban perspective, can we look at it from its own perspective? If is so, how it could be?

THE SPANNING OF SPACE



The Seasons in Quincy:
Four Portraits of John Berger

La pointe-courte, 1955
Agnès Varda



10

I was born under the care of a star.
 Mother moon gave me coolness.
 Father sun gave me heat.
 And the universe gave me shelter.
 Can you imagine?
 How much room I have to live.

Visages, Villages, 2017
 Agnès Varda & JR



11

LIFE OR HERITAGE

TOURISM OR CULTURE

FINANCE OR REGULATIONS

The Architect and the Old Village, 2003
 Catarina Alves Costa



The wooden head ornament symbolizes the long ox horn.
 Photo: John Aage Gjestrum/Soga ecomuseum
 Traditional Dong wooden houses in the Dong nationality village Tang'an in Liping county. Photo: John Aage Gjestrum.
 An Laishun, John Aage Gjestrum, The Ecomuseum in Theory and Practice the First Chinese Ecomuseum Established, Nordisk Museologi 1999,2, S. 65-86



Module 1
 Market place Restoration



Module 2
 Historic village Preservation



Module 3
 Sustainable Valley Development



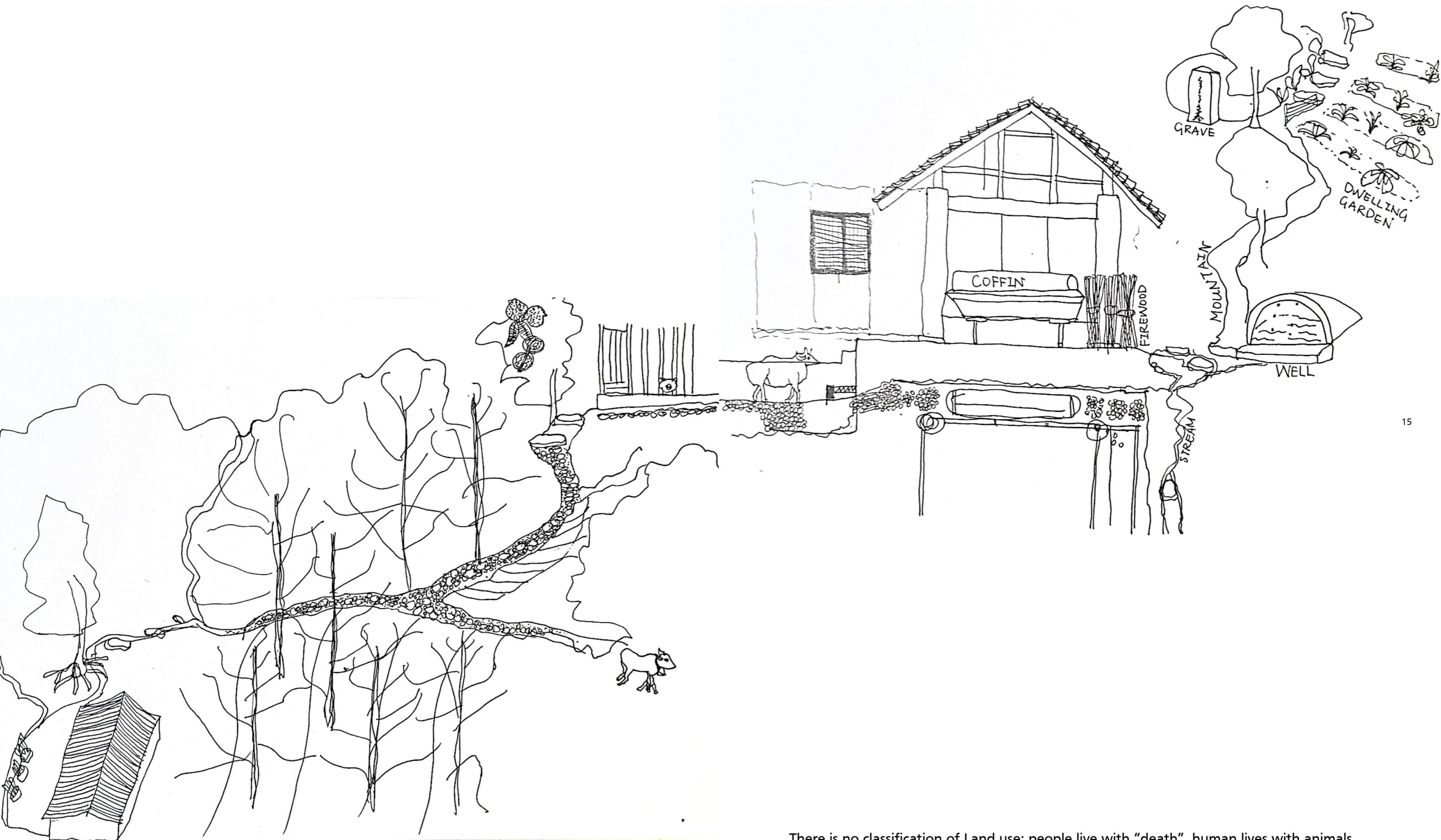
Module 4
 Ecological Sanitation



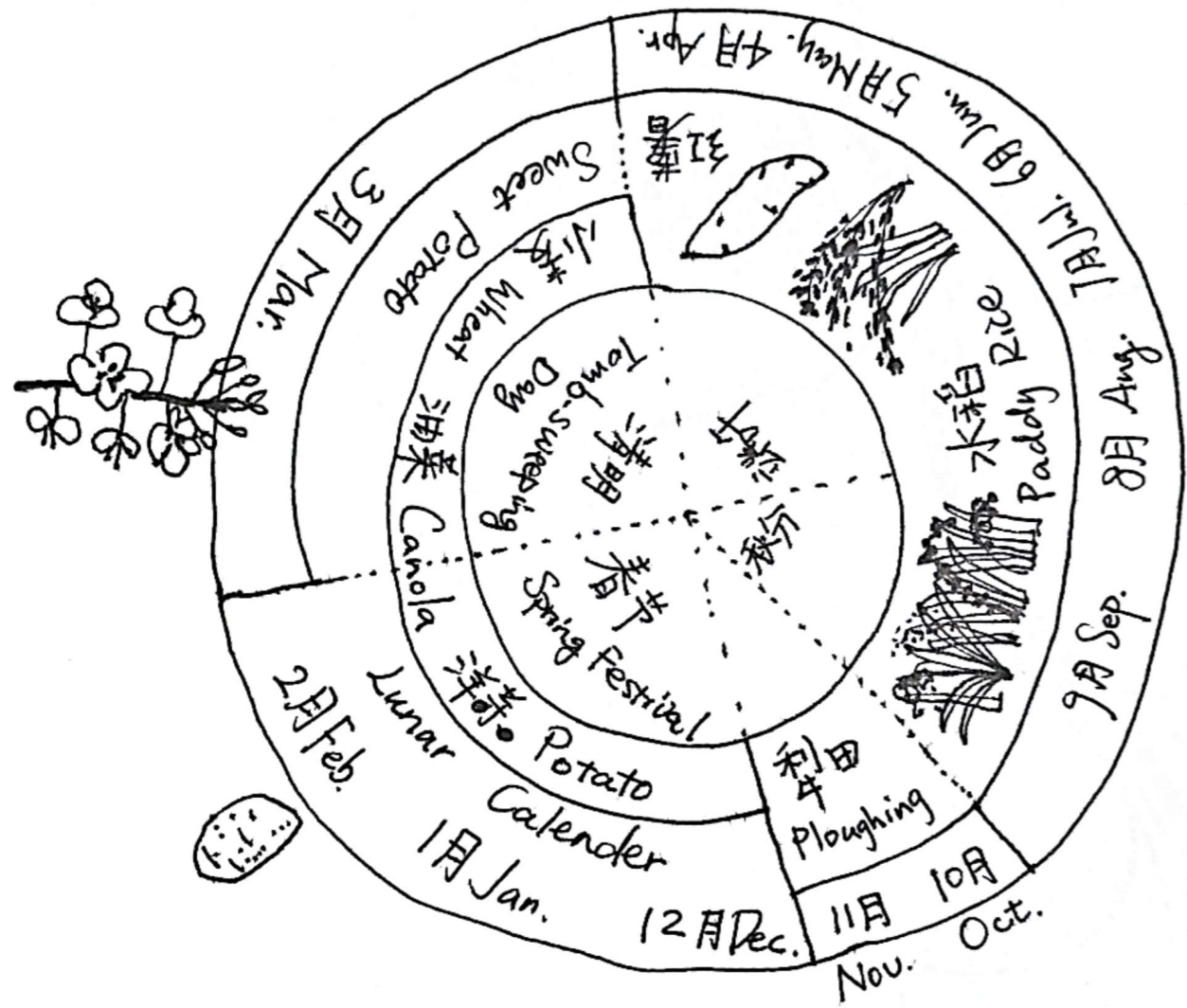
Module 5
 Poverty Alleviation



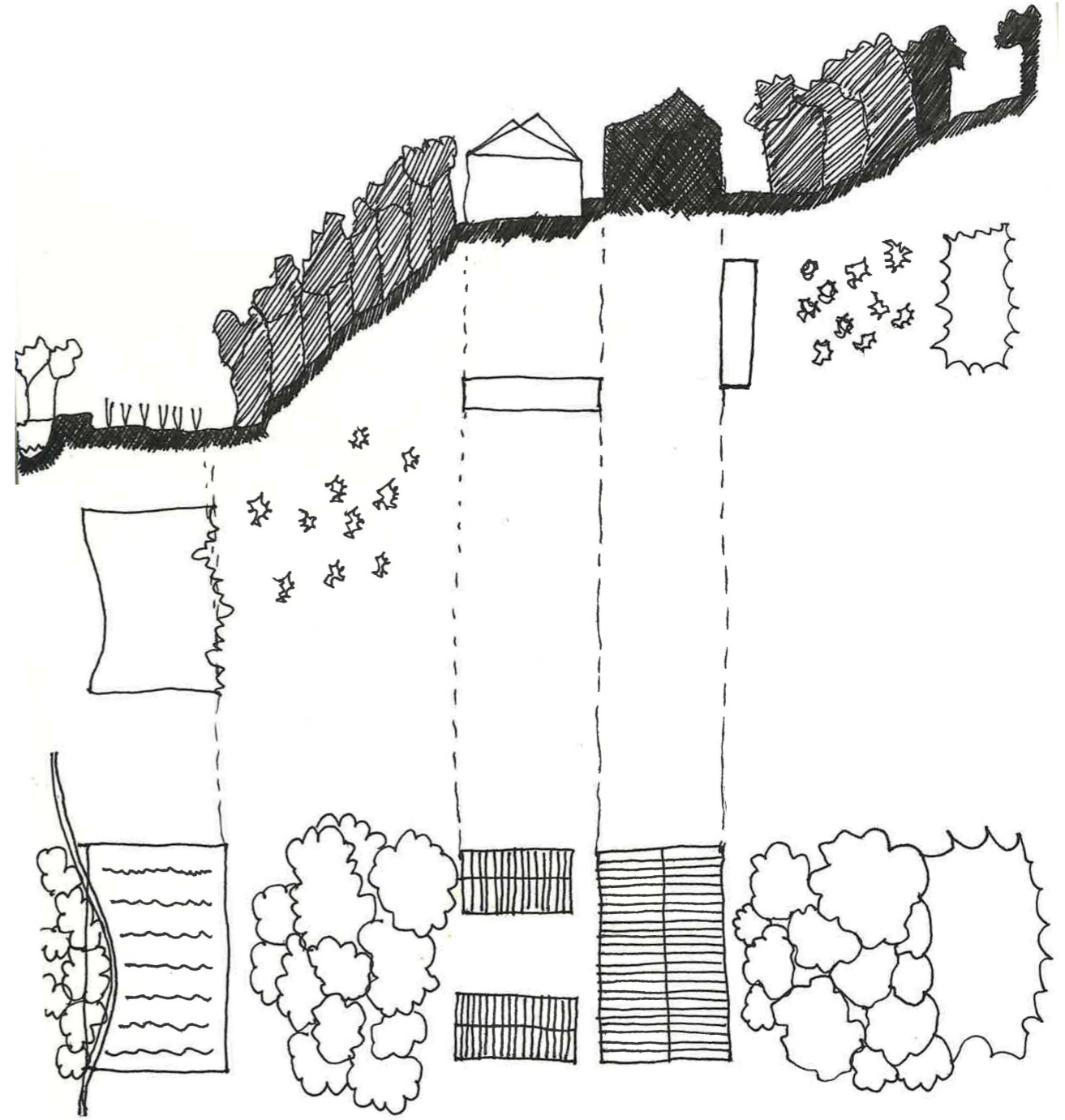
Module 6
 Dissemination



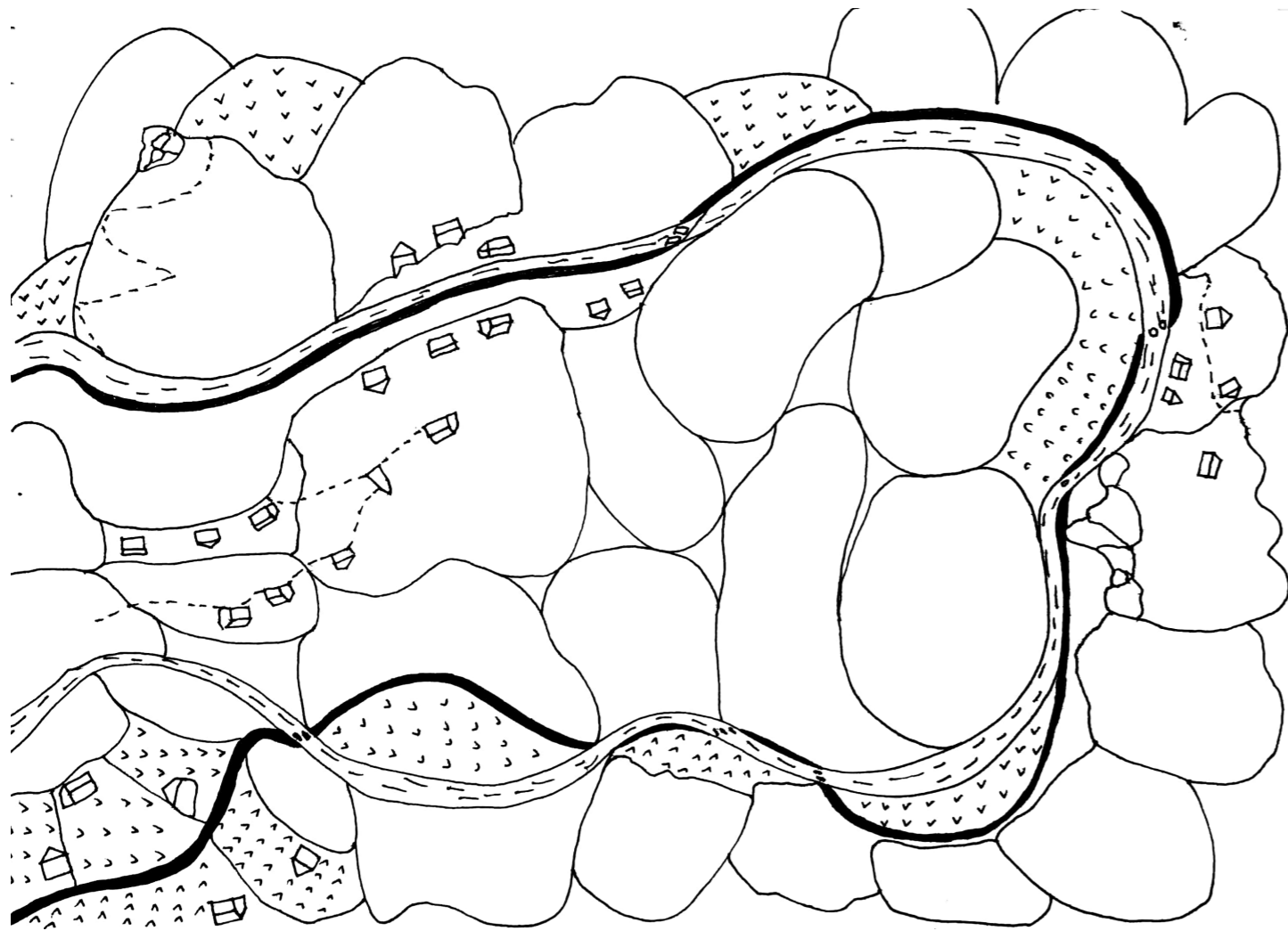
There is no classification of Land use: people live with "death", human lives with animals and house lives with water and mountains. The view is blocked, but the change from light to dark to light is completed.



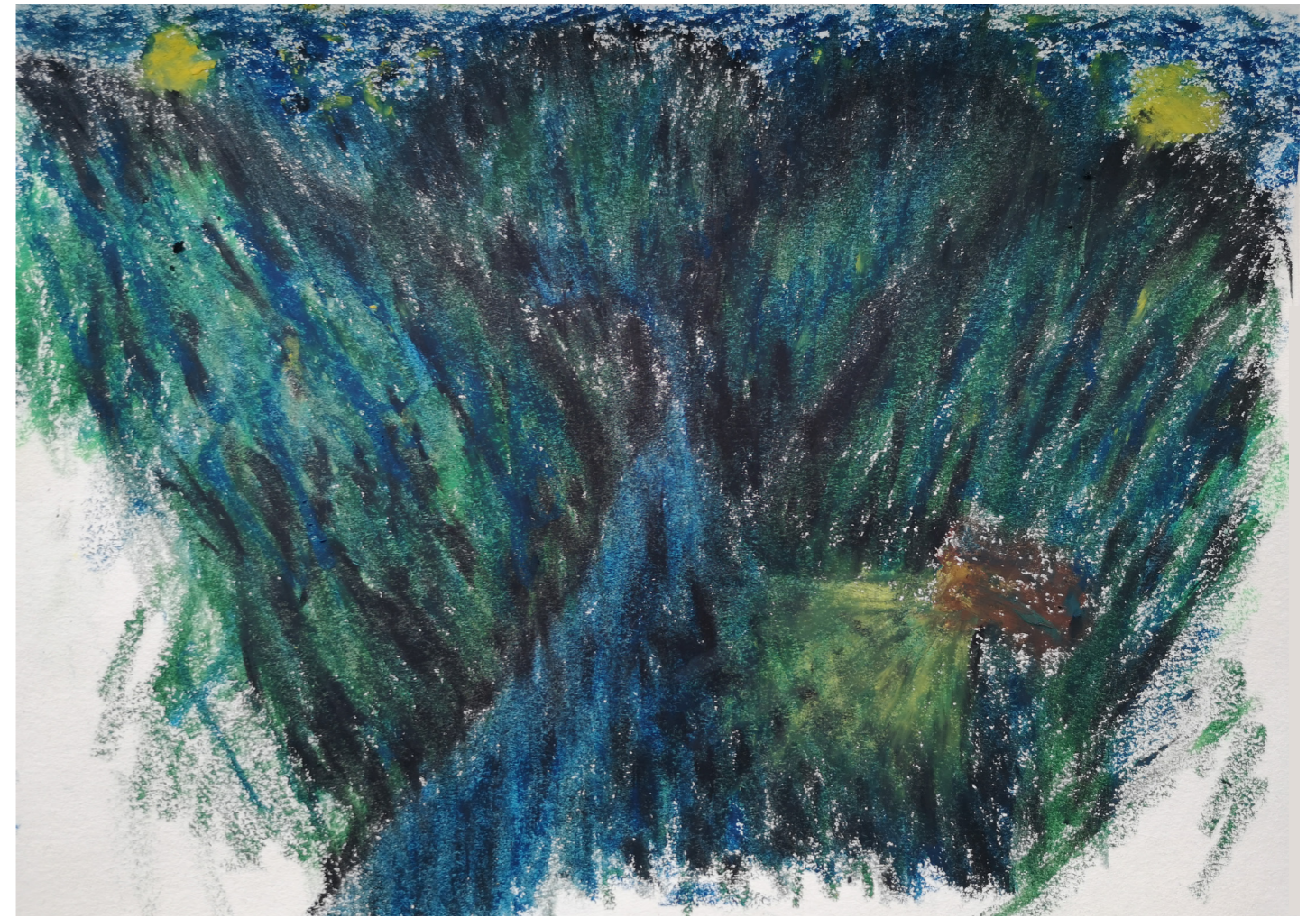
Landscape as Living Schedule



Landscape as Containers of Light

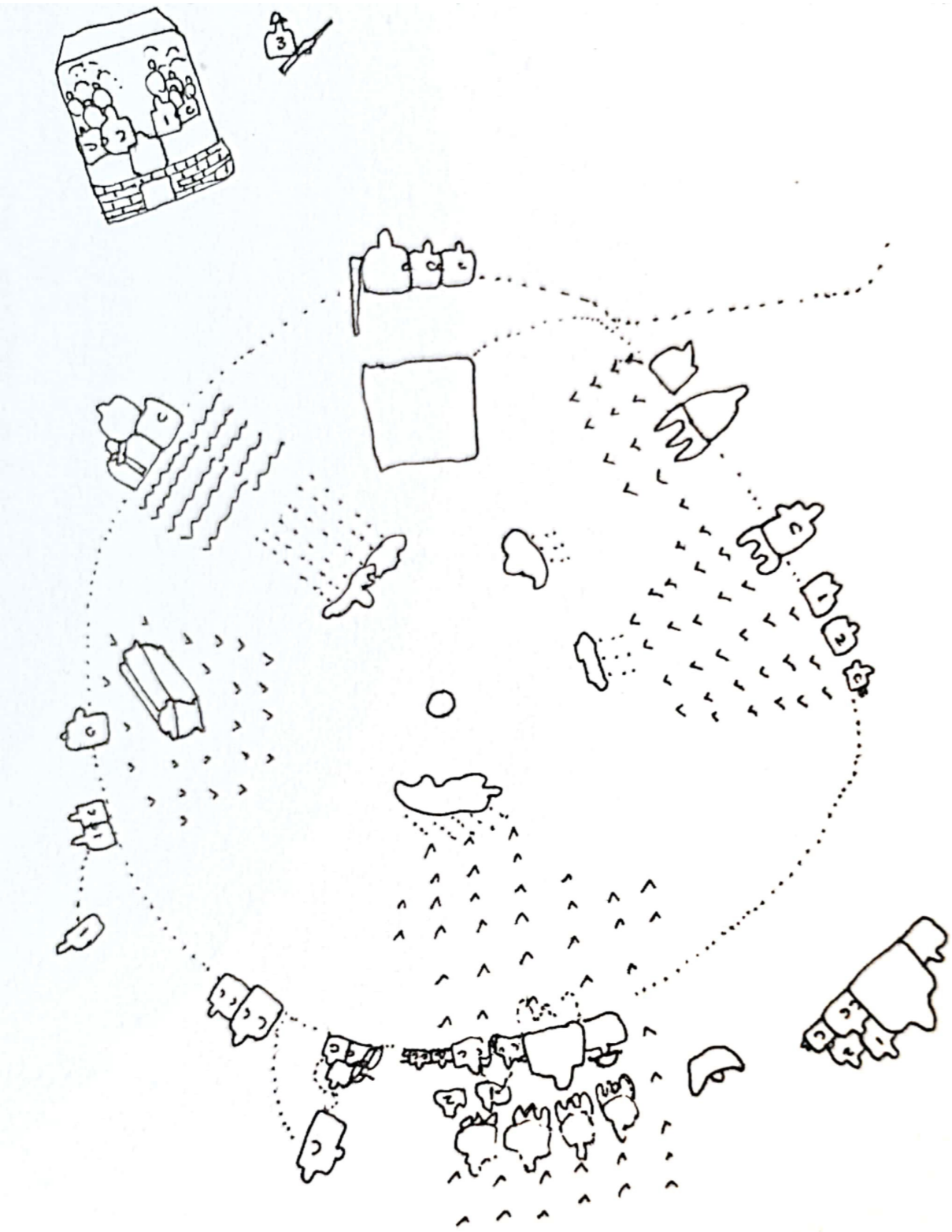


Infinite Landscape



Landscape as a Playground
From Moonrise to Moonset

THE SOCIAL CHANGING OF SPACE



20

The Great Earth
Pearl S. Buck



21

To make more farmland, River Channel changed in 1980s
To supply more water, villages disappeared in 2010s

VILLOPIA



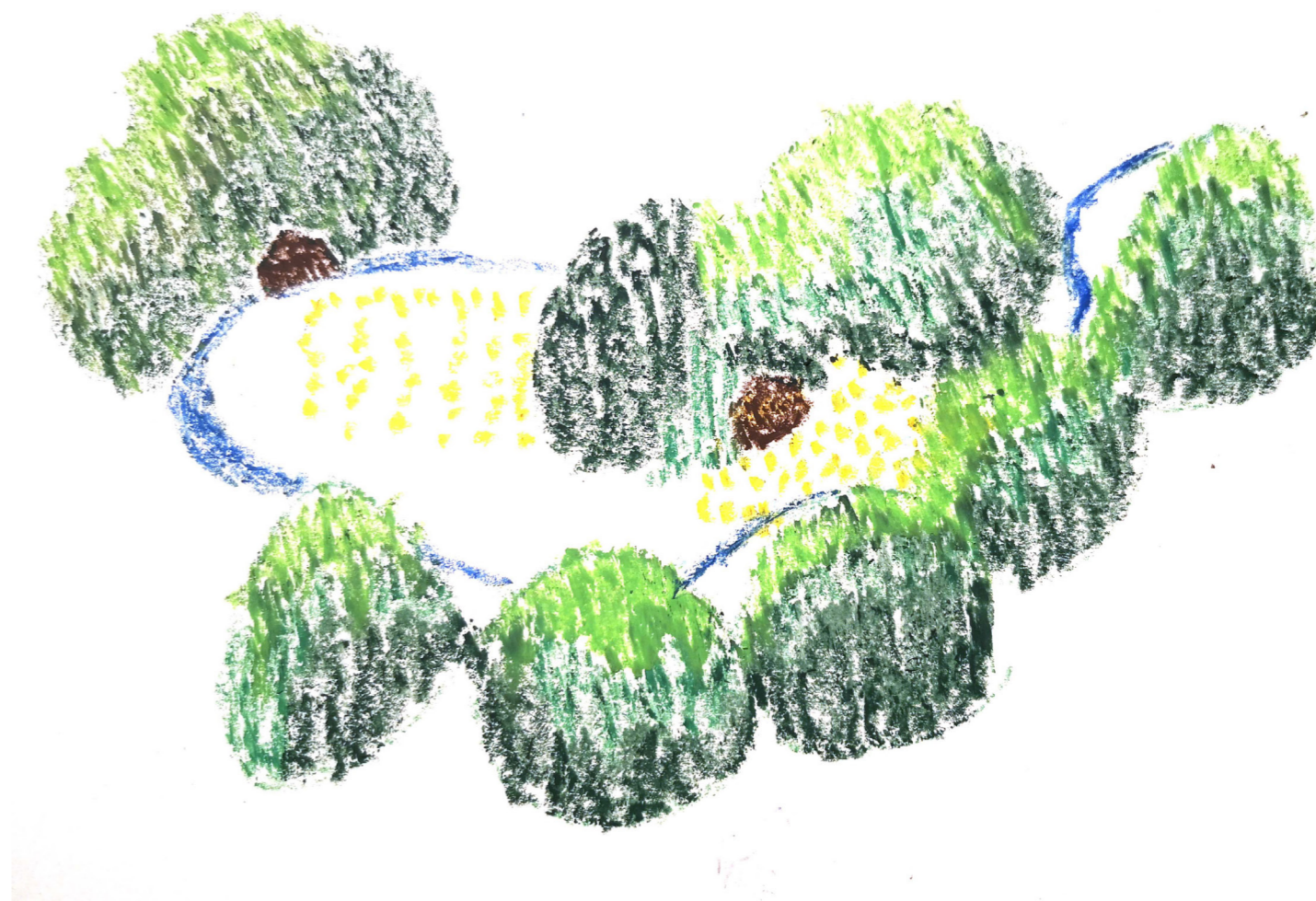
Tourism based village



When people in the village, there are fields.
When people left and the dam was built,
no human trace for the field but dam for city imprint.



Frequent natural disasters make people further from the villages



Wandering House

VILLOPIA

Memory Journey

28

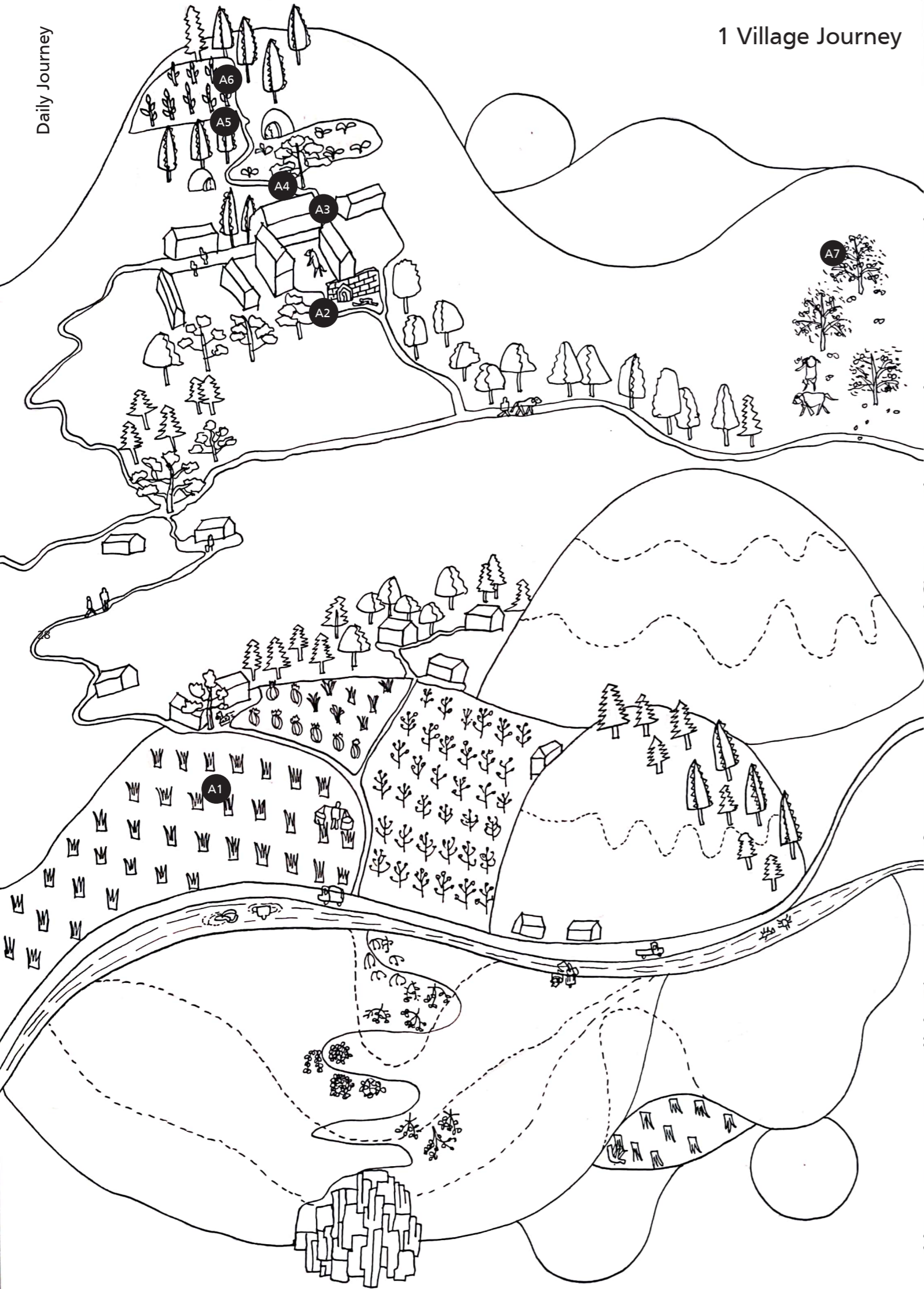
Villopia Experiment

40



Atmosphere model of cooking in the black space

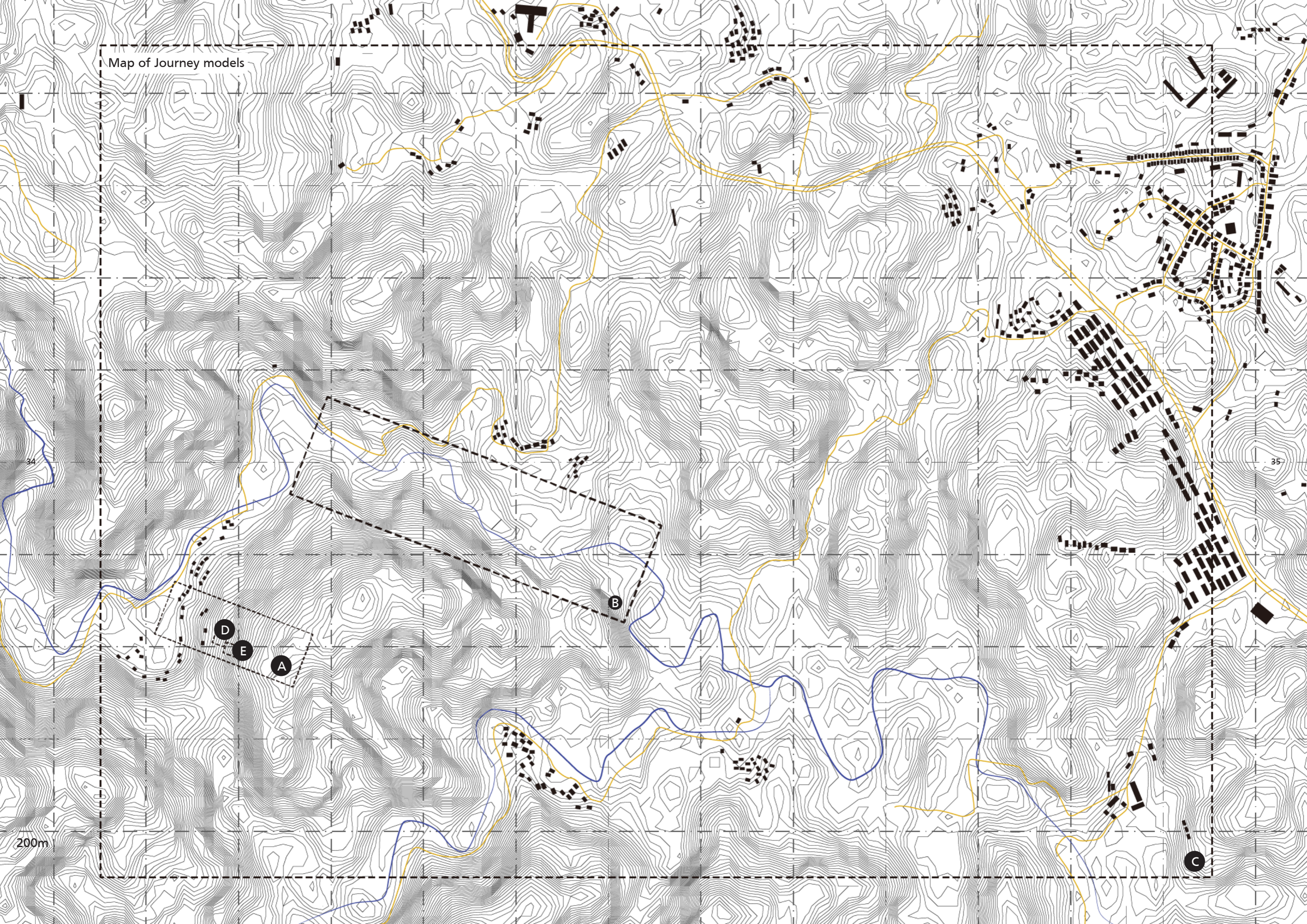
1 Village Journey







Map of Journey models



D

E

A

B

G

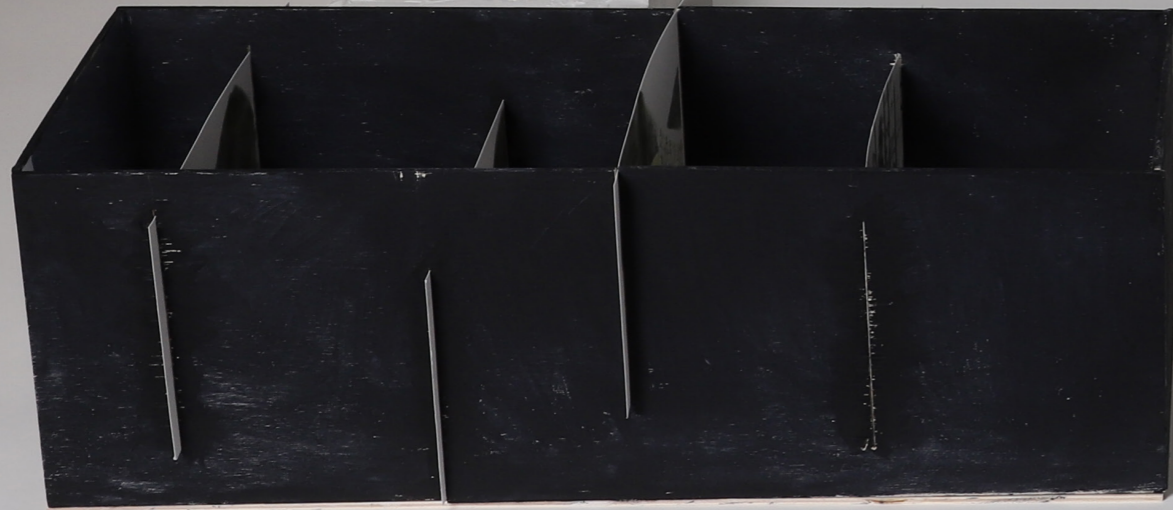
200m

34

35



A Daily Journey



B Yearly Journey



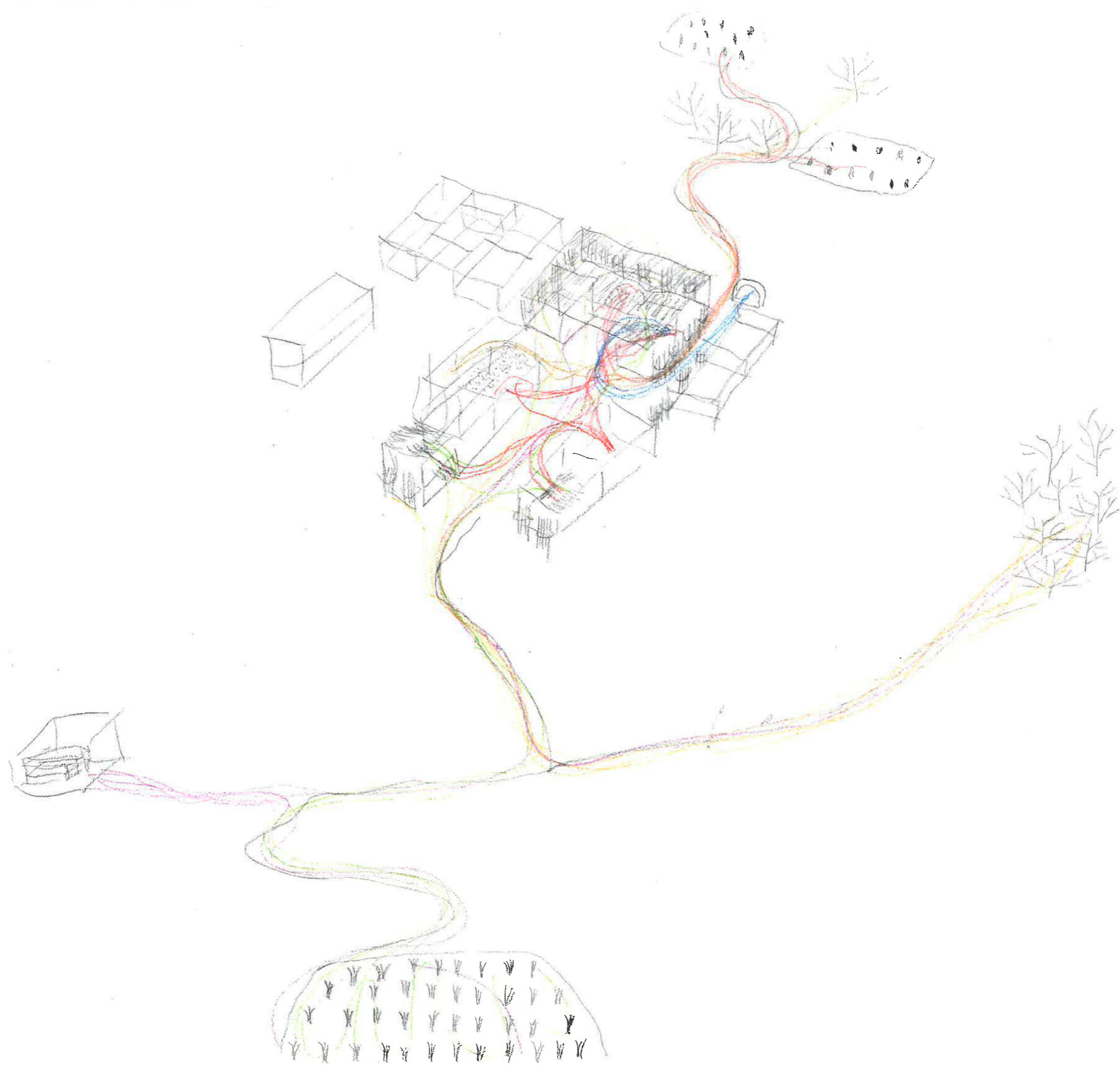
D Black Space



E Black Space 2



C Layers of Journey

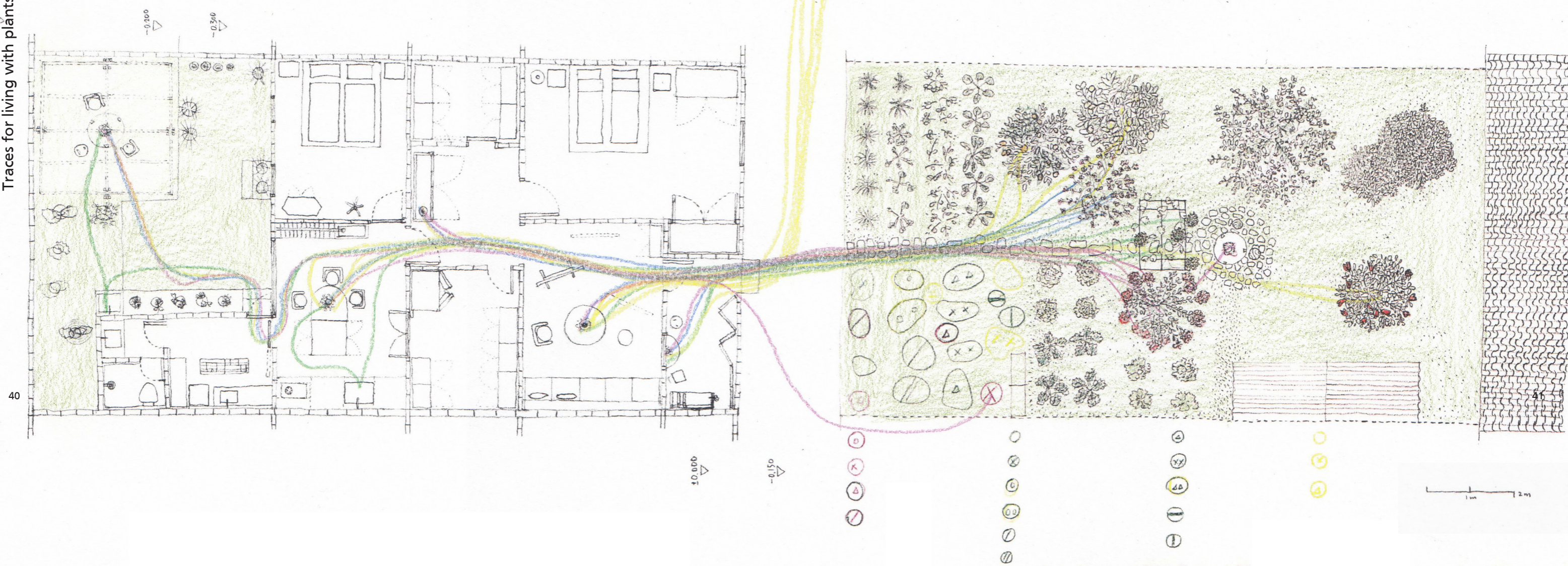


- Firewood
- Paddy rice
- Water
- Potato
- Pickled vegetables
- Tung oil plant

Villobia Experiment

- Spring
- Summer
- Autumn
- Winter

Traces for living with plants in the urban area



Heights of the furnitures and plants



Thanks for being here.

