

# Natural urbanity on the urban edge

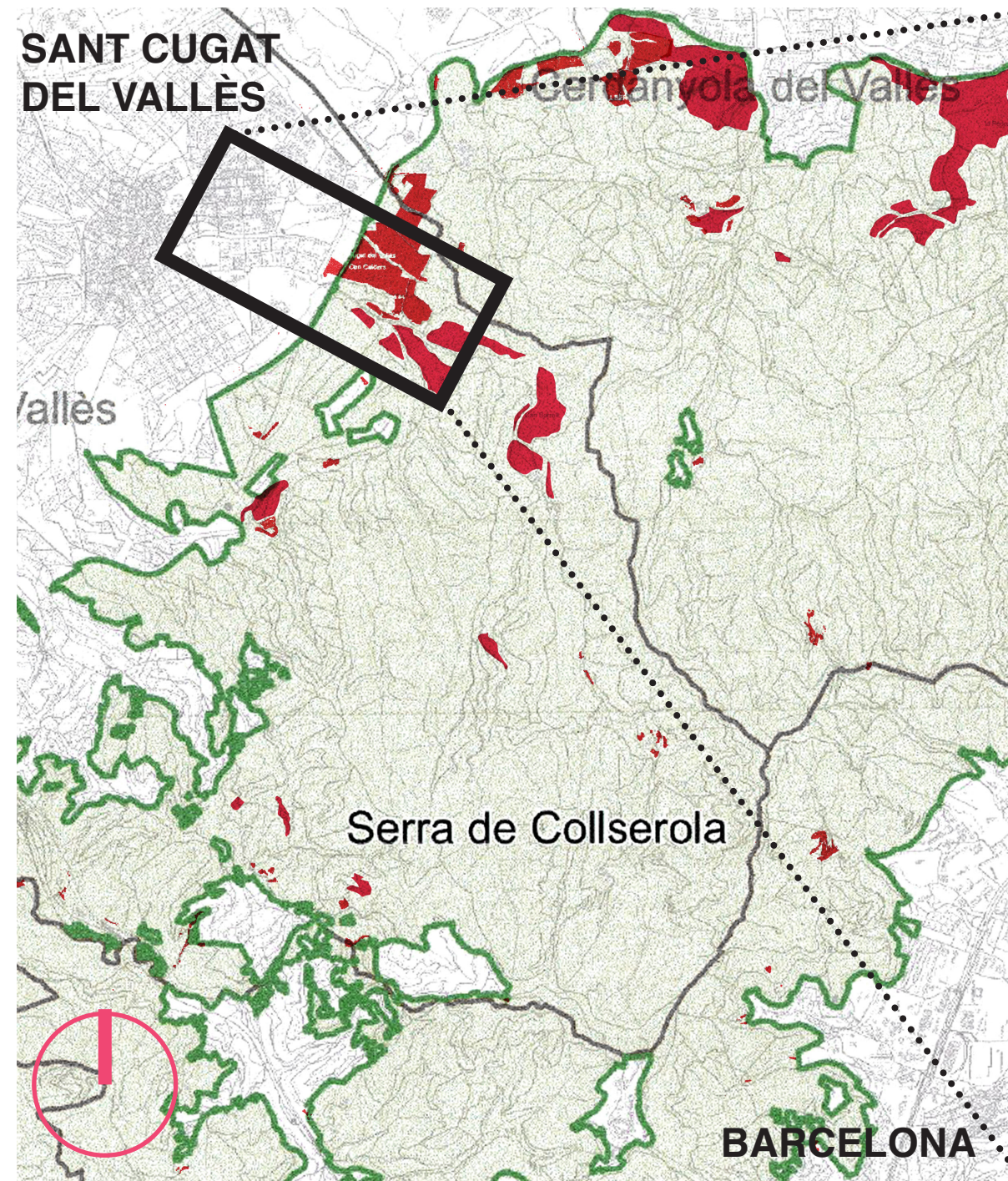
## Design Considerations for Torre-Negra, Collserola

\*Notes on the Final Degree Project developed by Alvaro Clua at the Barcelona School of Architecture (UPC-2012), under the supervision of prof. A. Linares.

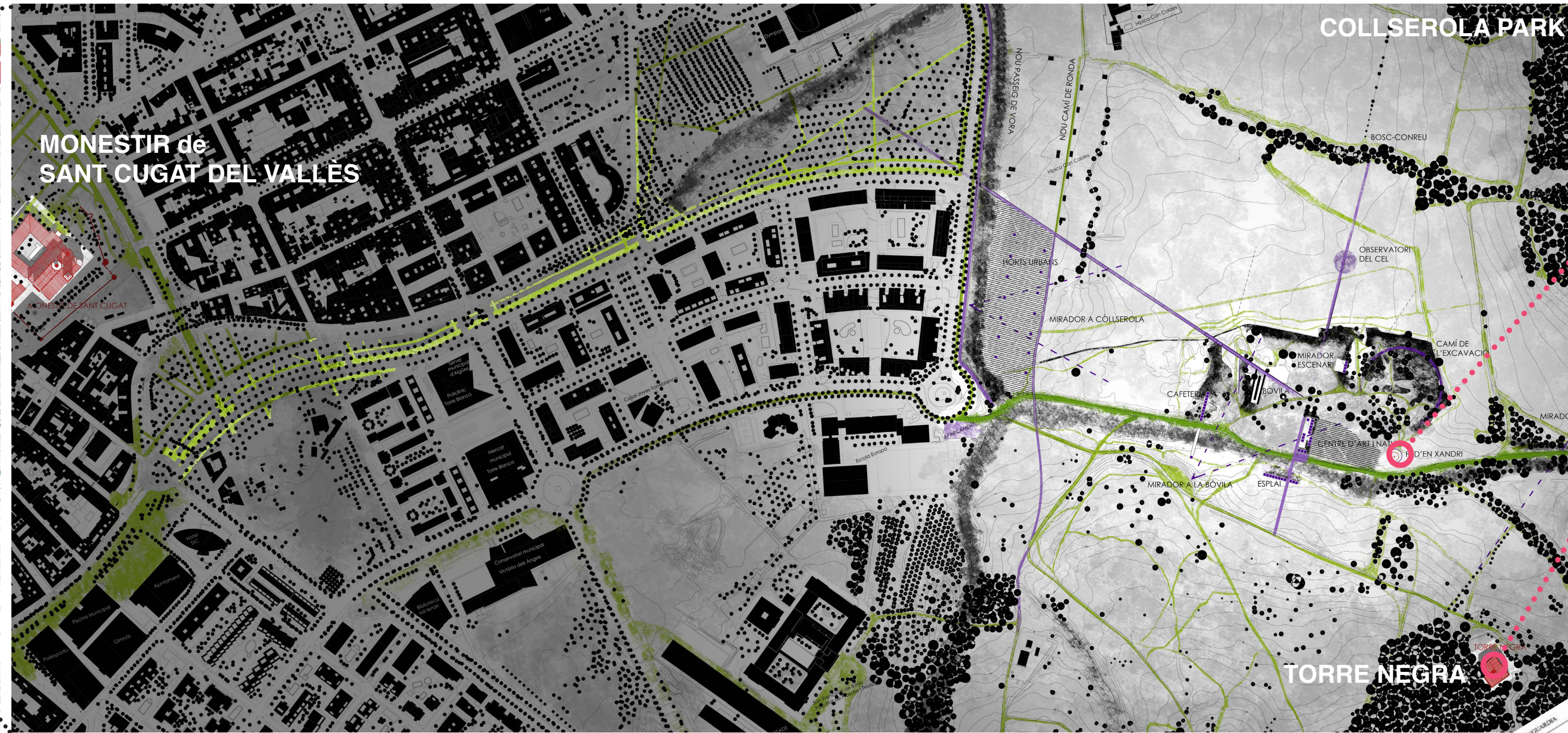


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on Urban Forestry  
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Urban Forest Boundaries  
Within, between and beyond the city



Existing farmland areas within the Collserola Park boundary  
Manipulation of document published at Avanc de Pla Especial Parc Natural de la Serra de Collserola, 2014



### 1. A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The natural environment of Torre Negra, between Sant Cugat del Vallès and the Collserola Park, has been under severe discussions for almost thirty years (Busquets, 2003). While PEPCo 1987 (Pla Especial del Pla de Collserola) defined this area as a “valuable agricultural landscape”, the more recent court decisions of Tribunal Supremo and TSJ Catalunya (Freire, 2010) has declared that this area shouldn't be considered under the *Llei de Patrimoni Natural i la Biodiversitat d'Espais Naturals* and, therefore, it should remain as an area for **real-state speculation**. Nonetheless,

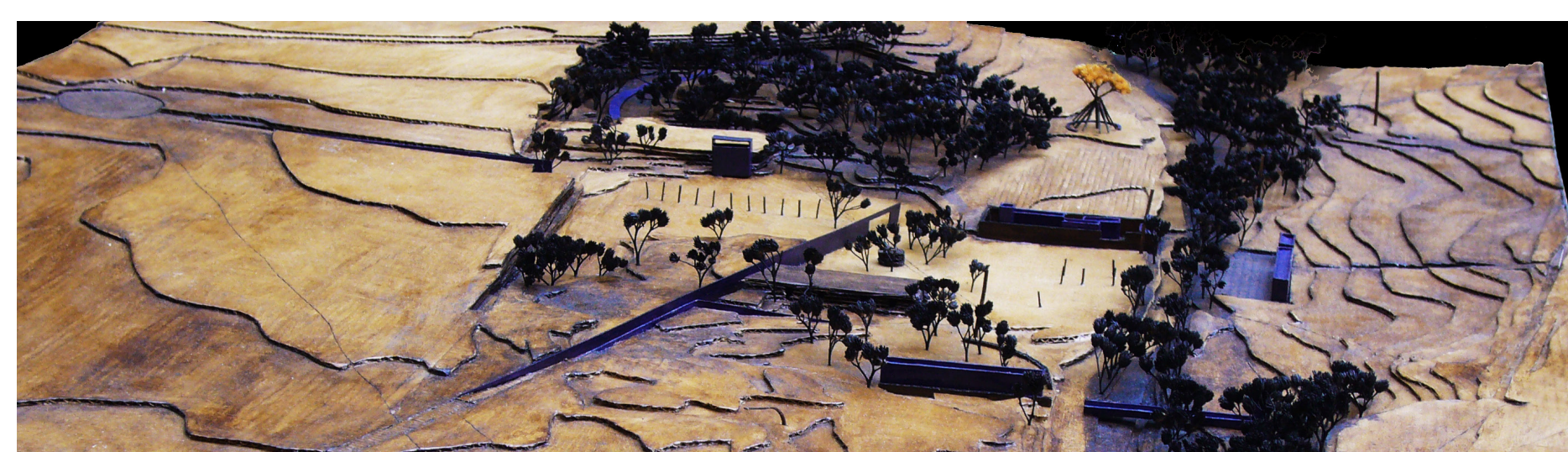
while this resolution is being discussed by the local administration, the Torre-Negra area has been becoming a widely used public park, right at the edge of Sant Cugat del Vallès, next to a number of international schools and faculties, tennis clubs and horse riding facilities. This area, at the natural confluence of Riera de Sant Crist and Sant Medir and inhabited by the ruins of a former brick factory and guarded by the old watchtower of Torre-Negra, is **one of the few farmland areas left** within the Collserola Park. The Pi d'en Xandri tree is still the symbol of this citizen as a **real-state speculation**. Nonetheless, vindication.

### 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

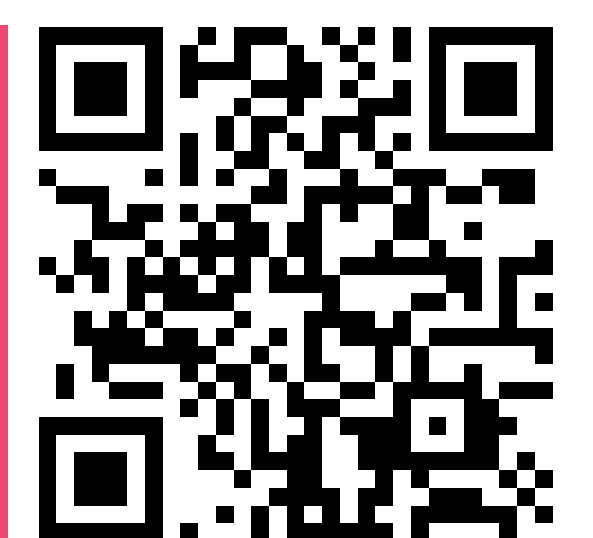
The hypothesis of this project is to consider that the real complexity in urban management and political discussions in urban edges should be enriched by a design process and assessment. Thus, the research questions would be:

**Which activities and design guidelines should be considered to achieve urbanity in those urban-nature transition spaces without a 'recognized' ecological or heritage value but with a great social use and meaning?**

**How to integrate city and nature in a more sensitive way, i.e., attentive to the real potentialities of the place and the social demands?**



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### 3. DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

#### TRANSITION vs DUALITY

Edges between cities and forests should be considered more as a **transition** than as a **duality**. While ecology has been demonstrating the wealth of ecotones in nature (Forman, 1996), it is also necessary to create **rich urbanity in the interplay between nature and city** (Kourkoutas, 2015). In this sense, developing Torre-Negra as a **'transition park'** could be a way to stop the degradation and provoke positive processes there. **Keeping nature 'in standby' is not the best way to preserve it**

#### SOCIAL HERITAGE

The 'low ecological or patrimonial value' of the Torre Negra area as declared by official reports makes more necessary to claim a **third way** to defend it from speculation: the existence of a real **"social heritage"** as an intangible but strongly present good. Our design could be an effective tool to make more evident the suggestive but fragile attributes of this place in terms of nature, activities and social meaning. **'Heritage' can be reinvented**

#### A NATURAL PROCESS

The development of the project in 3 phases: **pathways + pavements + prefab modules** exemplifies a gradual and sensitive way to talk with the logics of nature. In this sense, the mapping of new pathways is, perhaps, the most effective initial tool to give a sense of urbanity and stabilization to this territory and to incorporate it into the imaginary and collective use. **A good structure enables a good integration**

#### PLACE & MANAGEMENT

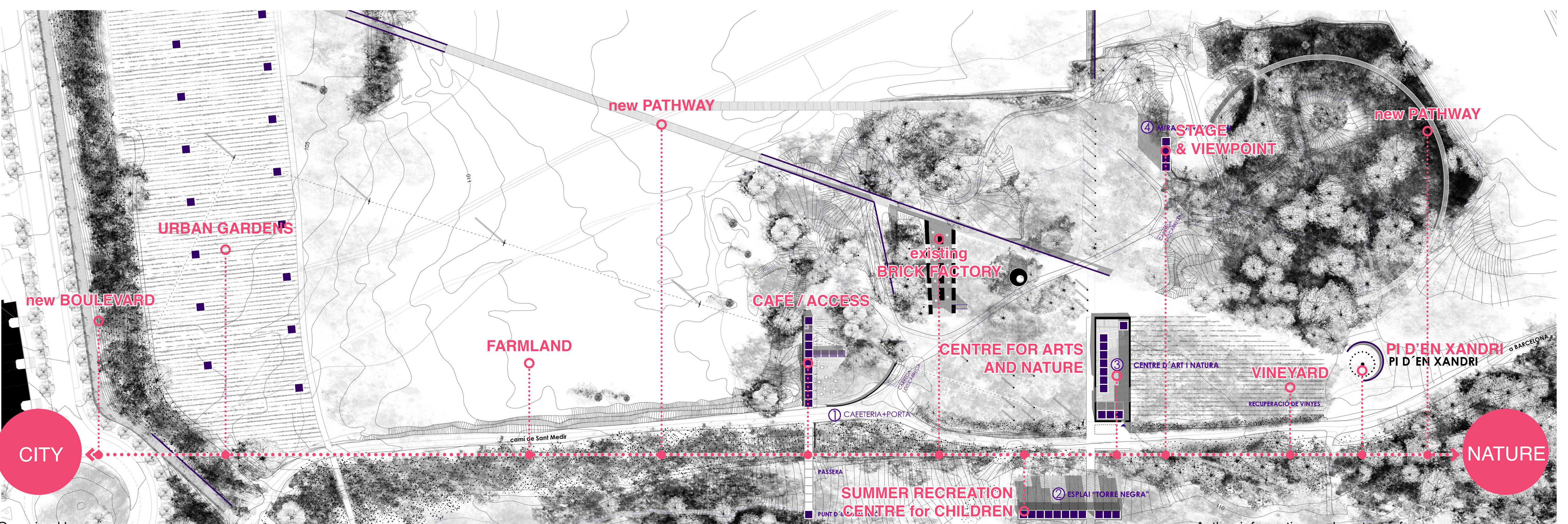
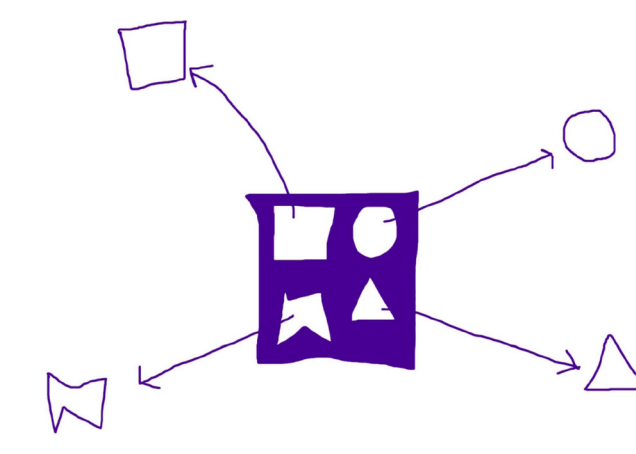
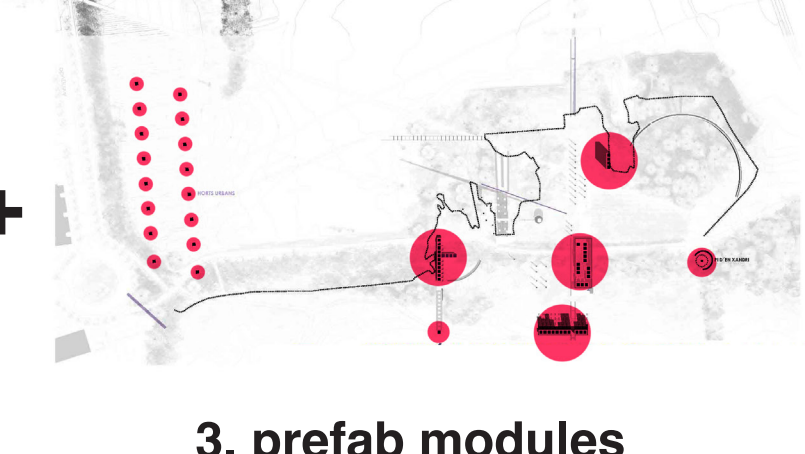
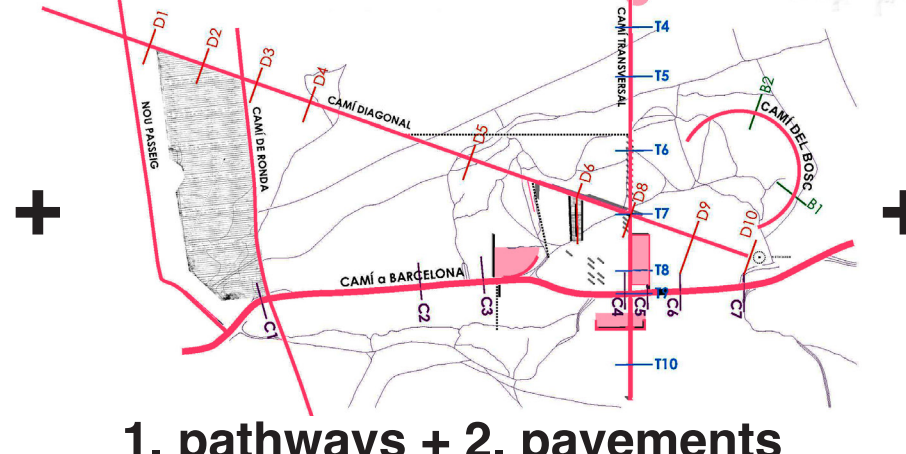
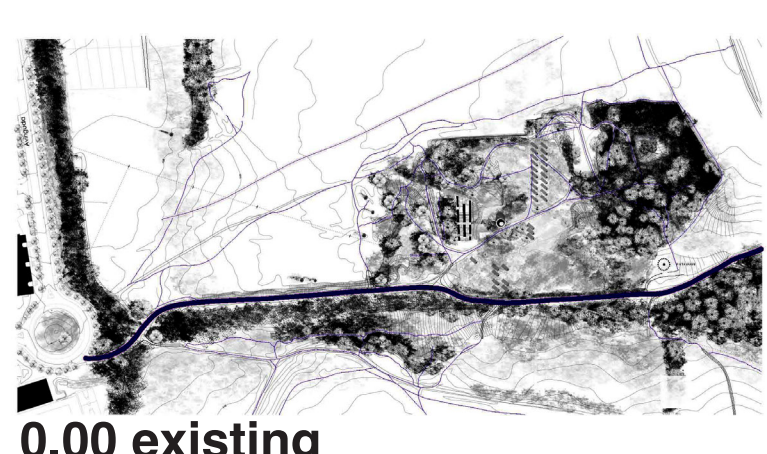
This project shows the value of **suburbanism** (Marot, 2006) as the better approach for designing urban edges. The real value of a place should be found in the successful encounter of the cultural, ecological and economical possibilities of the place with a sensitive urban management. **Urban management should be considered a tool for improving our habitats and not vice versa**

#### BUILDINGS & USES

Three important observations could be raised around buildings and uses: **1** The classical model of "nature interpretation center" as a closed building is less effective when the objective is to recreate a 'new' landscape from 'lower value' elements. Thus, the **dispersion** of museographic programs in the place could help to reactivate the natural and human resources. **A landscape museum made of landscape**

**2** The peripheral condition of those edge areas is the opportunity to set **occasional but essential uses in urban life**: a café at the park's main access, areas for concerts, races and cultural events, summer recreation centres, centre for arts and nature... Those buildings could work as pieces of *land art* on closing times. **City edges as opportunities for urban-natural activities**

**3** Three scales have been taken in the prefab module: the scale of **landscapes**, the scale of **public buildings** and the **scale of children** (in some of the buildings). **Design of transitions as a matter of 'matching scales'**



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