

SARPSBORG: THE FUTURE'S CITY

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Sarpsborg is an important node in the physical and economic environment, even if it's small by global standards. It sits along Norway's largest river - the Glomma - in a rich watershed. Because of this, Sarpsborg has long been a player in the international market with industries in wood and hydropower. The city is also strategically located on the most direct route to Europe, connecting it to the EU's rail network and market.

There is a massive plan in action to upgrade to high-speed rail around Oslo and connect to Sweden. With the new rail, Sarpsborg will only be a 50 minute ride from Oslo. This makes it an attractive orbital and thus expects to grow from 60,000 residents today to 80,000 by 2050. This massive expansion will ideally be managed by densifying the city center, adding upwards of 10,000 residents to a space that has only 4,400 today. Urbanization begets gentrification, which is already a very real threat for the center.

So, the big question is how will this rail project and subsequent urban development manifest inside of Sarpsborg? While it is not yet decided, almost every new rail option will follow a similar path to what exists. But there is one outlier, a discard option that fundamentally changes the space of central Sarpsborg and makes use of a wasteland that currently fragments the city. The line bisects an old industrial landfill that has been deemed too expensive and complicated to deal with. Still, it COULD be possible, and how would this look for Sarpsborg and it's center?

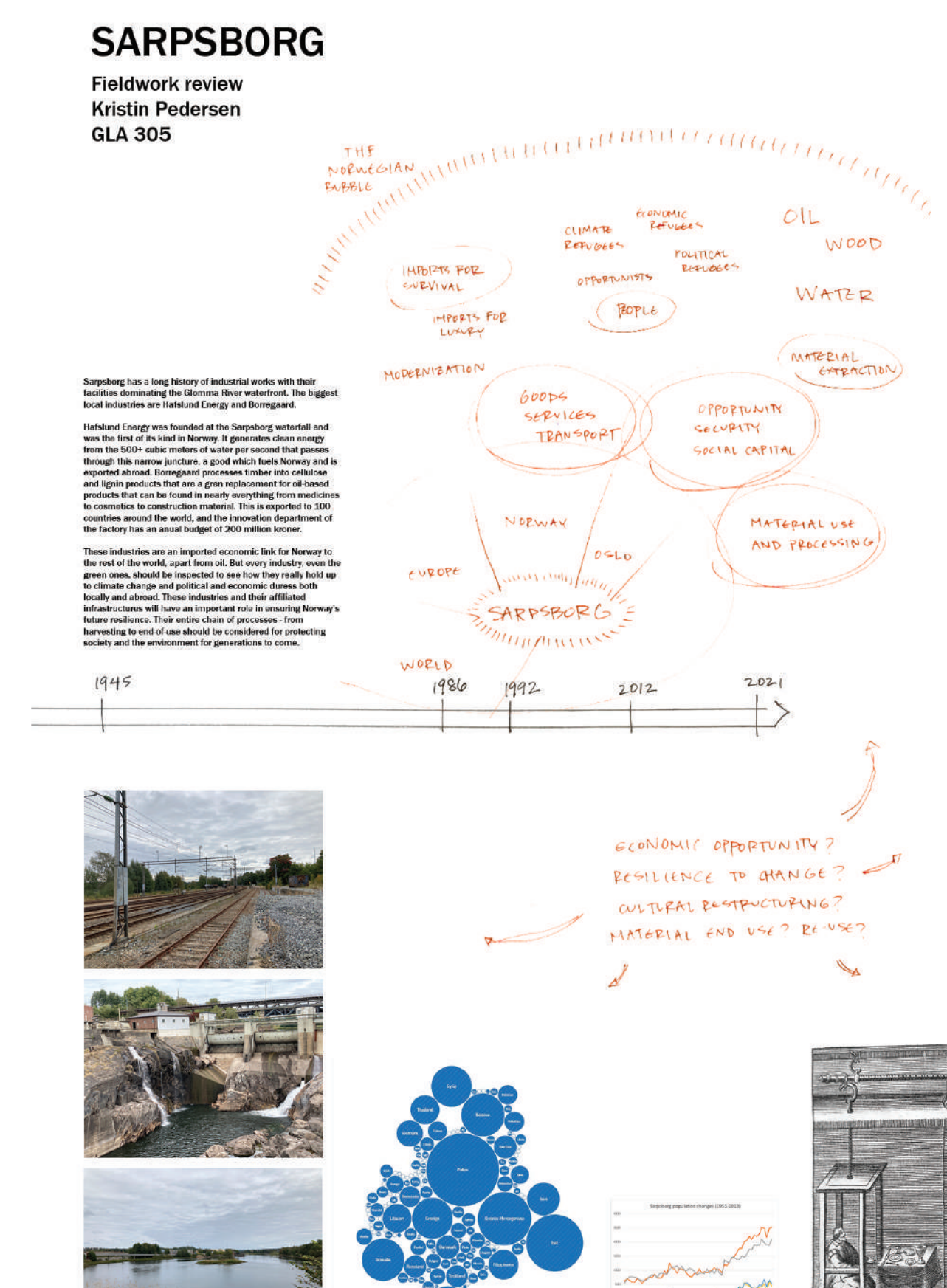
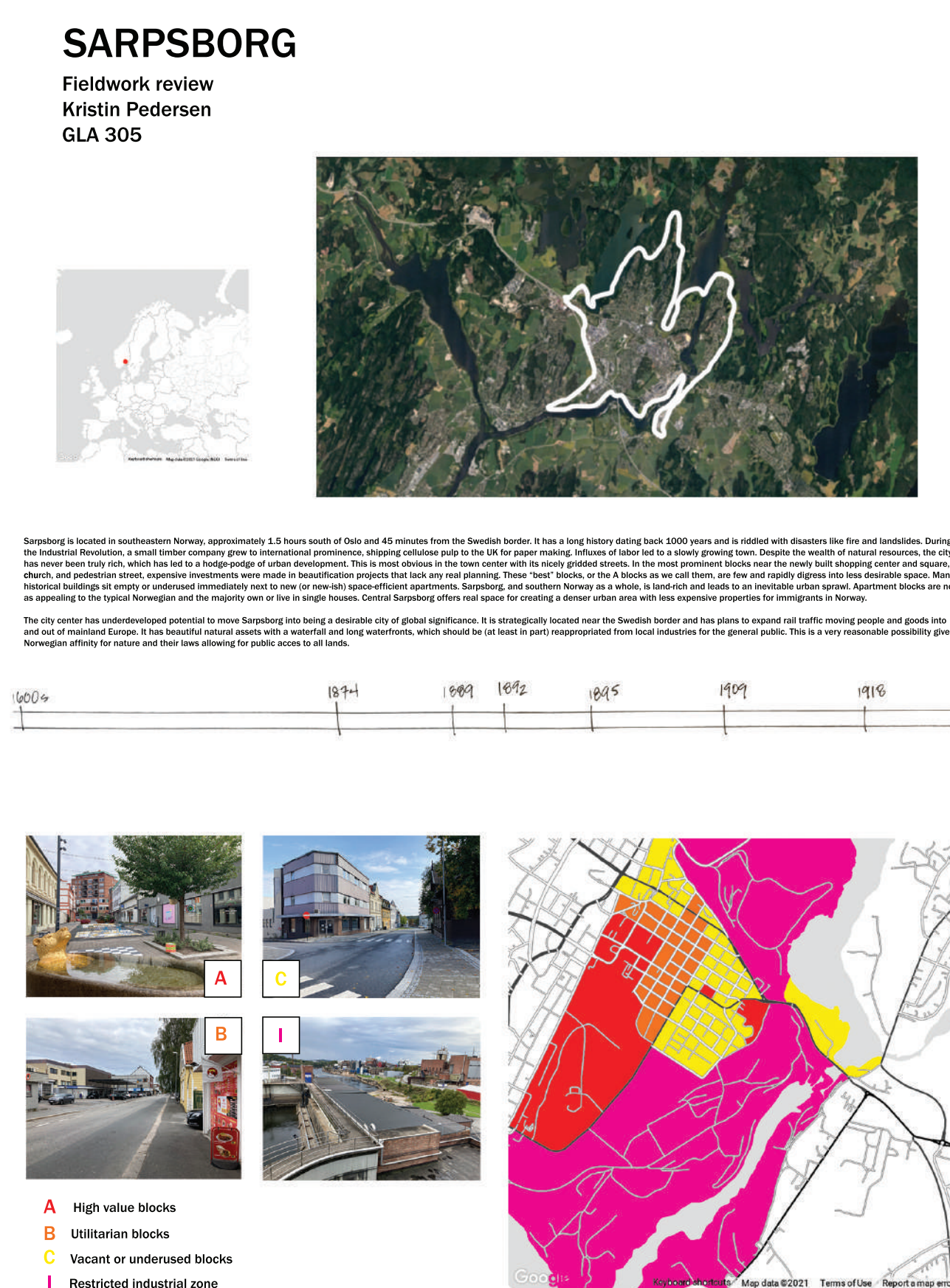
Fieldwork Photography



An introduction to Sarpsborg

An early analysis established an idea of what Sarpsborg is. Sarpsborg's center is a truly fascinating mix of industrial history, modern face lifts, and immigration. The center has undergone a dramatic change in the past century. It began as a grid of small homes and gardens, which gave way to densification from the 1970s, when Norway found oil. The growth and prestige of its business district exploded. Still, the city has an unfairly negative reputation that precedes it, and the lack of pride in this beautiful working man's (or woman's) city is palpable.

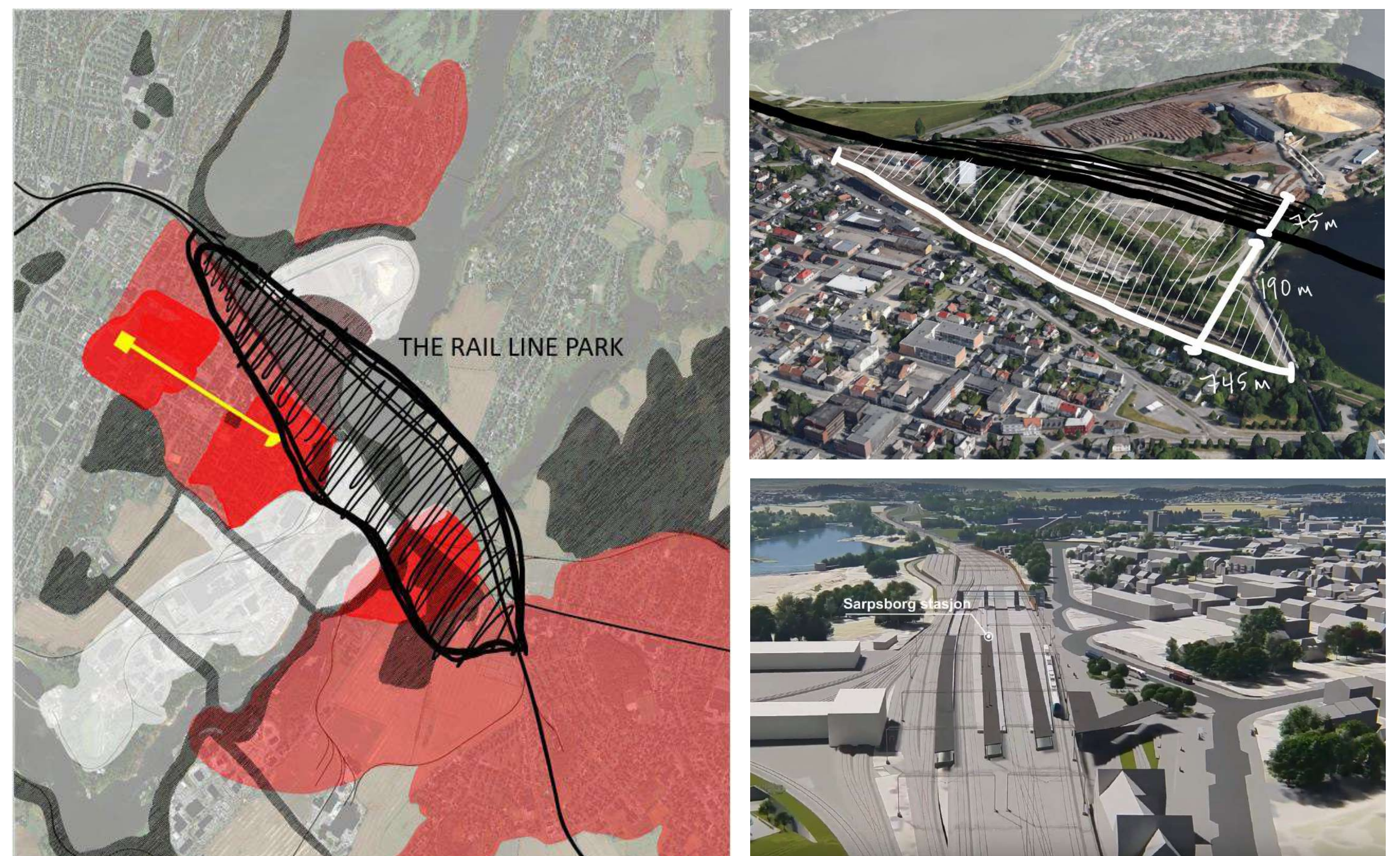
Important corridors and sites have been the center for investments in the public arena, namely the town square and pedestrian street. But the further one ventures from these spaces, the (generalizably) less maintained and more vacant the buildings. This is where the real charm of the center lies - in the everyday landscape of local shops, international restaurants, and historic buildings.



Urban wasteland

While remediation of an old landfill is certainly complicated, expensive, and potentially dangerous, I'm surprised that the space at the heart of my research design is still unused. It is literally just as close to the train station as the town square and in any other condition would be valuable real estate, yet it isolates several neighborhoods from any feeling of connectivity to the center.

In this train line project, this space can be an important buffer zone between the noisy, brutal infrastructure that will come and the city center where people work and live.



The spectacle of the falls

It is also interesting that Sarpsborg has such a strong history and identity affiliated with its waterfall, but the visibility of it is almost non-existent in reality. Pedestrian access is restricted by the train, numerous defined road crossings, industry, unmarked road crossings, underpasses, and lastly, stairs. It is a tourist attraction, at least according to Sarpsborg's tourism websites, but it is very difficult to view. It should be a celebrated feature of the city, because its power during flood season is spectacular, but improving the access to it is critical to make the waterfall more visible.



Final Review Posters

I propose a new masterplan for Sarpsborg, lobbying for the discarded train line option because it creates a cohesive space for the city center's expansion. If used as green infrastructure, it shapes a healthier environment for locals, easier pedestrian movement, and a connection between isolated neighborhoods that can be integrated into the urban core. New, dense housing can be built within walking distance of the train station without requiring a heavy transformation of historical buildings, nor the displacement of today's urban population nor its industries.

In the space between the old and new rail lines, I propose a new park linking culturally significant nodes. This corridor is the main detail providing connectivity to the center. But also, the structure of the grid itself should be reconsidered. Today's narrow sidewalk strips will be woefully inadequate with a growing population, and Sarpsborg can look for inspiration from other cities in the concept of shared space to make the most out of its finite streetscapes. This, along with added green elements to the pedestrian-only street, shaping it into more of a park, will contribute to making the entirety of the city center more liveable. And by pushing the densification pressure to spaces just outside of the grid, it will help to preserve the people and historic charm of Sarpsborg center.

