



CABLE CAR STATION LISI LAKE TBILISI GEORGIA



Fig. 6: Upper Station, 1978



Fig. 7: Cable Car, Mtatsminda 1970s

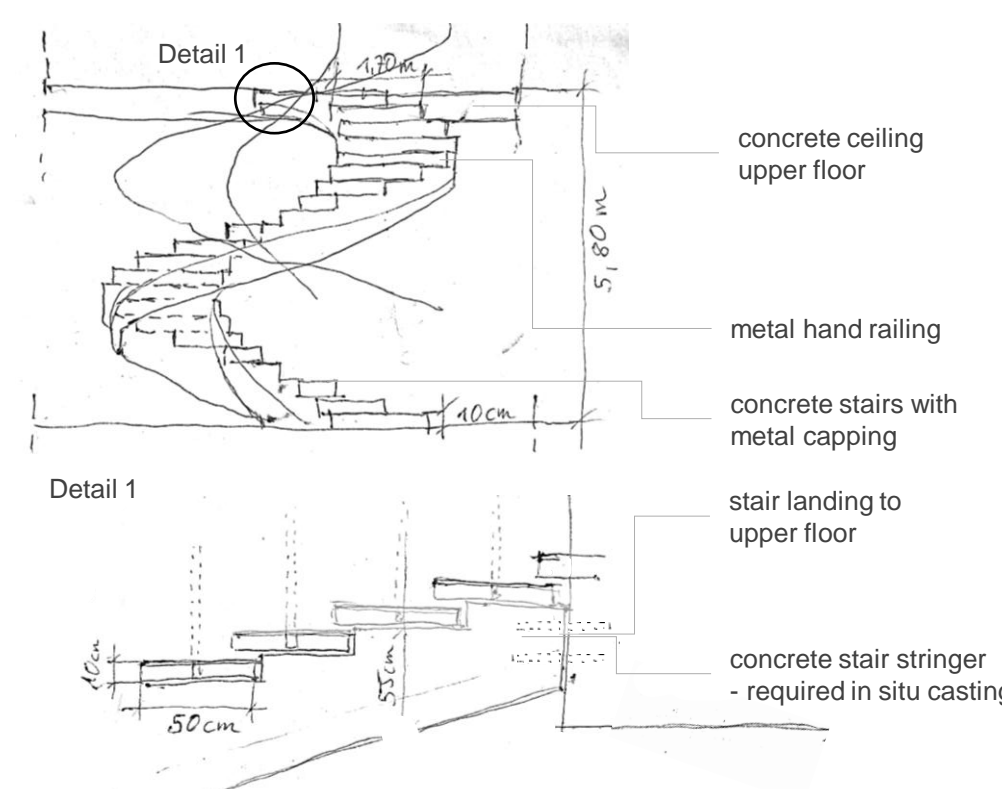


Fig. 8: Drawing of stair detail

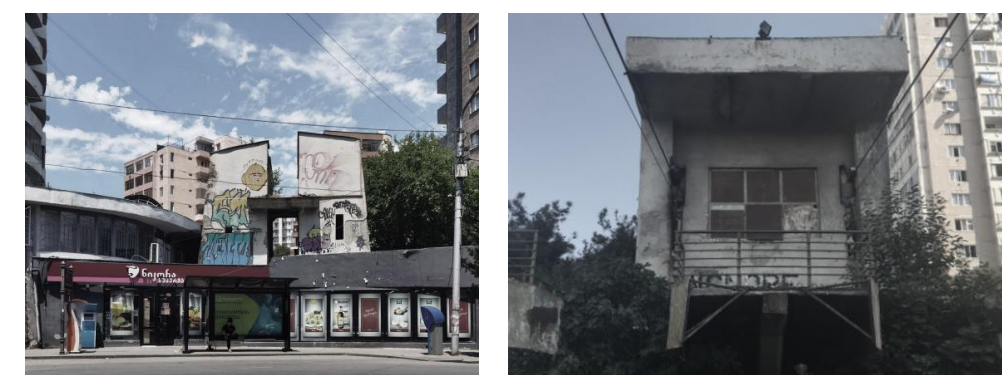


Fig. 9: Informal re-use of lower station



Fig. 10: IDP inhabited upper station in Vazisubani.

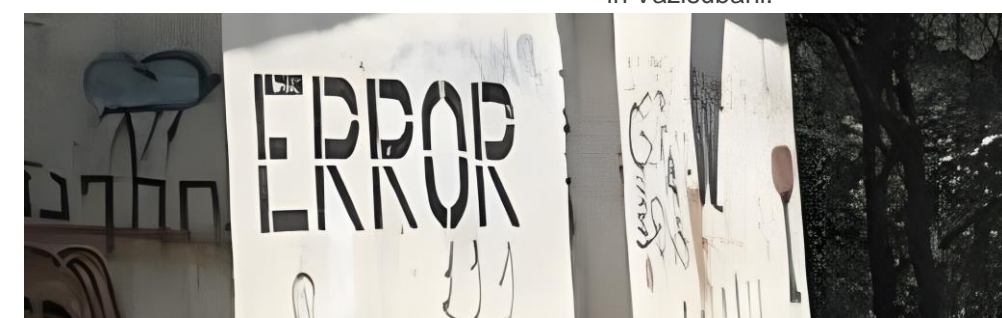


Fig. 11: Graffiti interventions of the Upper Station



Fig. 12: Side View of the Upper Station

BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE STATION

The **Nutsubidze Street–Lisi Lake** line opened in **1978** to provide access to Lisi Lake's recreational areas. Hidden within a dense pine forest, its monolithic concrete structure remains largely out of sight. After the **Soviet Union's collapse**, inconsistent governance and frequent power outages accelerated its decline. Today, the construction of residential buildings along the route between the lower and upper stations has rendered the cable car infrastructure **completely nonfunctional**.

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The Upper Station, blending **Constructivist and Brutalist influences**, is characterized by reinforced concrete, geometric simplicity, and a cantilevered, boxy form, emphasizing function, horizontality, and mass. Reflecting Soviet **ideals of technological progress** and collective mobility, it now stands neglected. A prominent **exterior spiral staircase** connects the levels, creating a sense of movement and vertical dynamism, a **recurring architectural motif in Tbilisi's vernacular landscape**.

CONCEPT: REUSE AND NETWORKS

As abandoned infrastructure, cable car stations across diverse neighborhoods are **connected by function and typology**, offering a unique opportunity for **rotating exhibitions**. Reusing the Cable Car Station could initiate links between these underdetermined structures. Consisting of two large, high-ceilinged rooms, the building is ideal for displaying large-format artworks. Minimal modifications would preserve its functional character, adding a transparent enclosure to the lower rooms and creating a **café and a Co-working space** on the upper terrace, revitalizing the site while respecting its architectural identity.



Fig. 1: The re-appropriated lower station at Nutsubidze Street



Fig. 2: Upper station at Lisi Lake



Fig. 3: Traditional Staircases, Old Tbilisi



Fig. 4: Matsminda Cable Car Station

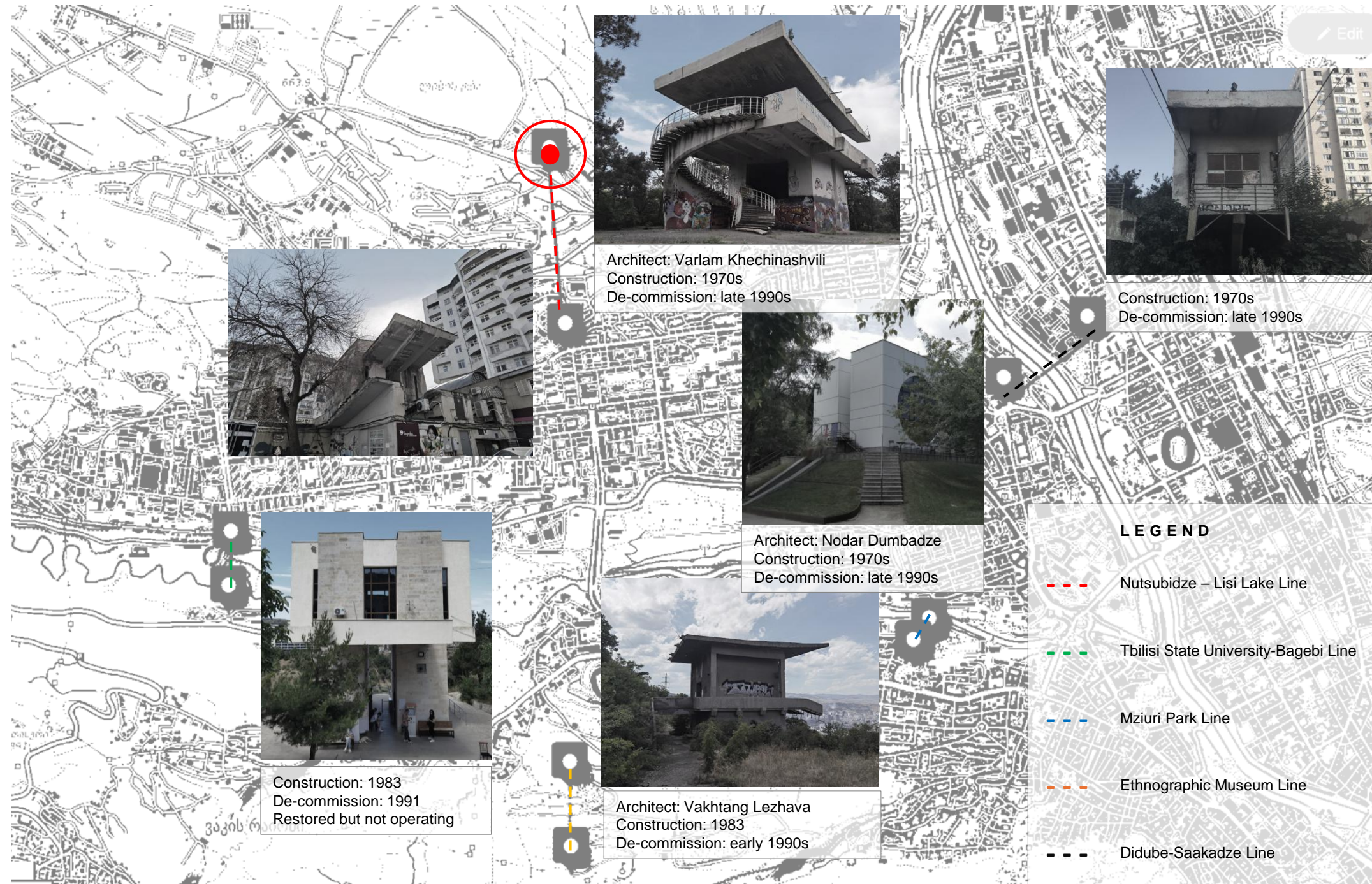
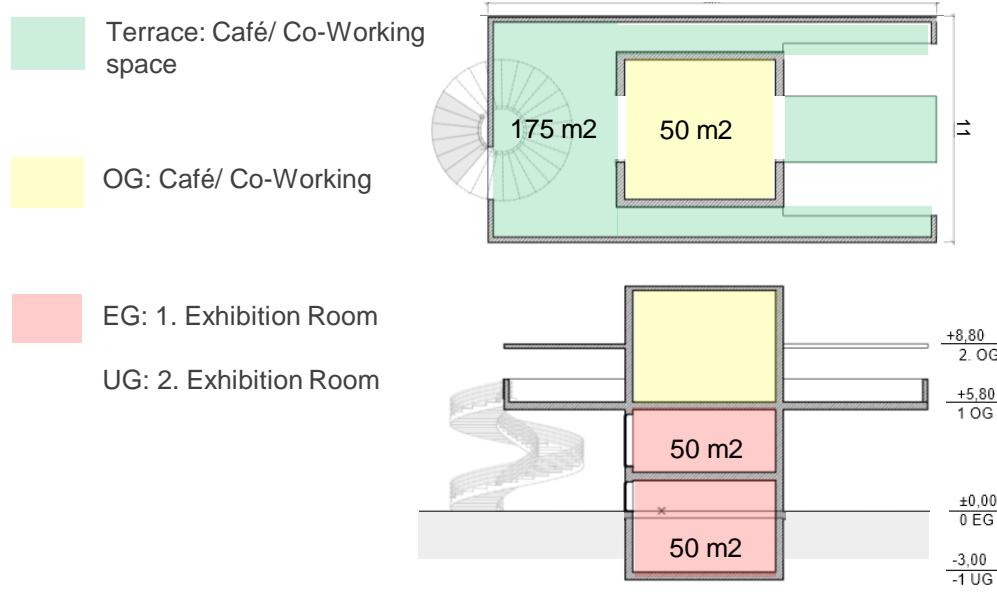


Fig. 5: Map of decommissioned stations

HISTORICAL LAYERS & SIGNIFICANCE

Tbilisi's cable car system reflects the city's political and economic transformations. Built by the Soviet government between **1953 and 1988**, it offered mass public transport and access to recreational areas, embodying **ideals of societal equality**. After Georgia's **independence in the 1990s**, the network was largely decommissioned due to economic crises and unreliable electricity. Since **2012**, partial reactivations driven by **tourism-focused goals** have sparked renewed interest, yet the **Lisi Lake line remains unused**, its potential waiting to be rediscovered.

The Lisi lake cable car station exemplifies **adaptive reuse and socio-political change**. Originally part of a 1980s transit-recreation line, the station itself reflects layers of history: Soviet engineering, post-collapse abandonment, and re- appropriation as a meeting point and canvas.

CONSTRUCTIVE SIGNIFICANCE

The staircase's cantilevered design and **spiral geometry** reflect the Constructivist ethos of defying traditional forms, creating a sense of movement and structural daring. The cantilevered stairs, projecting approximately **70 cm** from their support, balancing load through the robust concrete stringer. The junction where the stairs meet the main structure showcases seamless integration, achieved through meticulous **on-site casting**. This staircase not only serves as a functional element but also as a **sculptural focal point**, embodying the constructivist vision of architecture as **both art and utility**.

ADAPTATION AND INFORMAL USE

Following the **USSR's collapse in 1991**, most cable car lines were **abandoned**. However, their infrastructure such as station buildings, support masts, and platforms remained, undergoing **informal adaptations**. Former stations, such as the Nutsubidze Street-Lisi Lake line's **lower terminal**, were repurposed into **shops, salons, and exchange offices**, blending into the urban fabric. The upper Vazisubani station became **makeshift housing** for internally displaced persons (IDPs), who modified the structure by boarding windows and planting fig trees on the platform. Meanwhile, artists like **Sadarismelia** have left **graffiti interventions**, such as the word "ERROR", **critiquing neglect of both Soviet heritage and displaced communities**.

APPROPRIATION AND IDENTITY

These structures hold **untapped potential for community identity** and urban memory. Their adaptive reuse, whether as housing, art spaces, or revived transit hubs, could foster local engagement. Artistic interventions (like graffiti) demonstrate how abandoned infrastructure become a **canvas for social commentary**. Meanwhile, official proposals to reactivate lines (e.g., **Samgori-Vazisubani**) suggest a renewed interest in cable cars as sustainable transit, blending historical infrastructure with modern needs.



References

Harris-Brandts, Suzanne, and David Gogishvili. 2018. "Up in the Air: Traces of Aerial Connectivity in Tbilisi." Harris-Brandts, Suzanne, and David Gogishvili. "Cable Car Networks and Aerial Mobility in Tbilisi." Harris-Brandts, Suzanne, and David Gogishvili. 2024. "Lofty Ideals in Aerial Connectivity: Ideology in the Urban Cable Car Network of Tbilisi, Georgia." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*

Figures

Fig. 4: Levan Tsertsvadze, "Relinquished Series – Twirls & Soviet Swirls." Photograph, via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0).
Fig. 5: Map of decommissioned stations. Base map © OpenStreetMap contributors.
Fig. 6: Edisherashvili, Sergey. 1978. Cable Car: Nutsubidze – Lisi Lake, Tbilisi, Georgia. Photograph, National Archive of Georgia
Fig. 7: Fig. 7: Dezidor, Tbilisi Ropeway to Mtatsminda Park. Photograph, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 3.0.
Fig. 10, 11: Harris-Brandts, Suzanne. 2016. Upper station in Vazisubani and Lisi Lake, Tbilisi. Photograph, author's archive.

All other photographs and drawings by the author.