

Portfolio
Palace

Zhengxin Fang

Stockholm City Library:



A New Layer of Time

Situation



Odengatan 53, 113 50 Stockholm, Sweden



Past



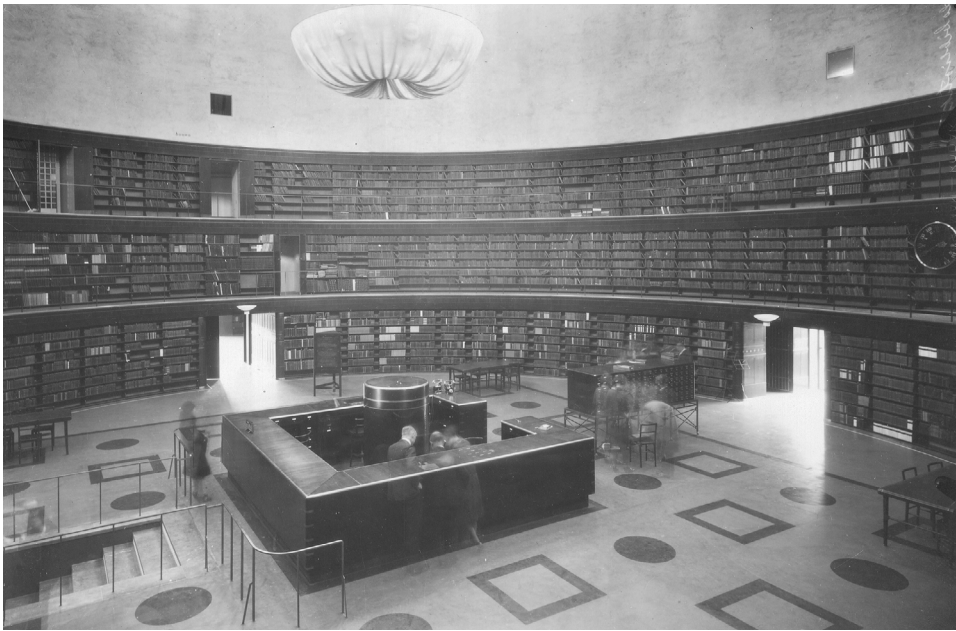
Past | Library by the hill



Past | Library by the hill



Past | A monumental entrance



Past | A monumental entrance

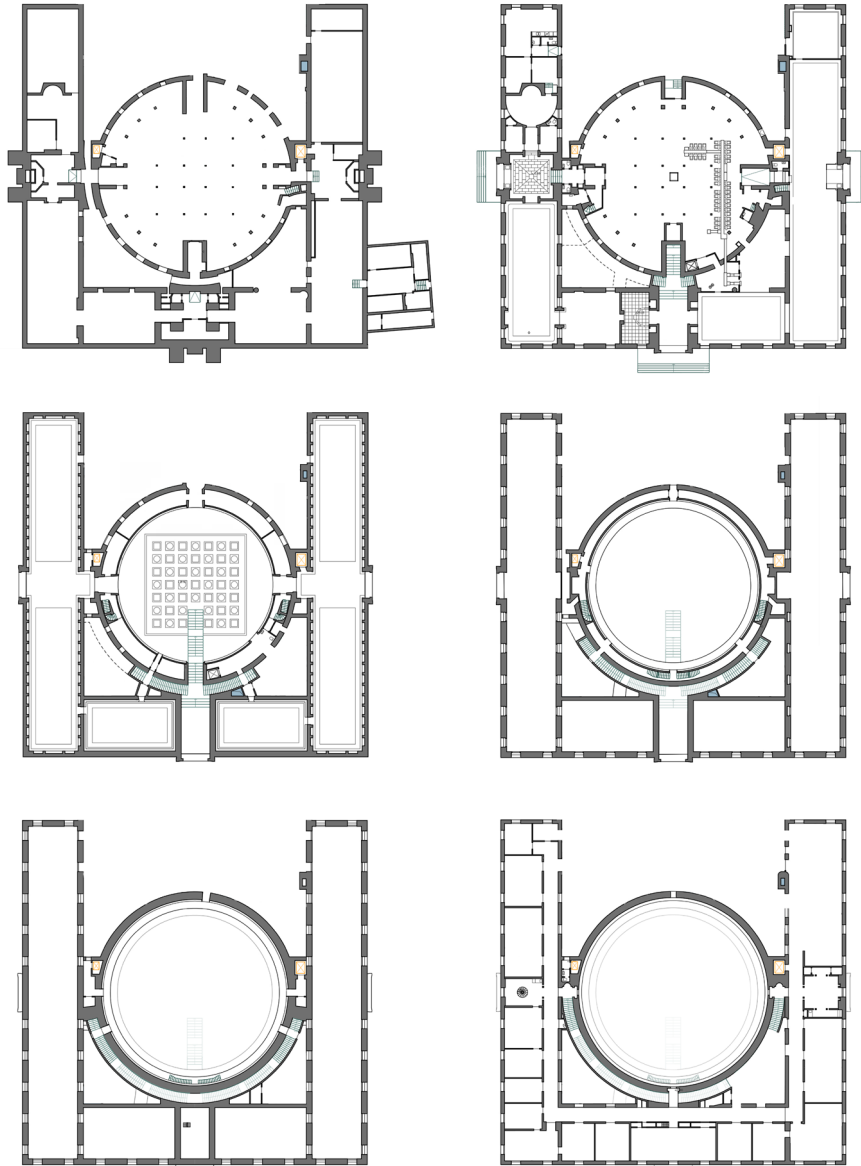


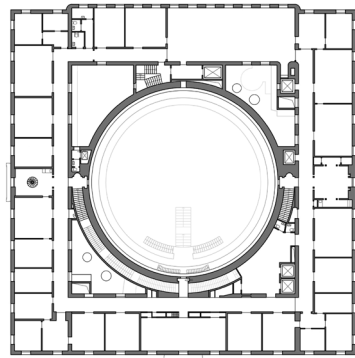
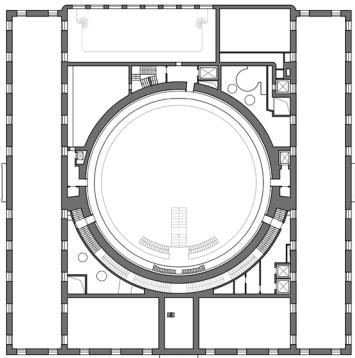
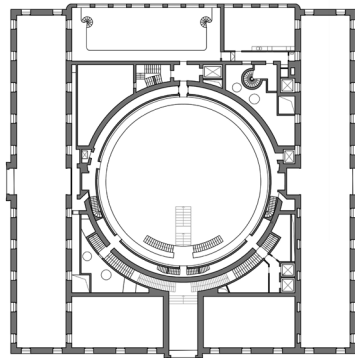
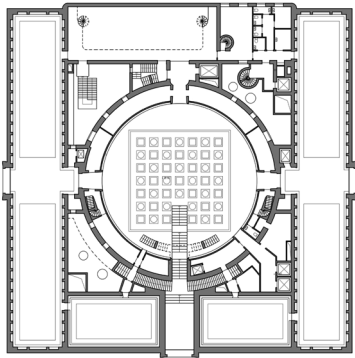
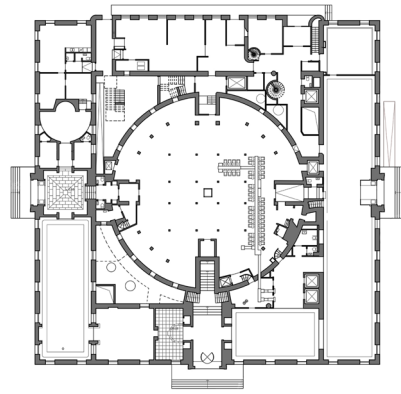
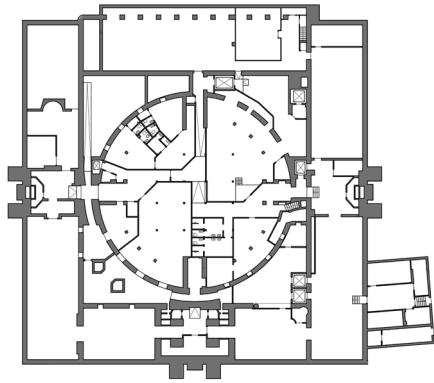
Past | The fourth wing



Past | The fourth wing

Changes Over Time





Present

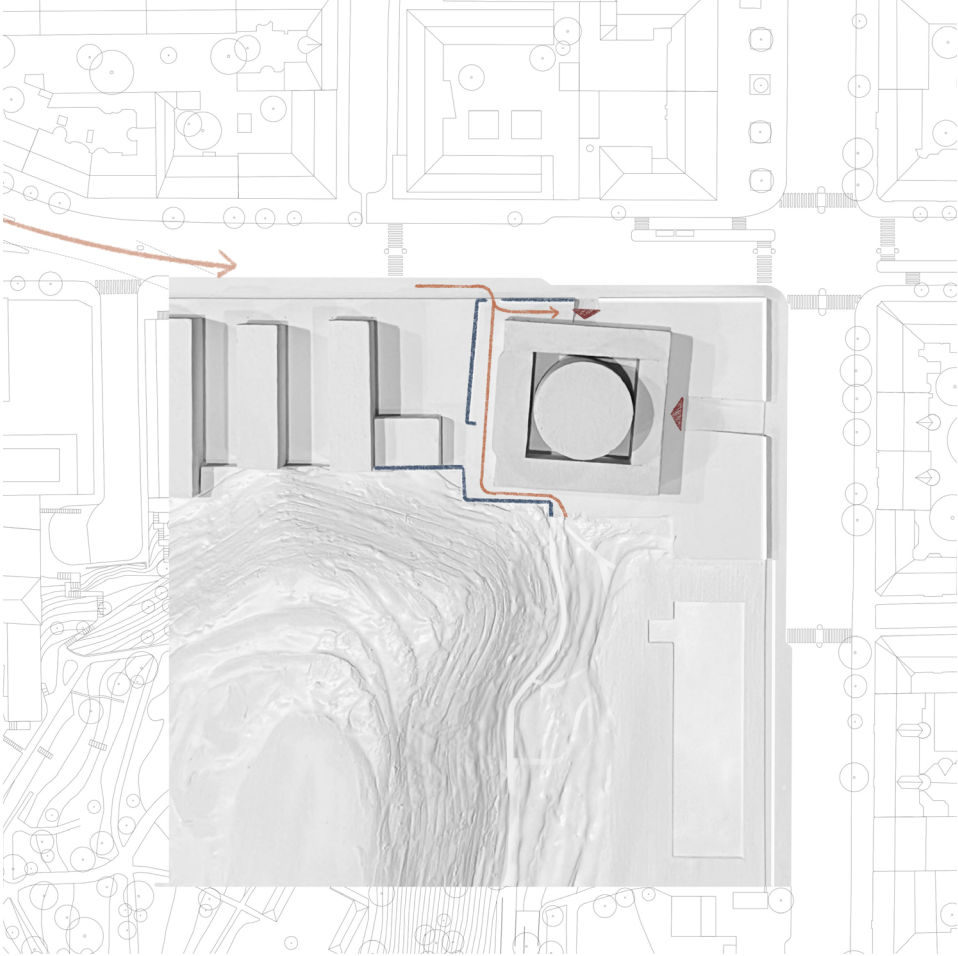


Present | Ambiguity



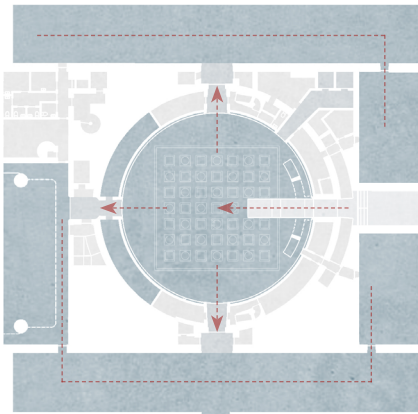
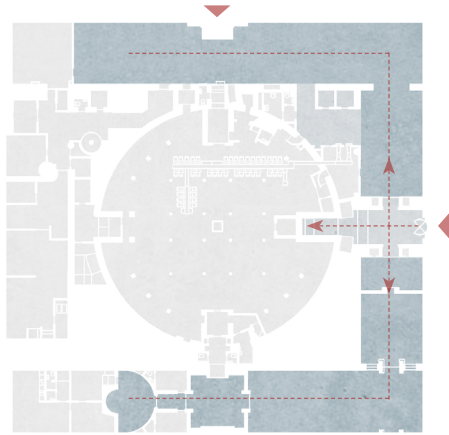
Present | Institutional entrances

Present - Issues



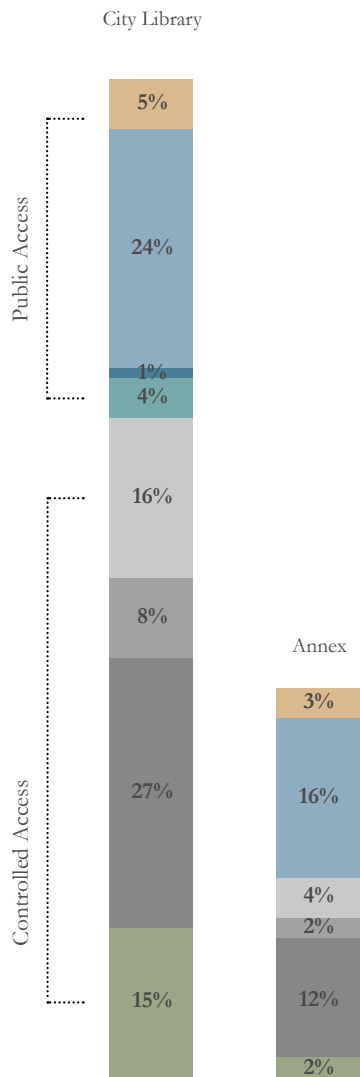


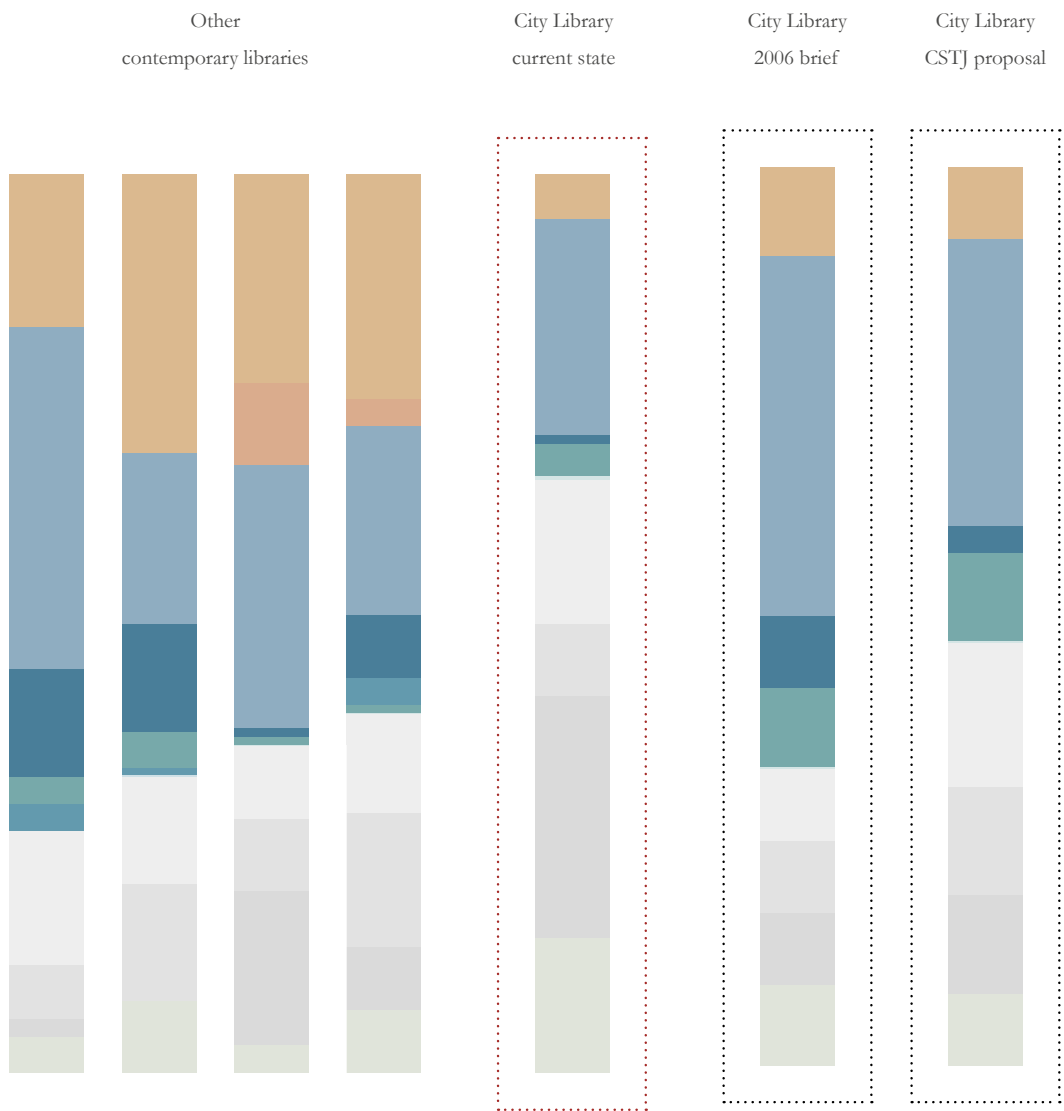
Situation | The "back" on the west side



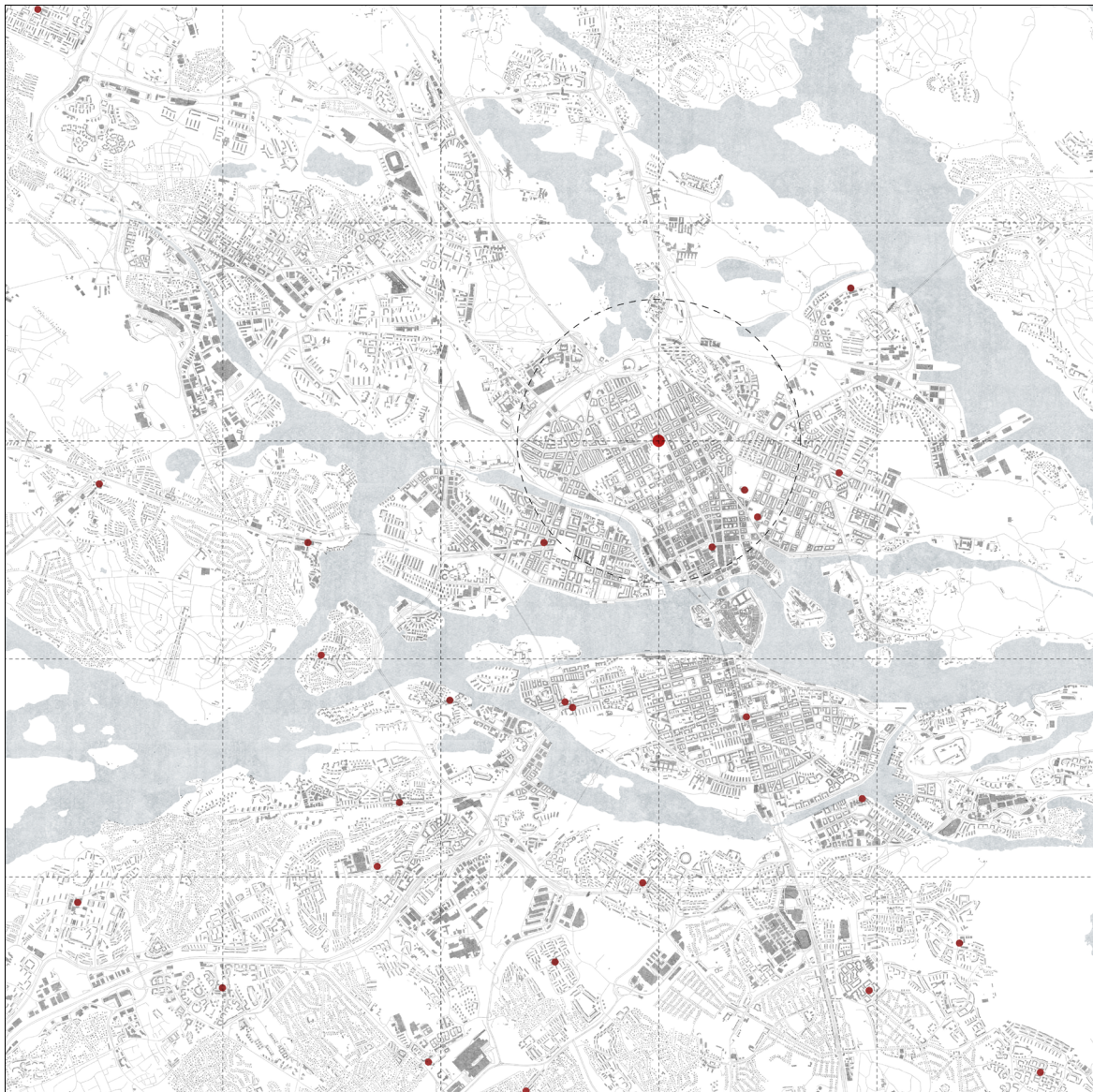


Spatial organisation | Limited effective space for visitors & overly dominant role of the Rotunda





Existing network of libraries



Do we really need another library to solve all these issues?

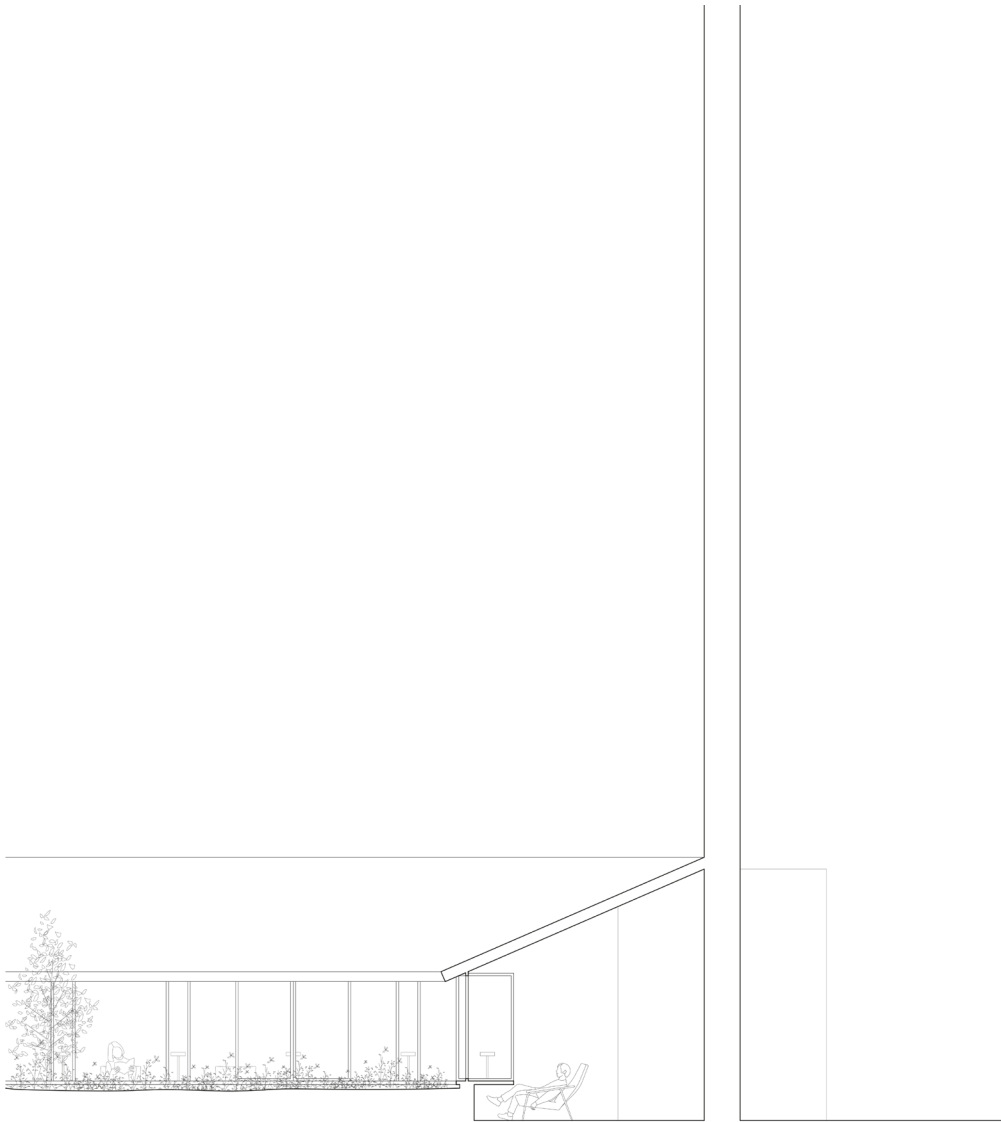
Evolved role of libraries



Before we build new, we need to know what to do with the old

Position: A Room for a Library







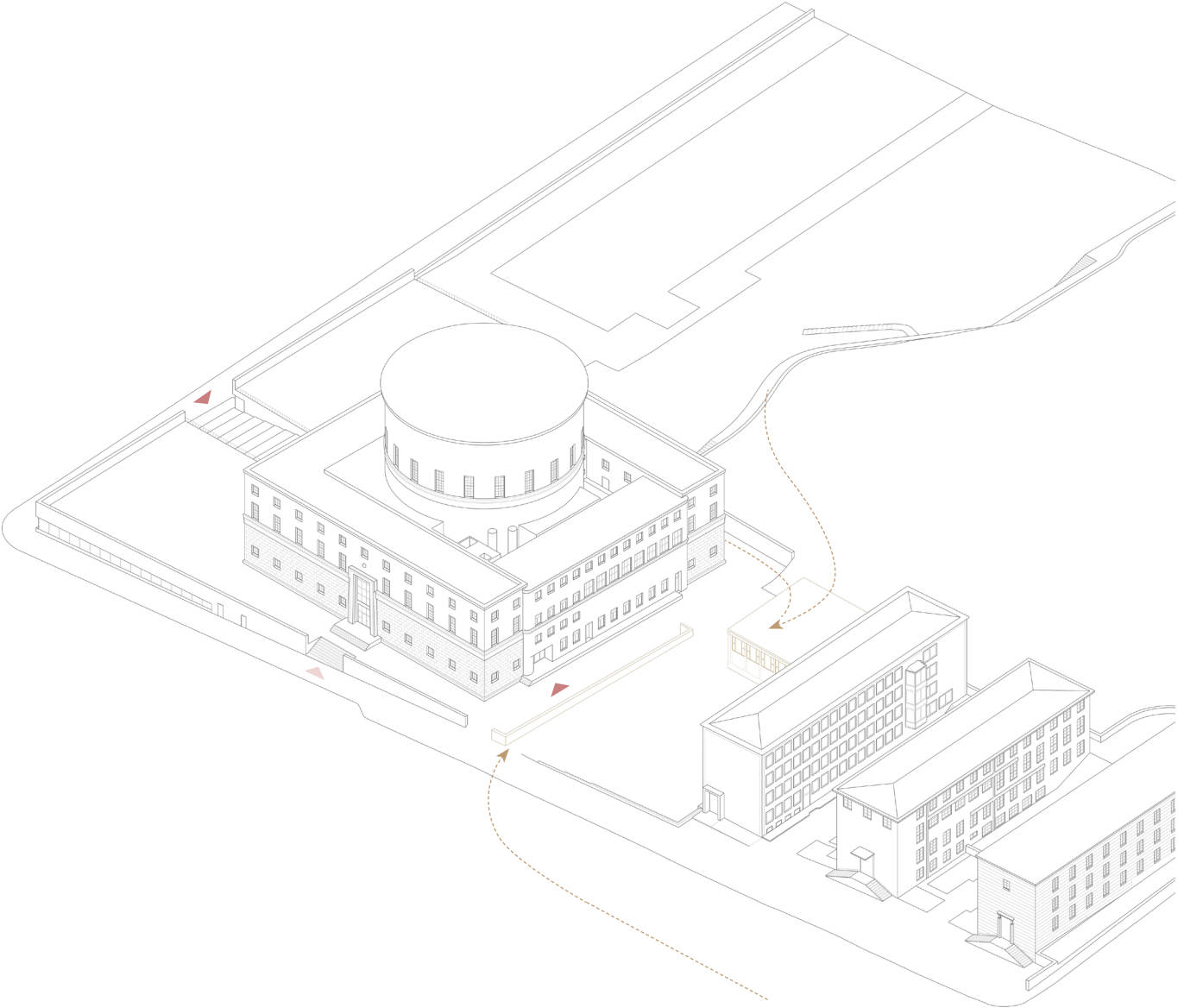


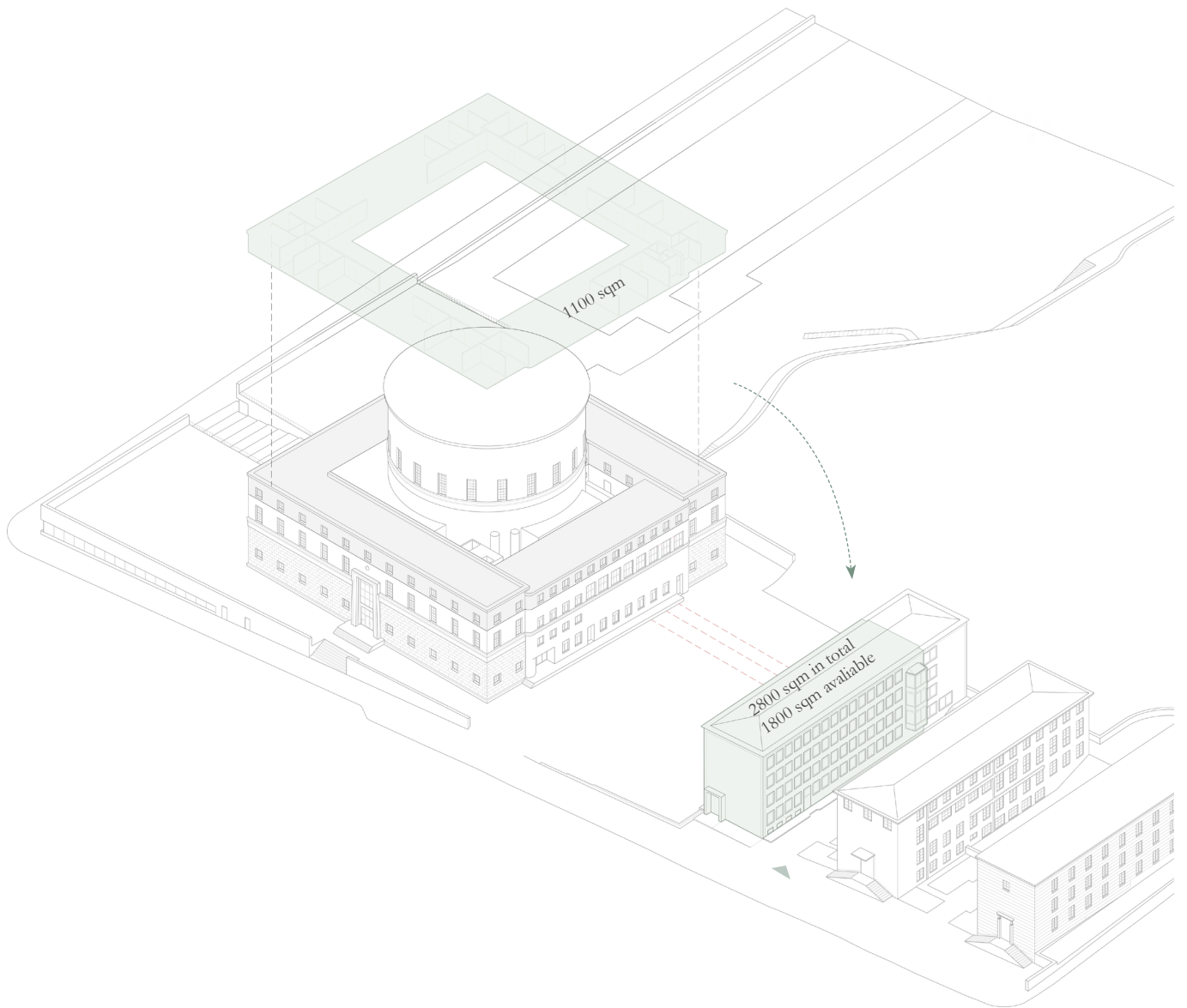
Proposal: A New Layer of Time

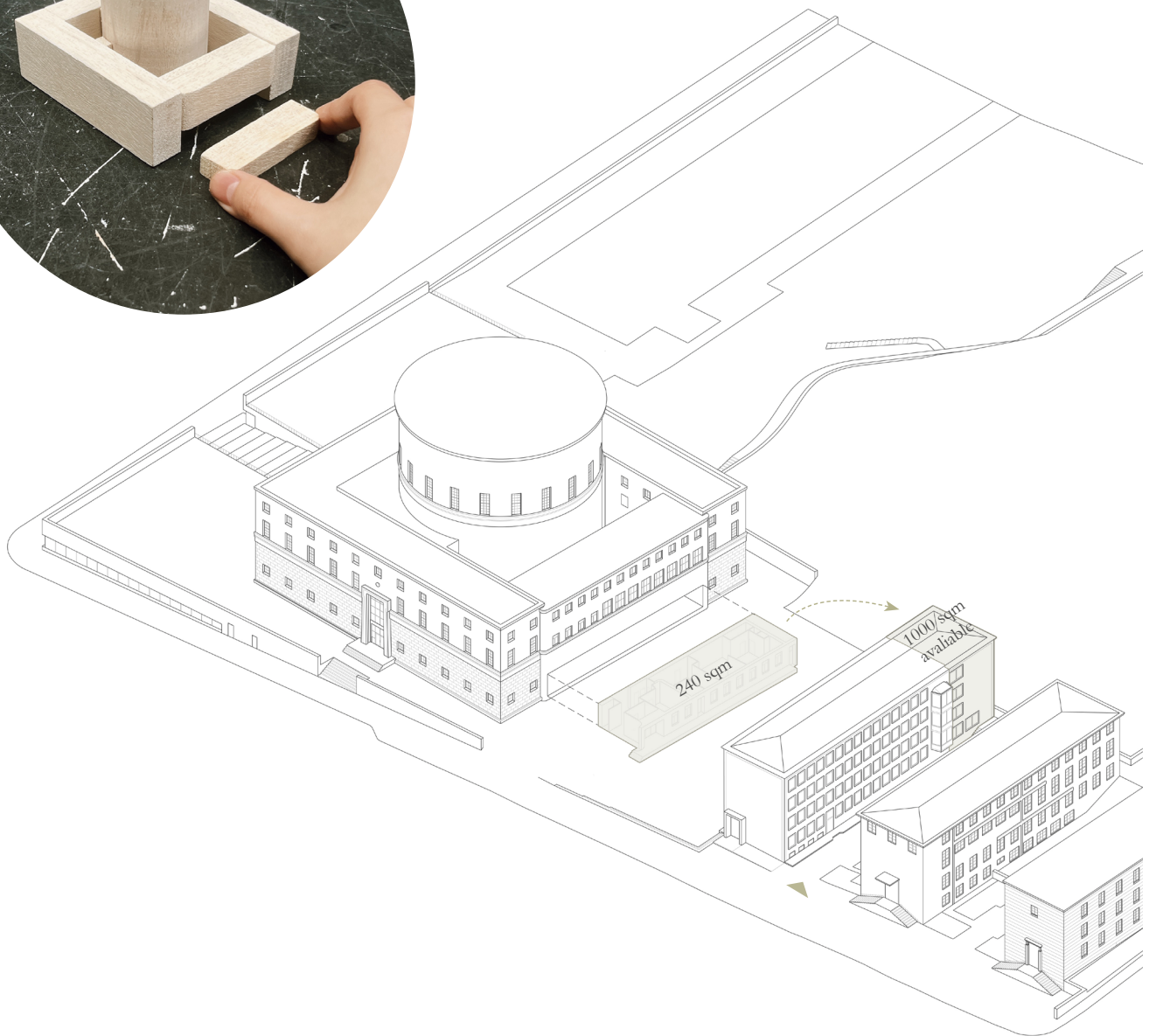


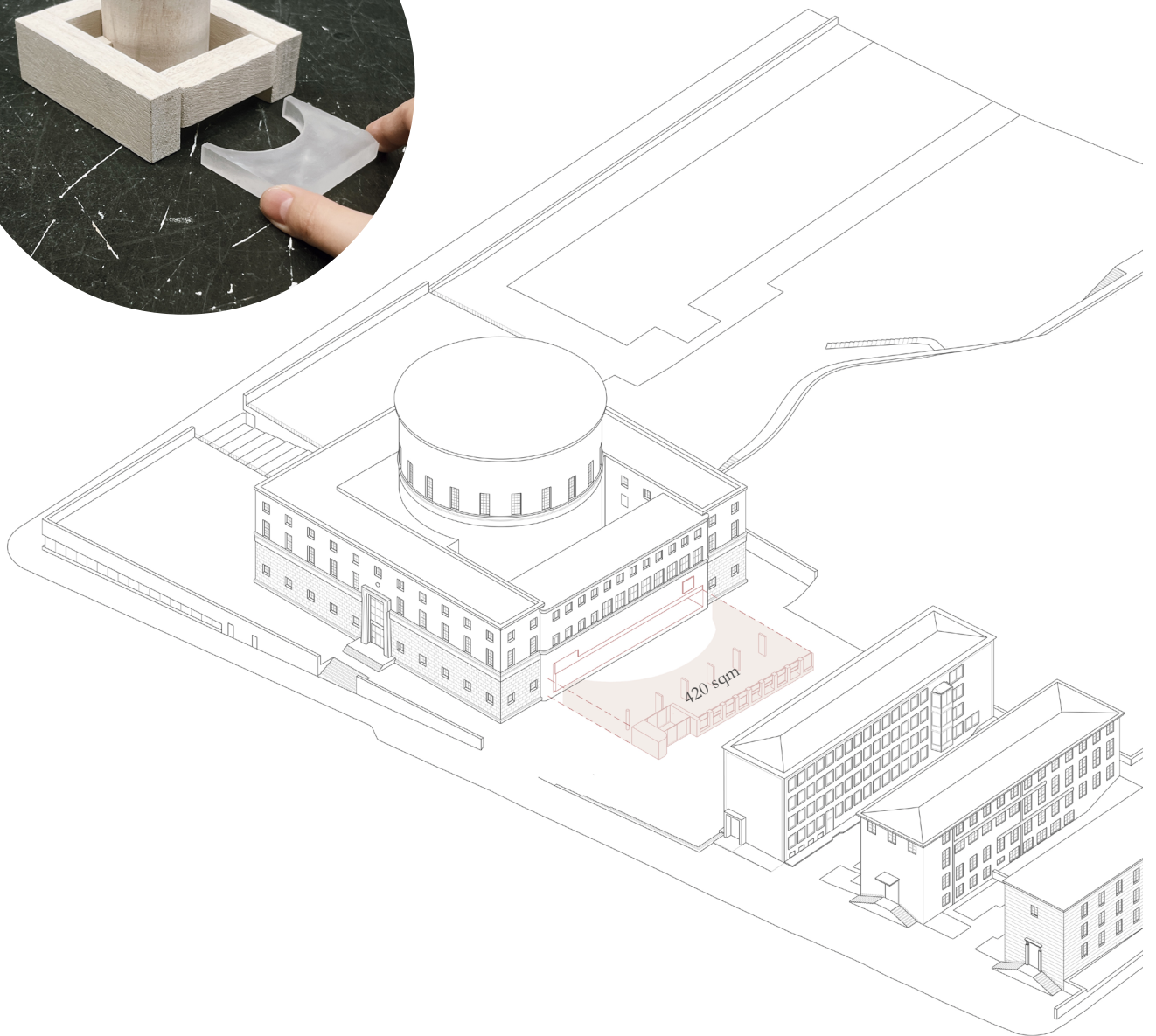


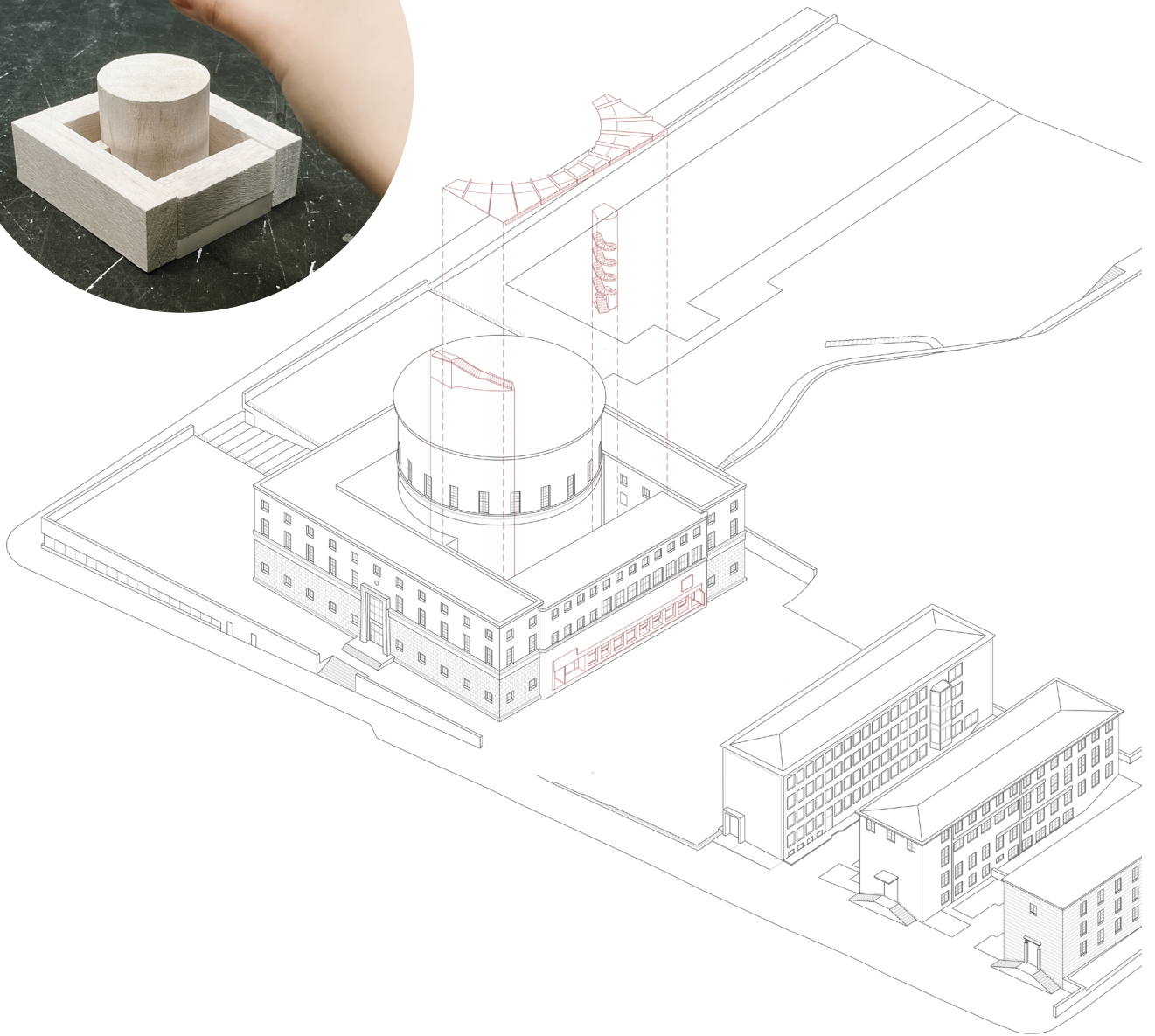
Strategy

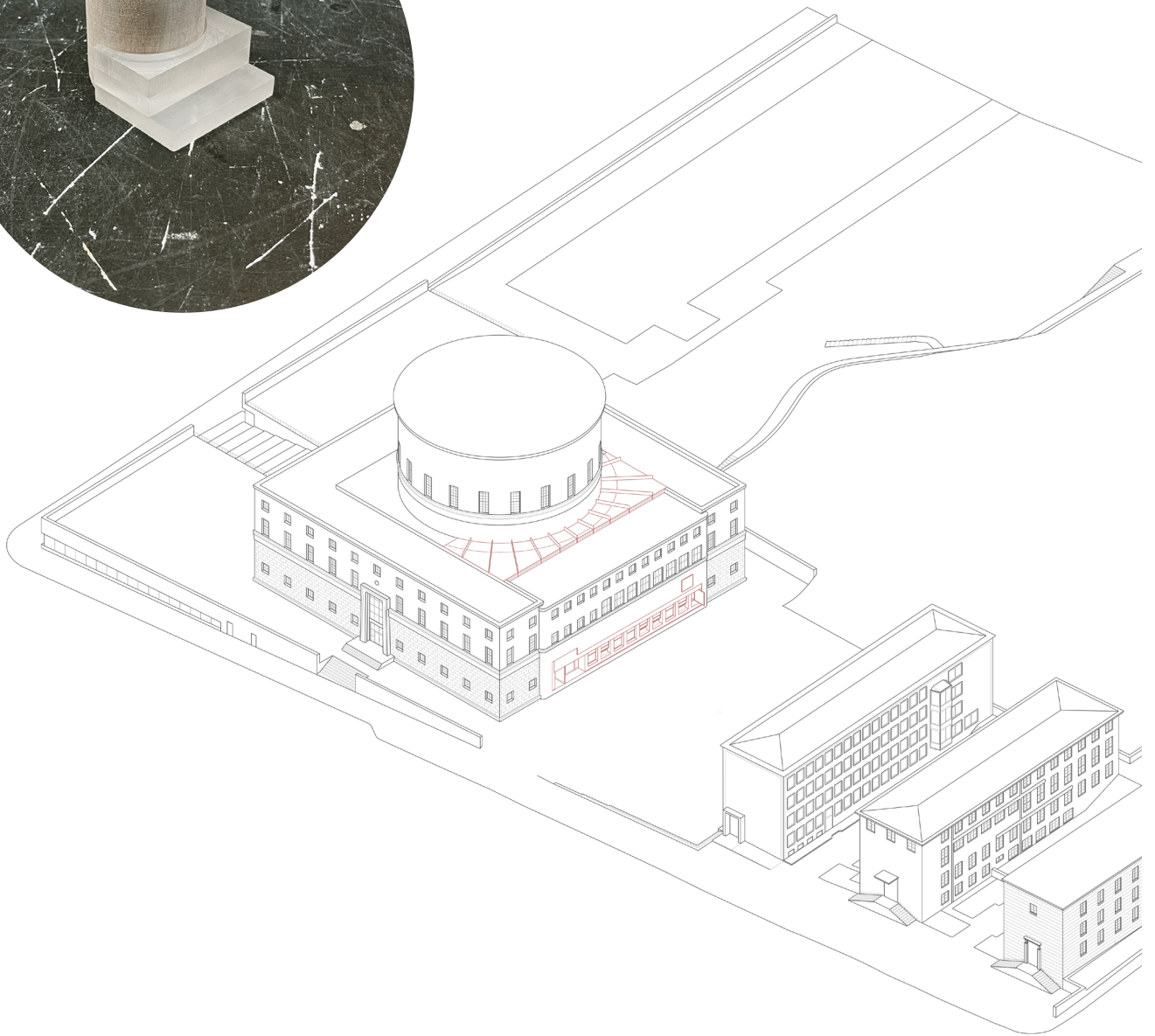
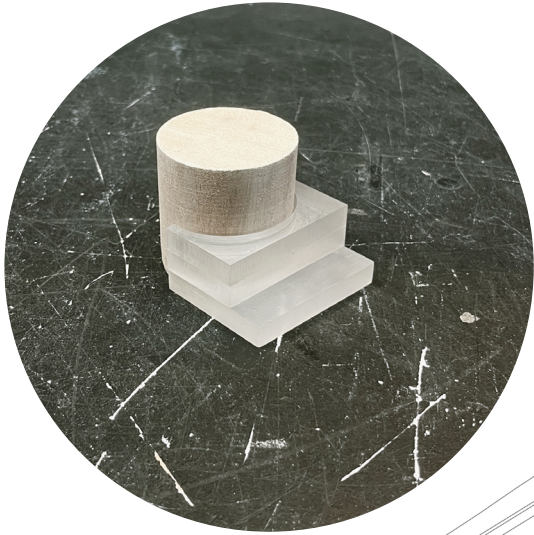


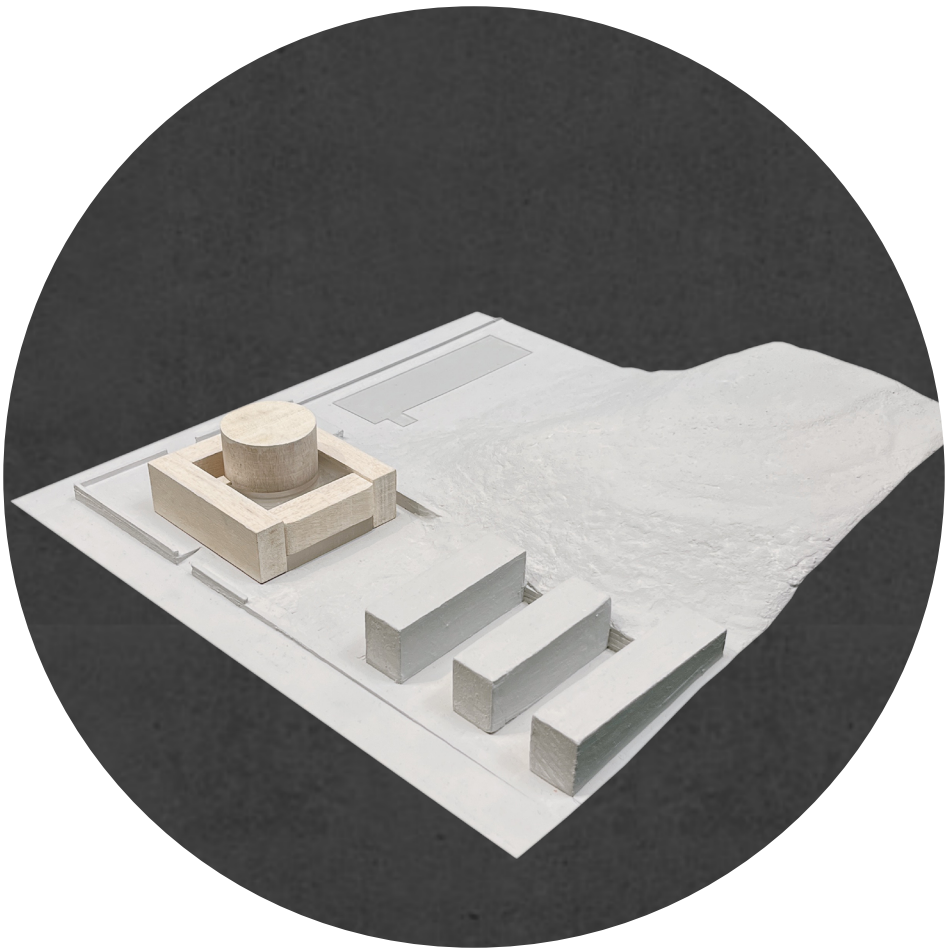


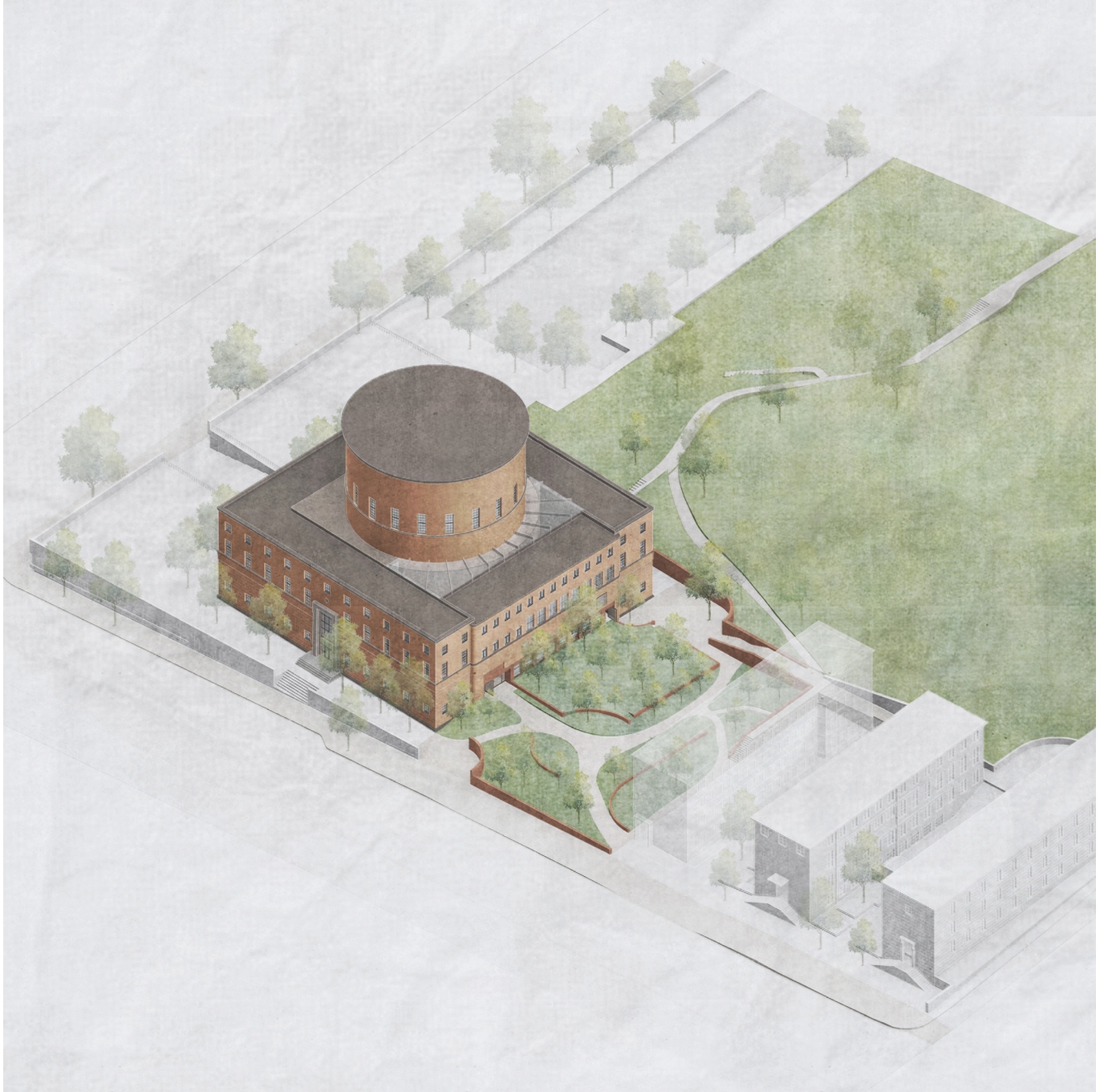




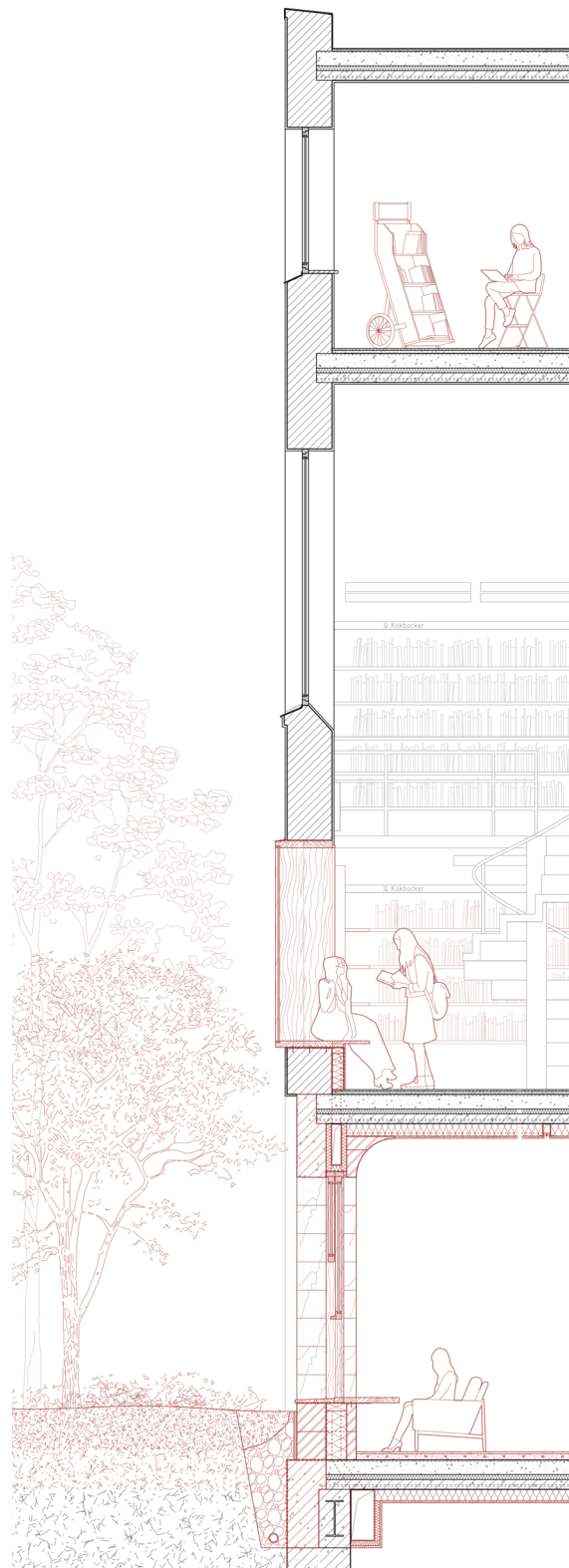


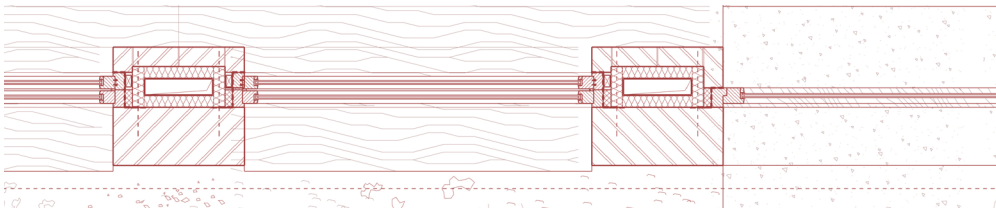


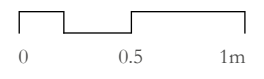
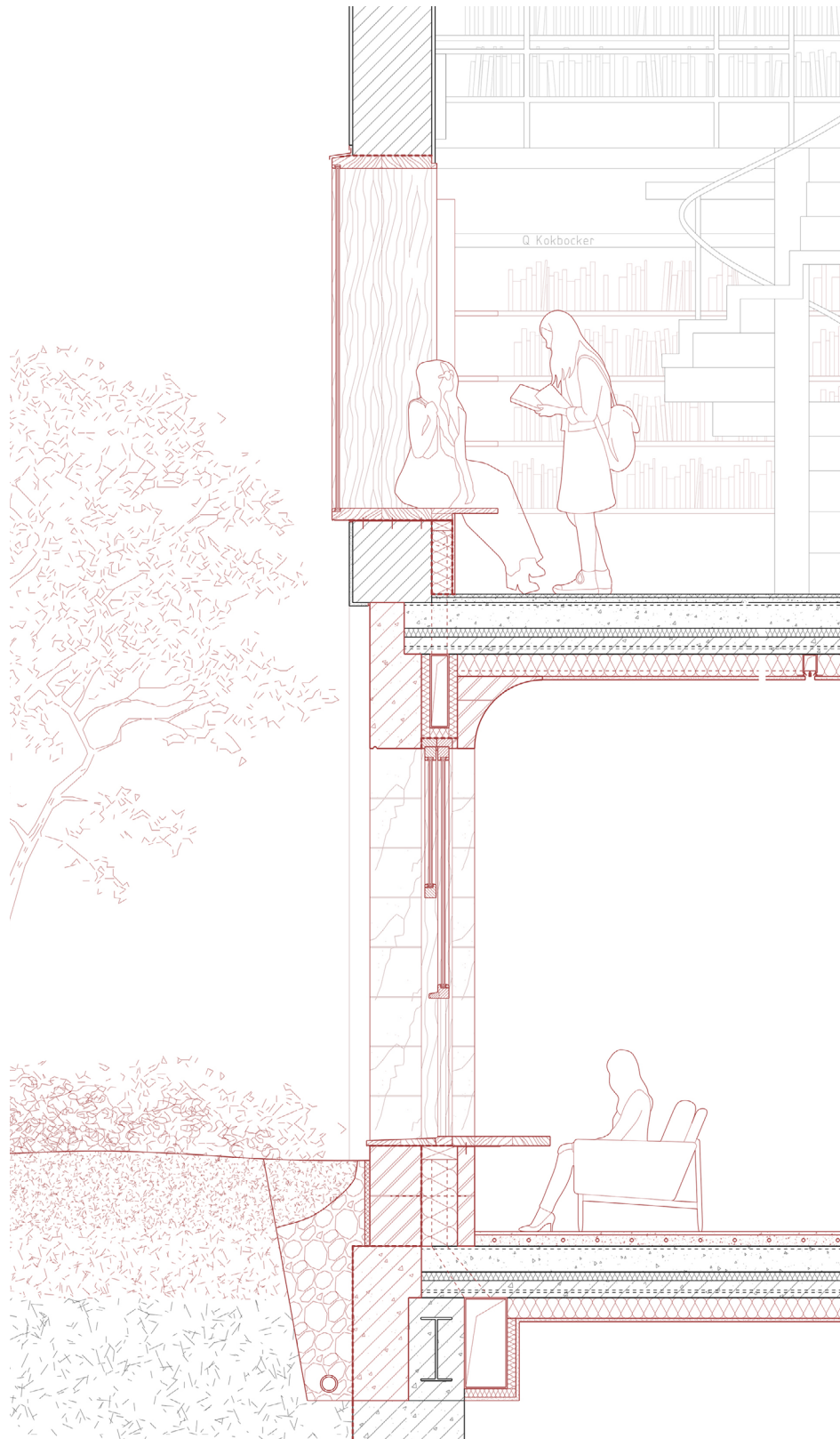


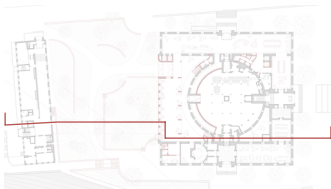
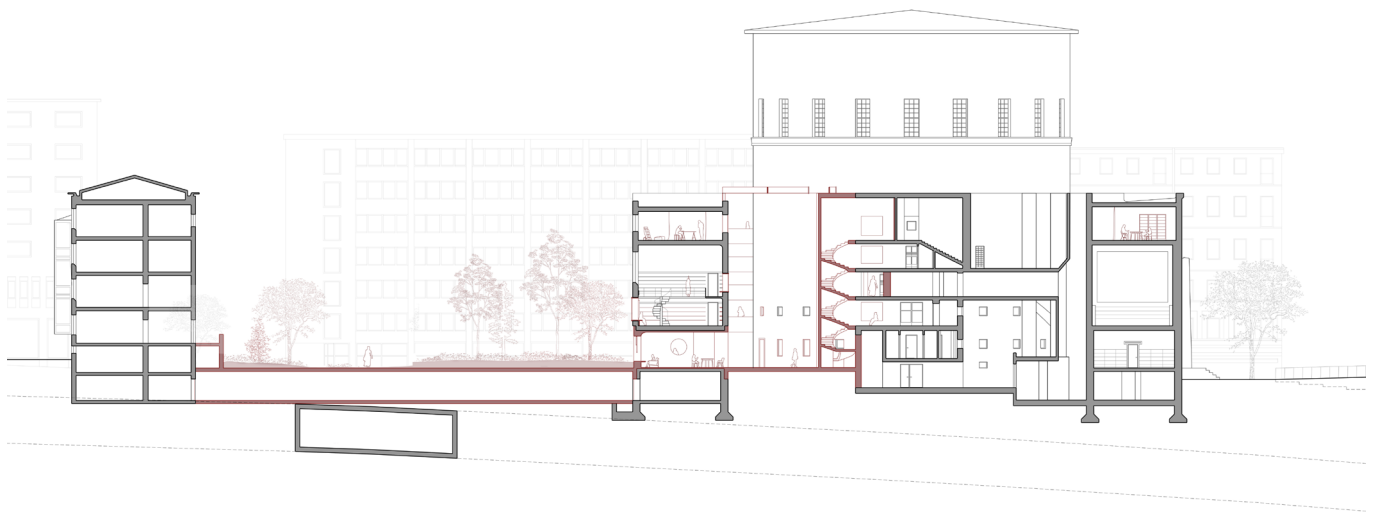






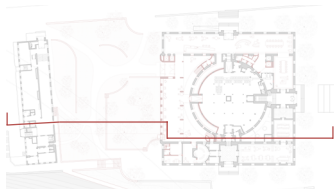
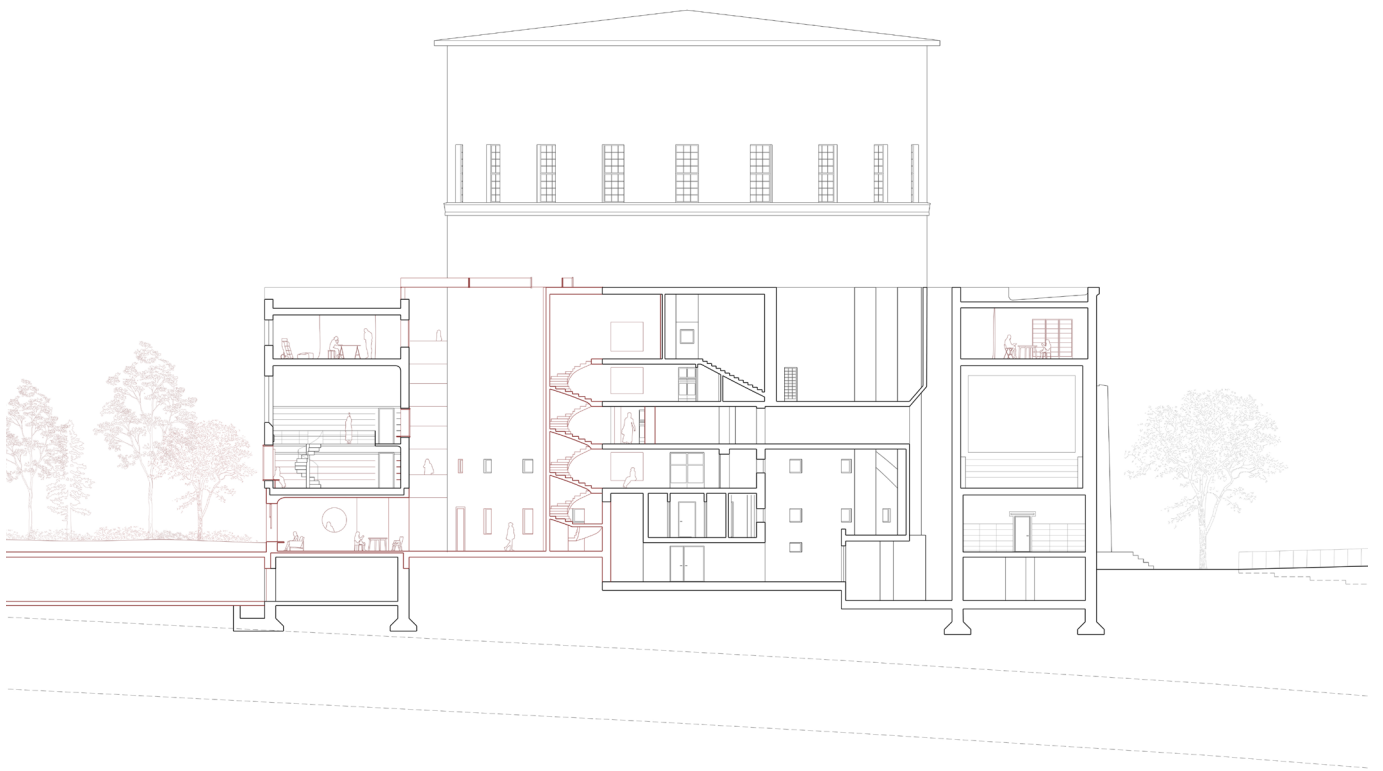


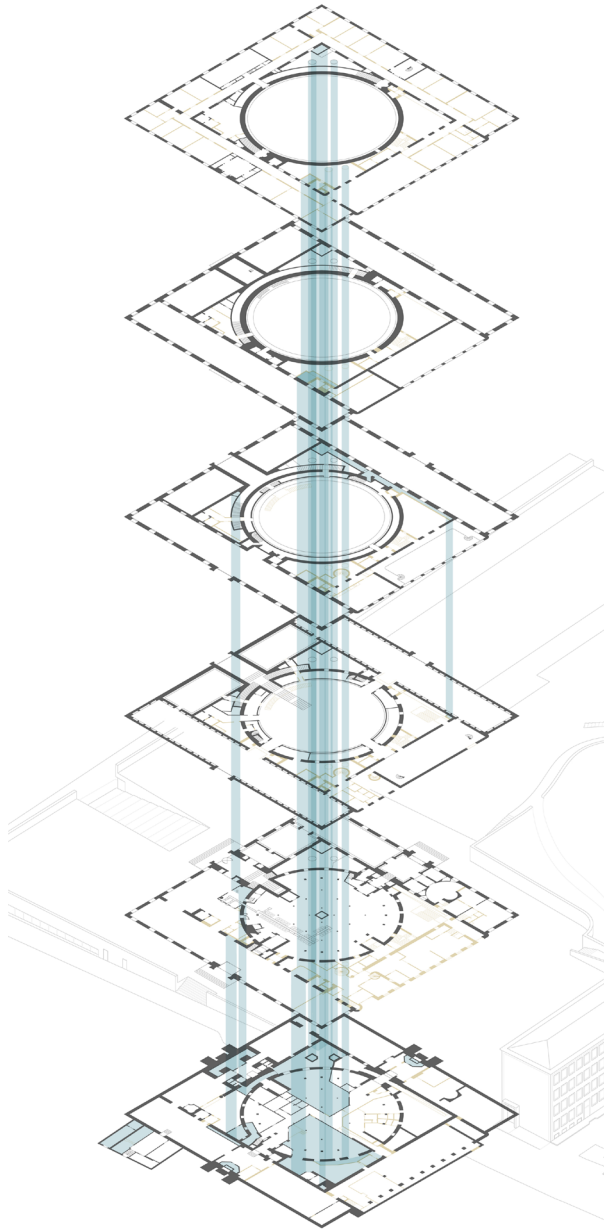




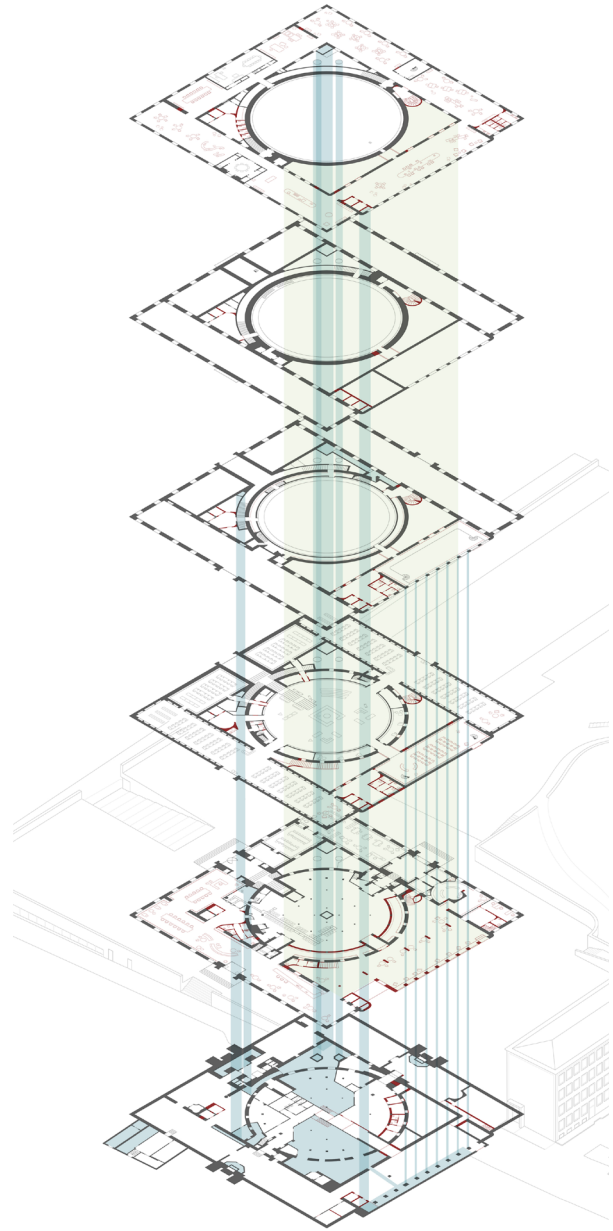


Services





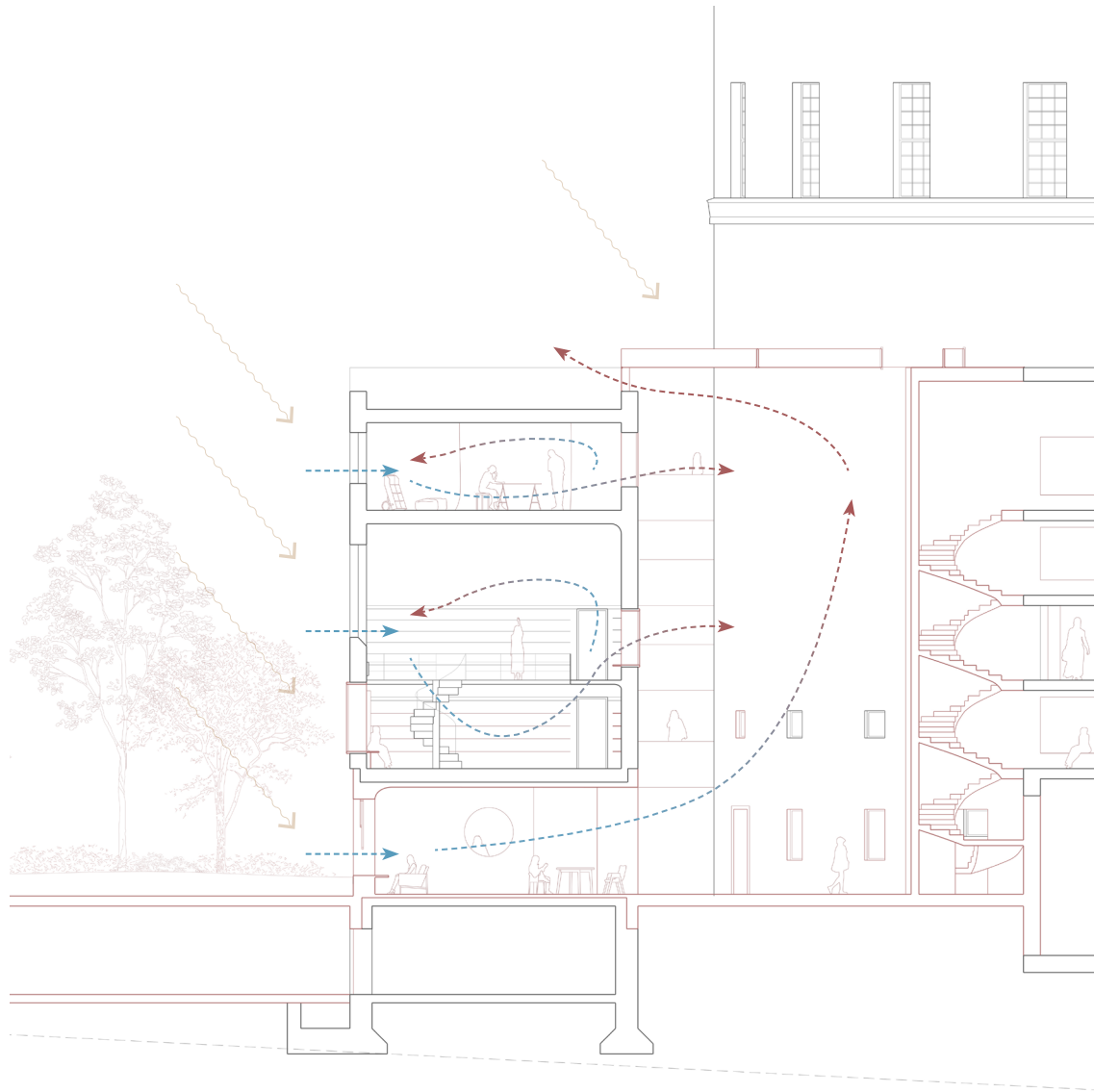
Current state



Proposal

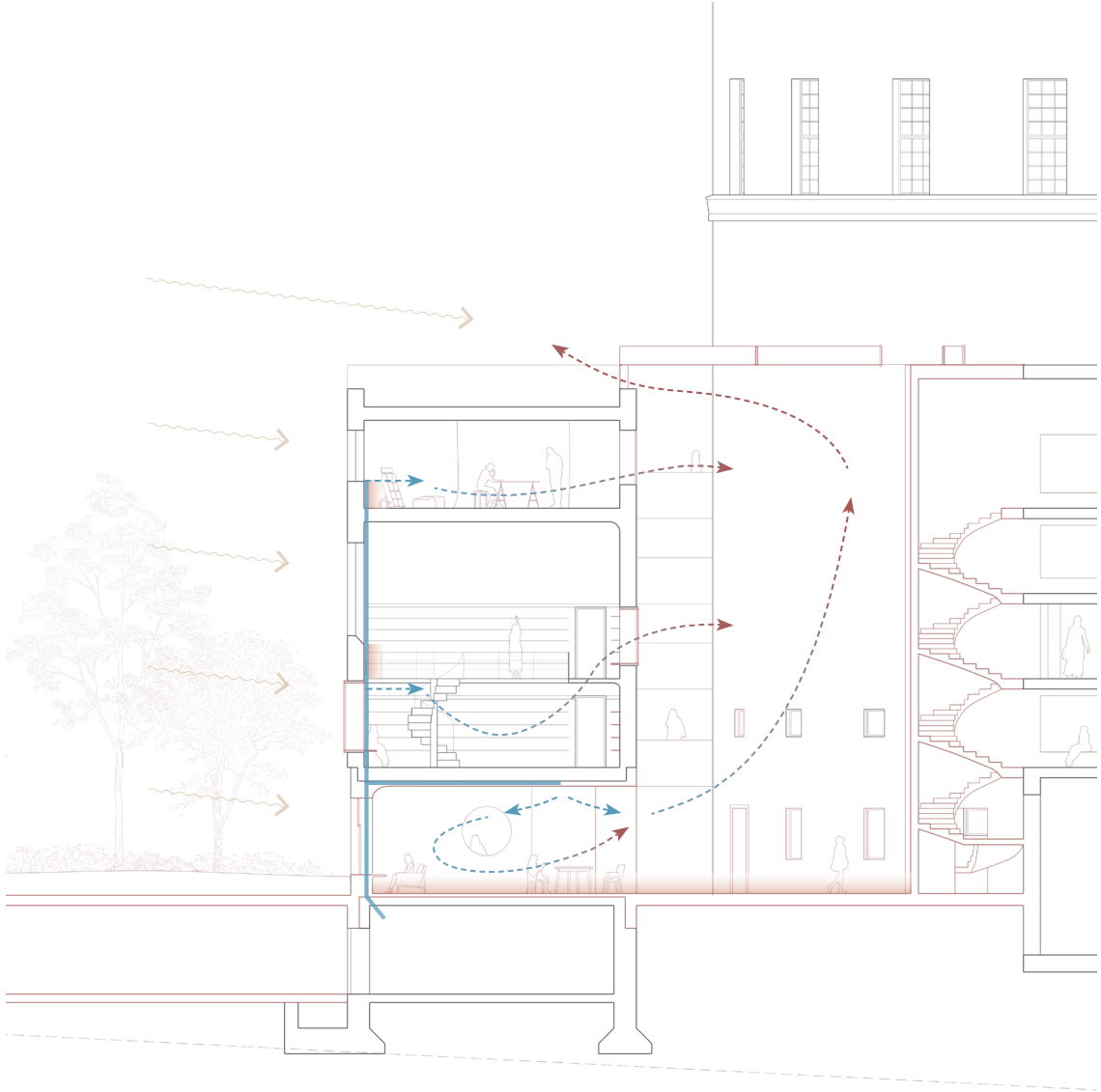
■ plant room & vertical riser ■ atrium

Services - Summer

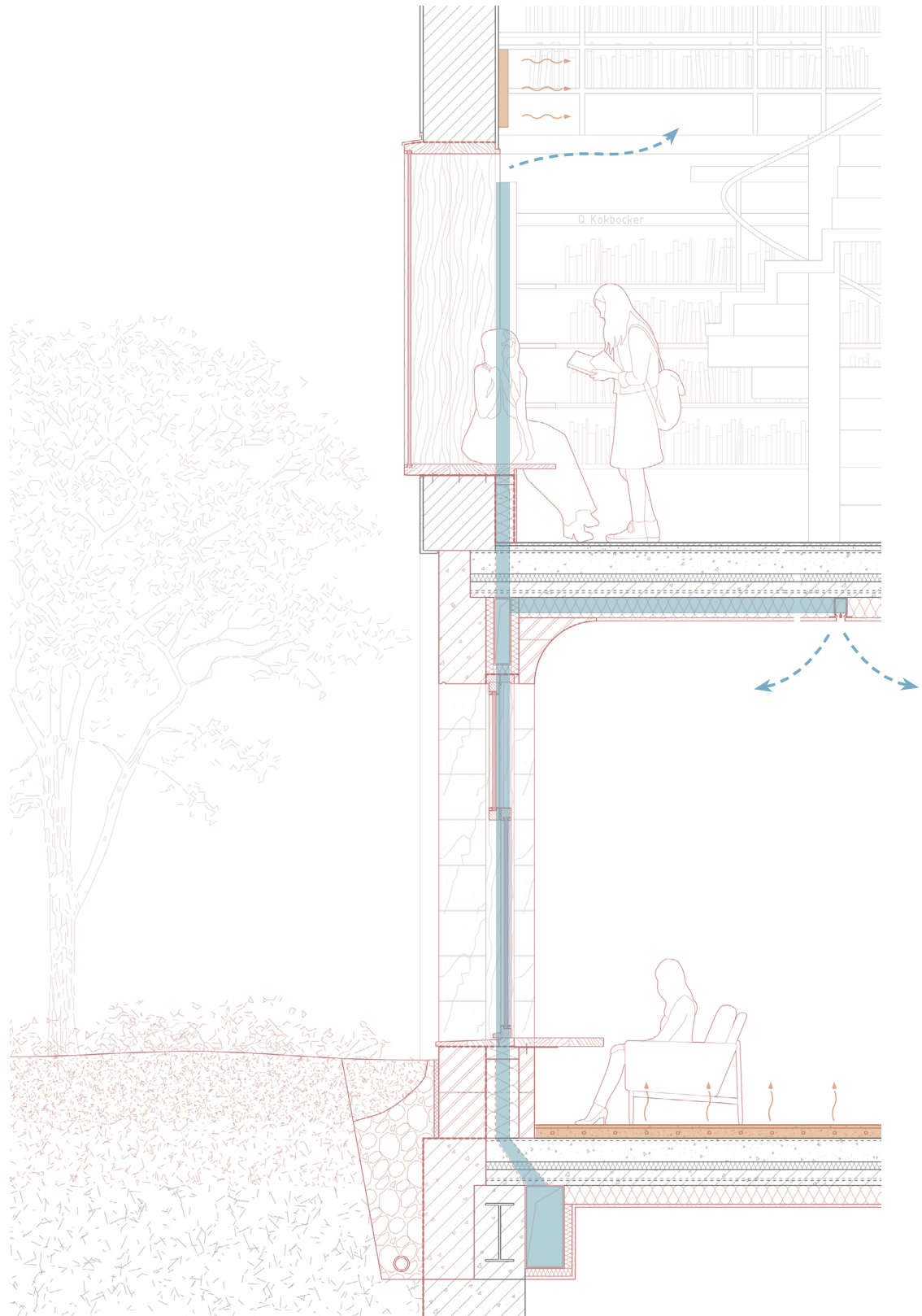


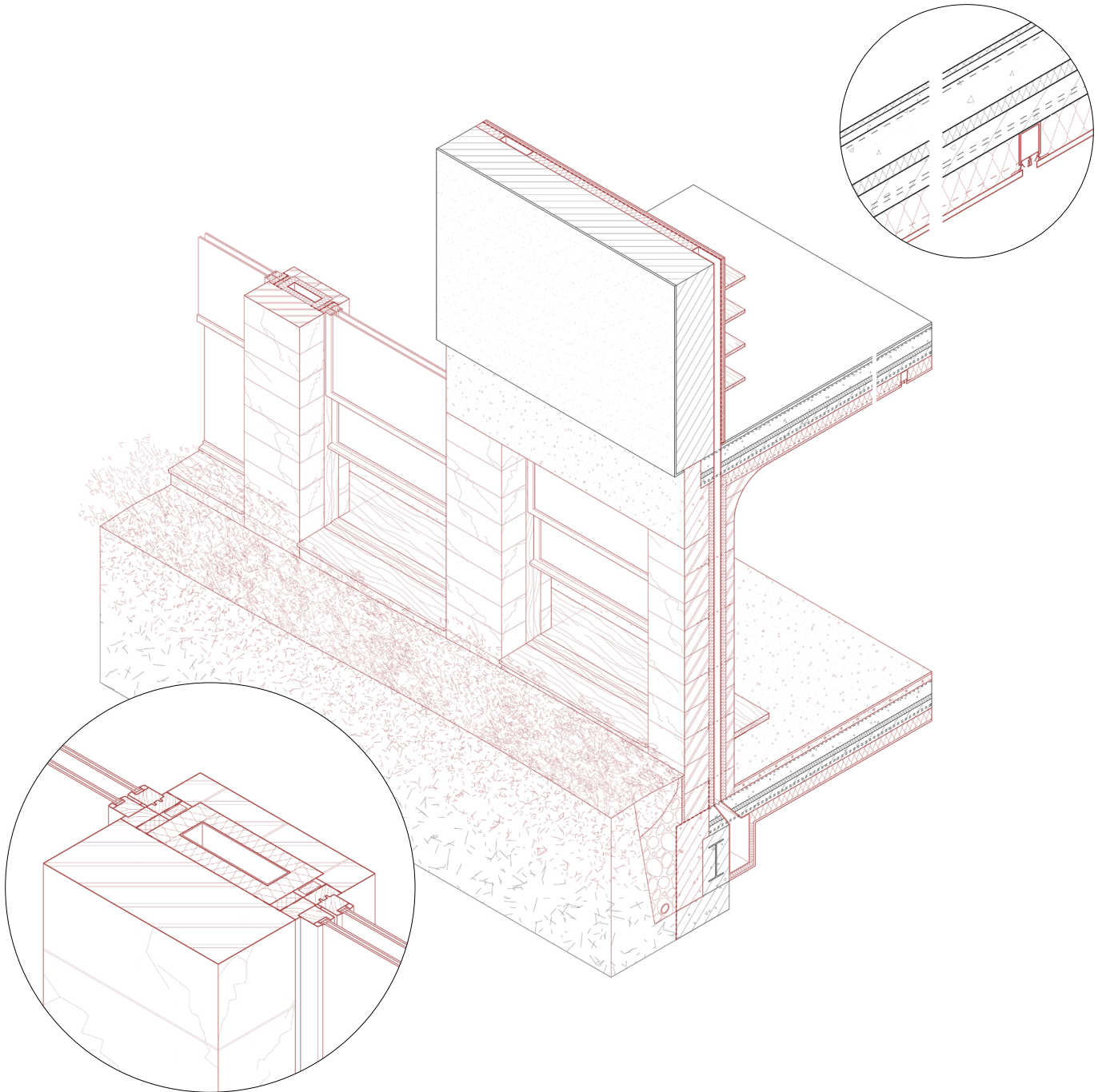


Services - Winter

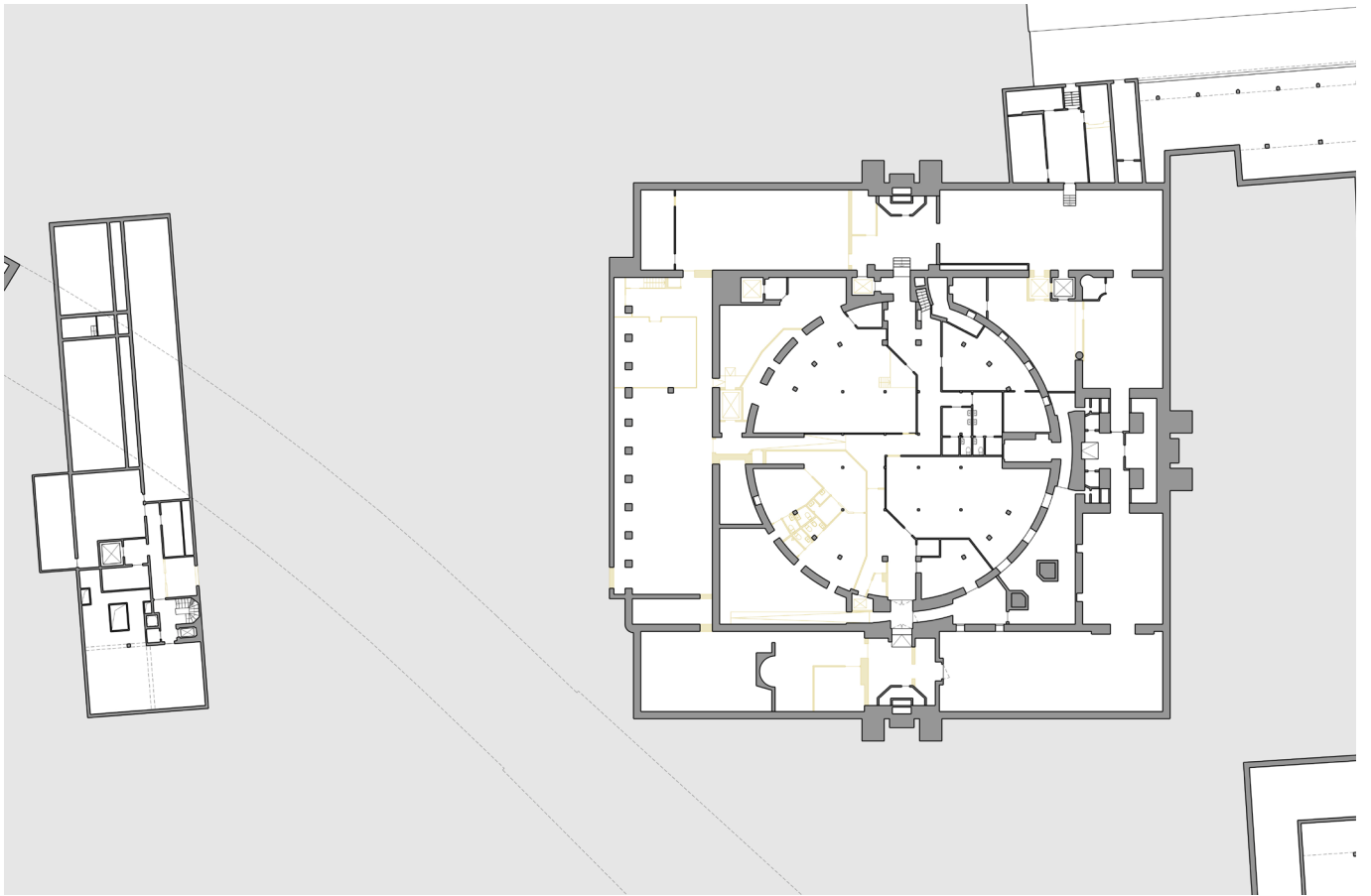


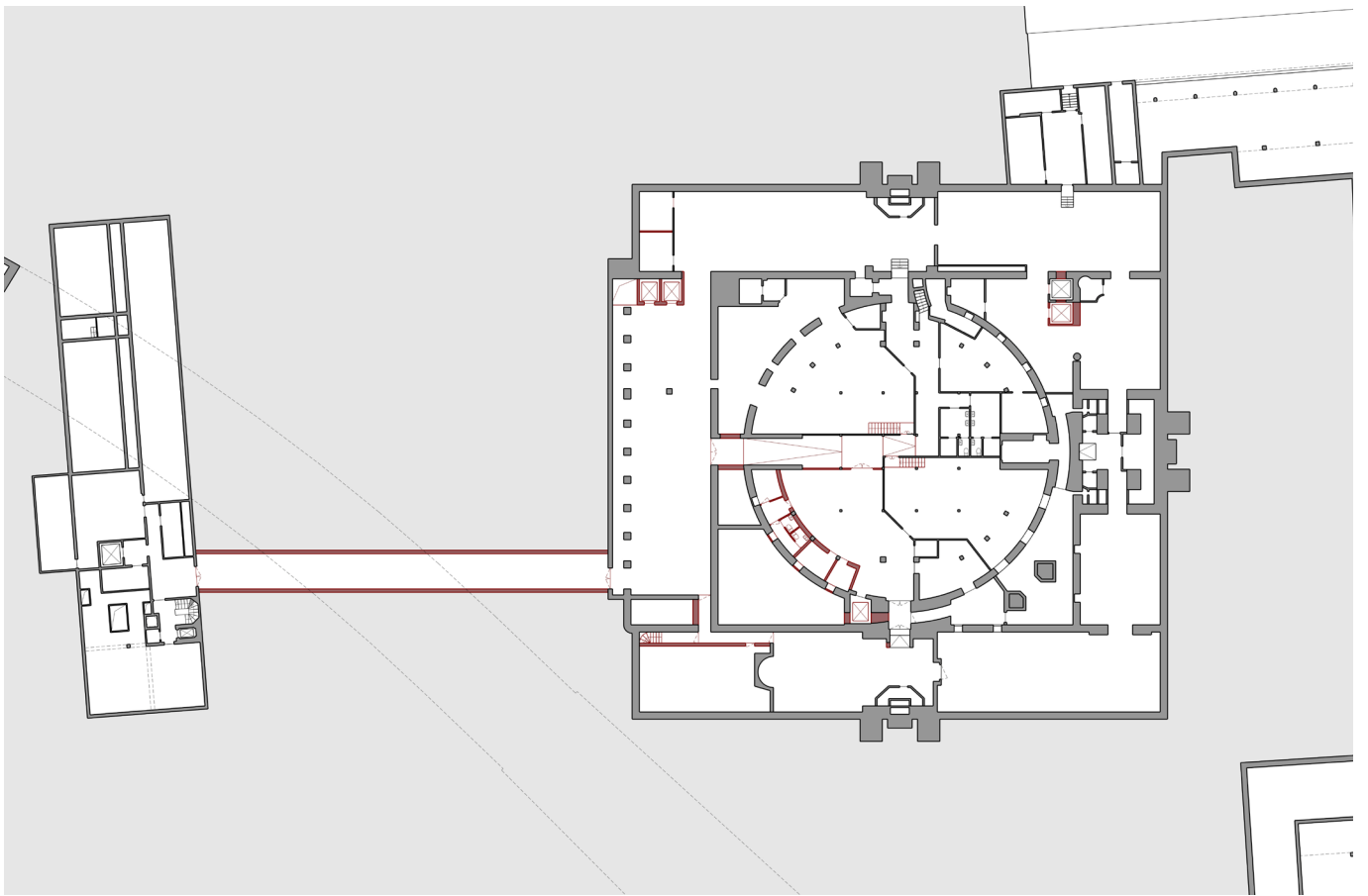






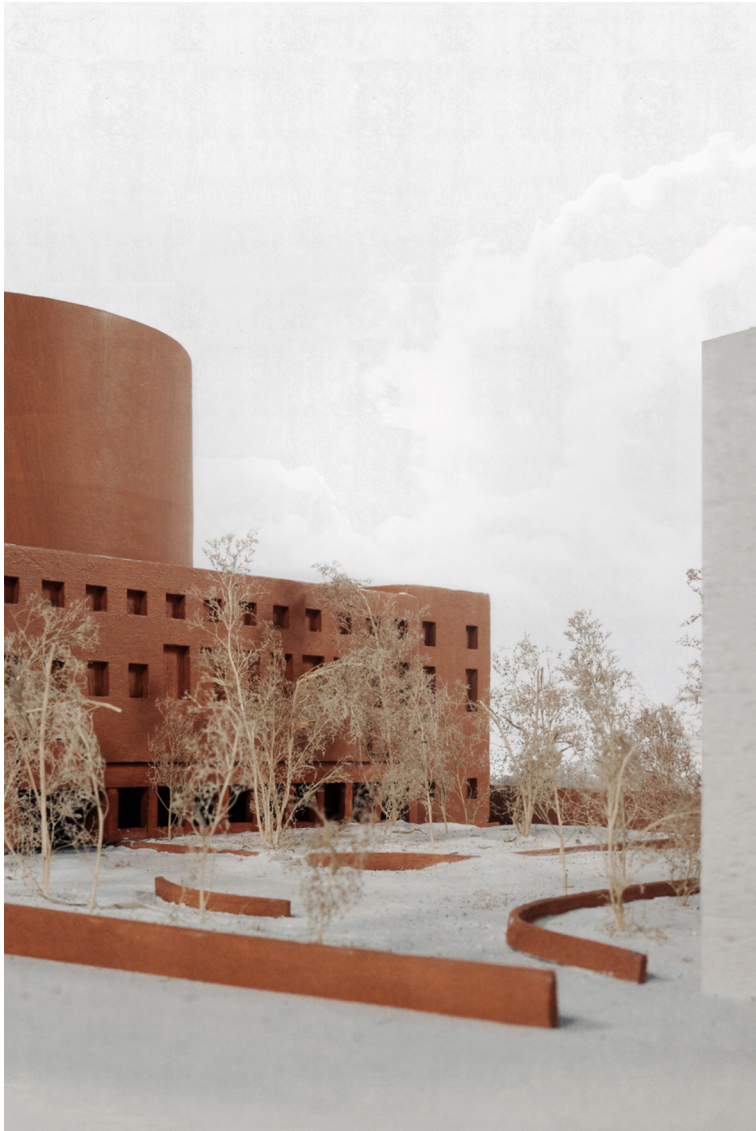
Basement





Garden: A Threshold

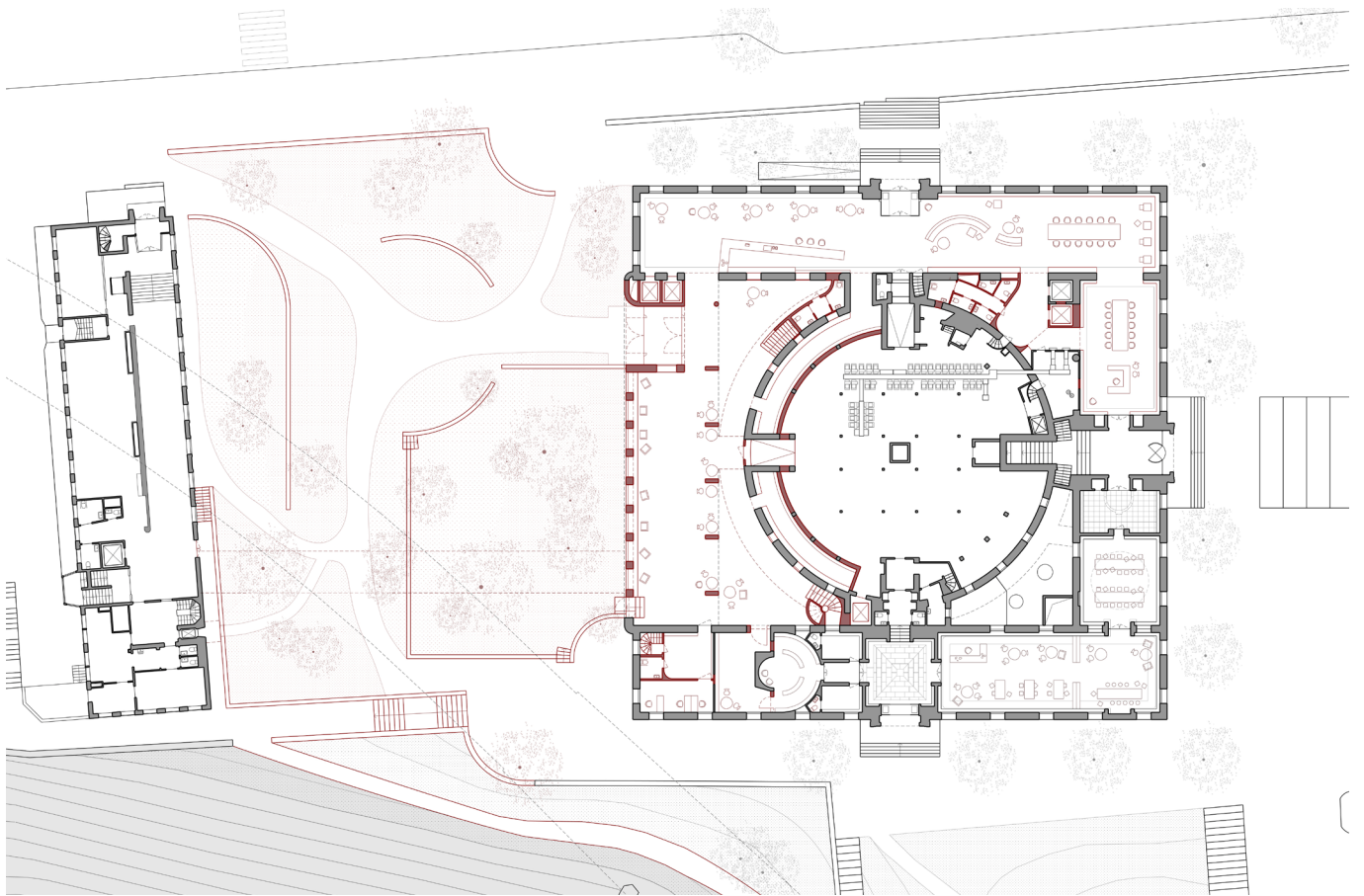




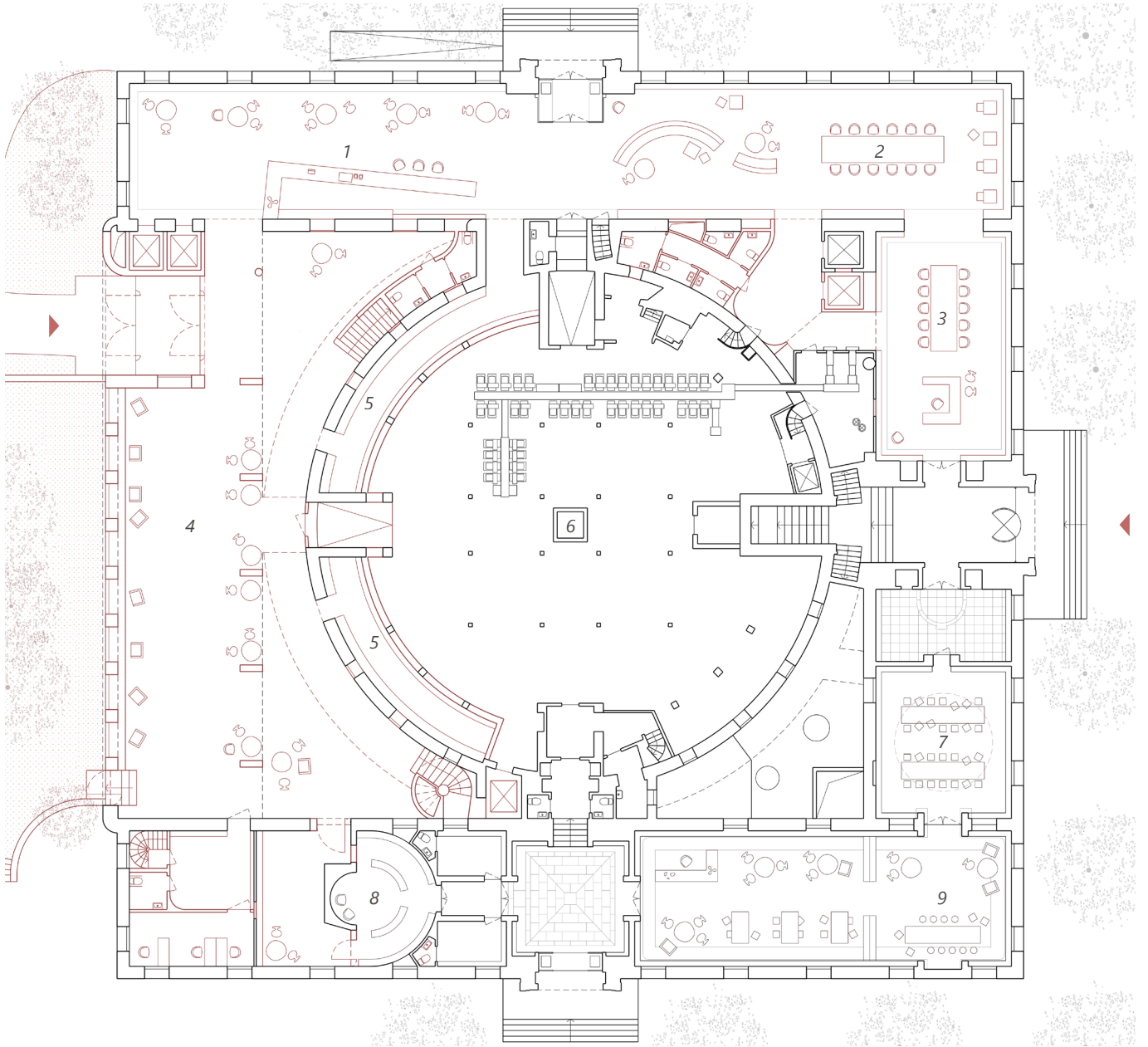




Ground Floor







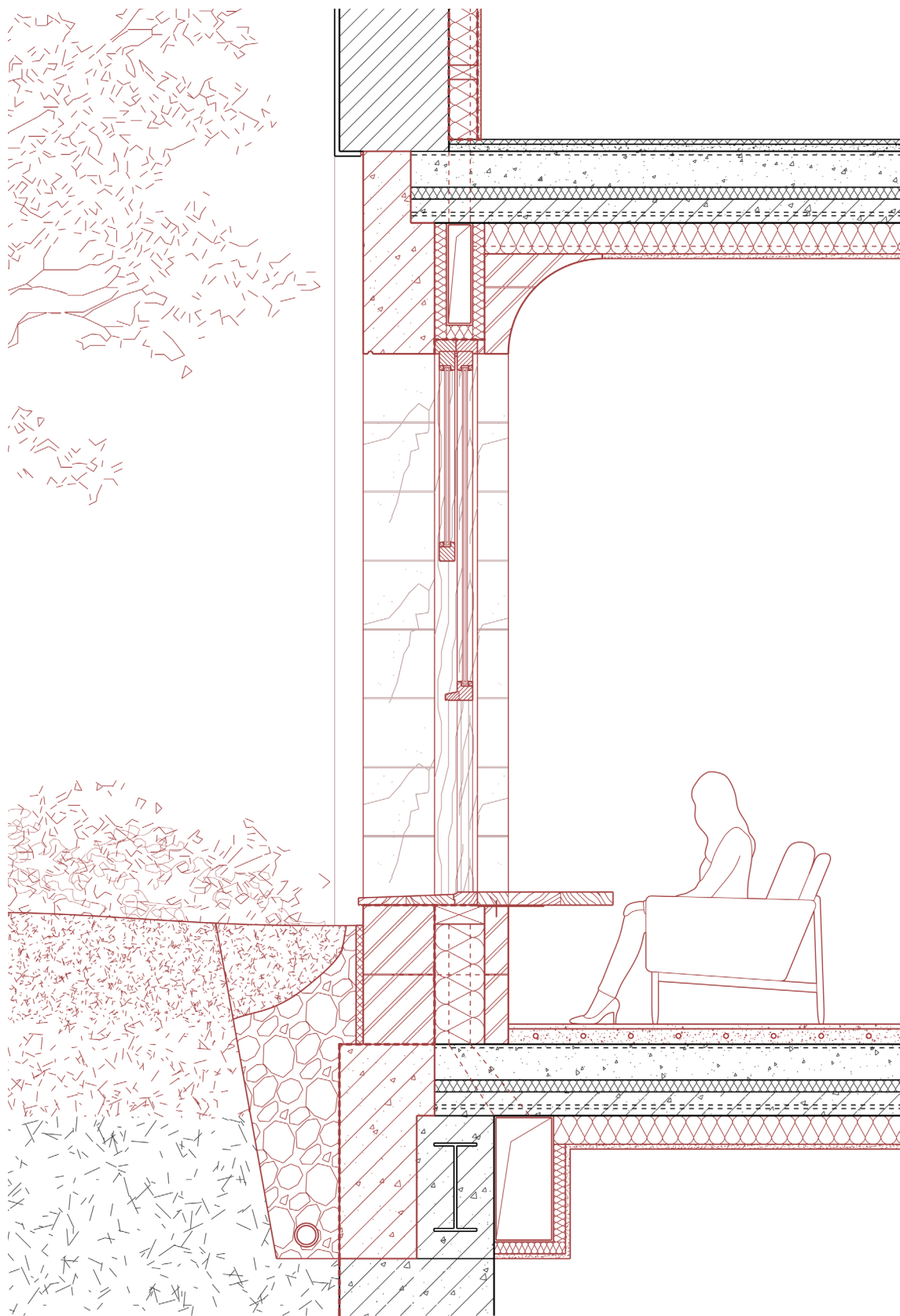
- 1: cafe
- 2: newspaper room
- 3: newspaper room/information

- 4: public foyer
- 5: exhibition/reading
- 6: book handling

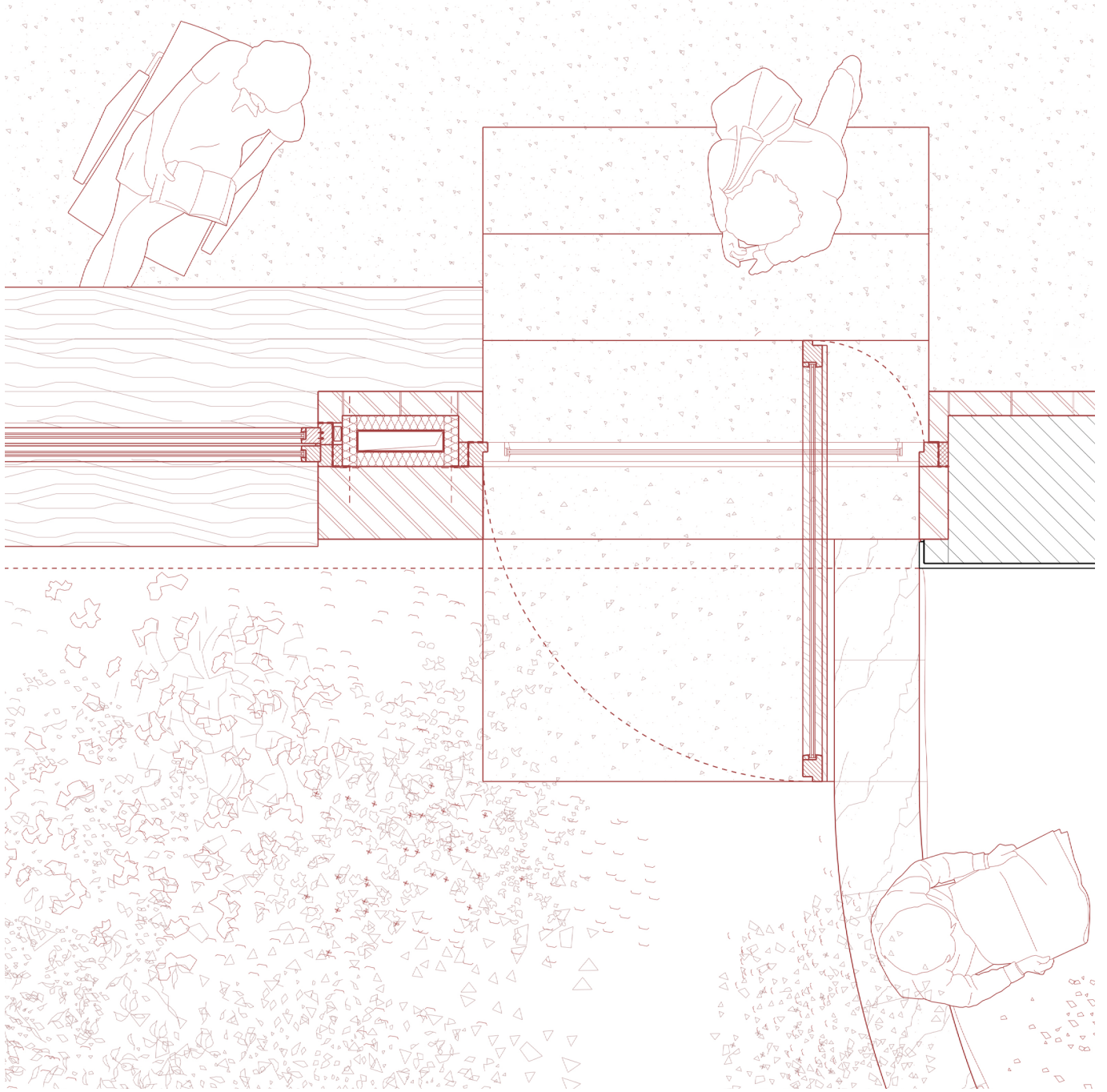
- 7: children's workshop
- 8: storytelling
- 9: children's reading room







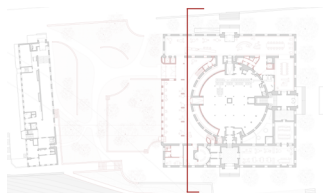
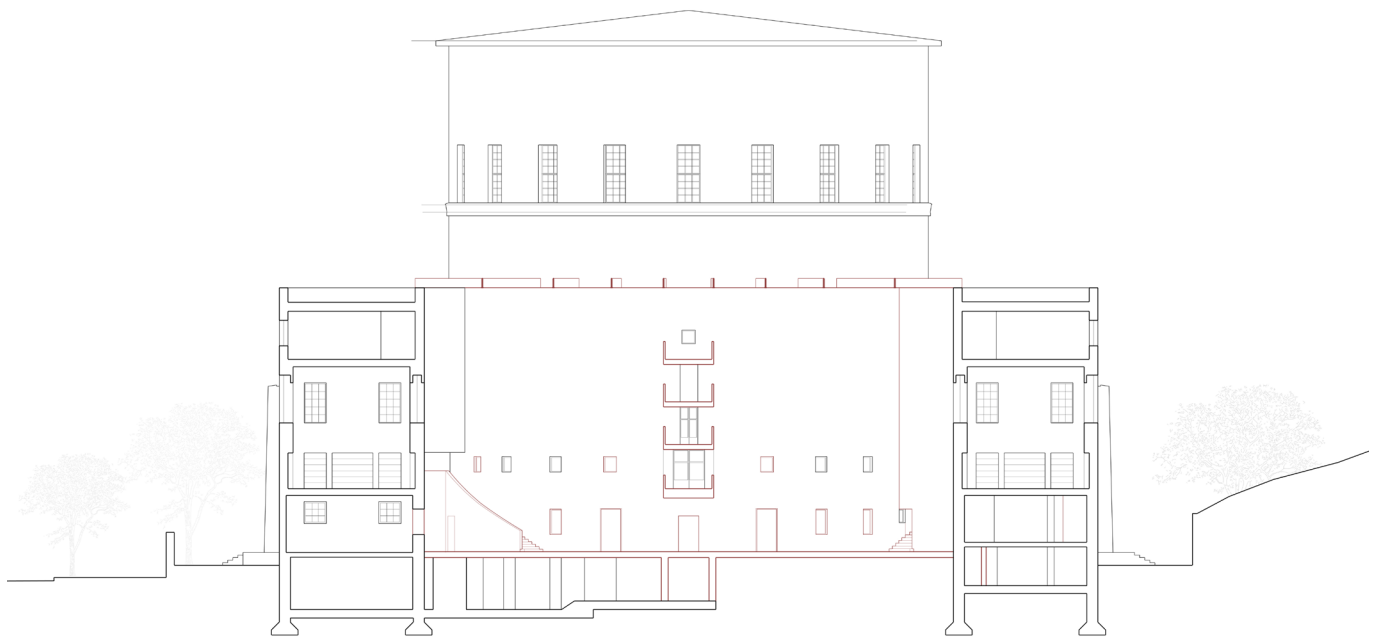












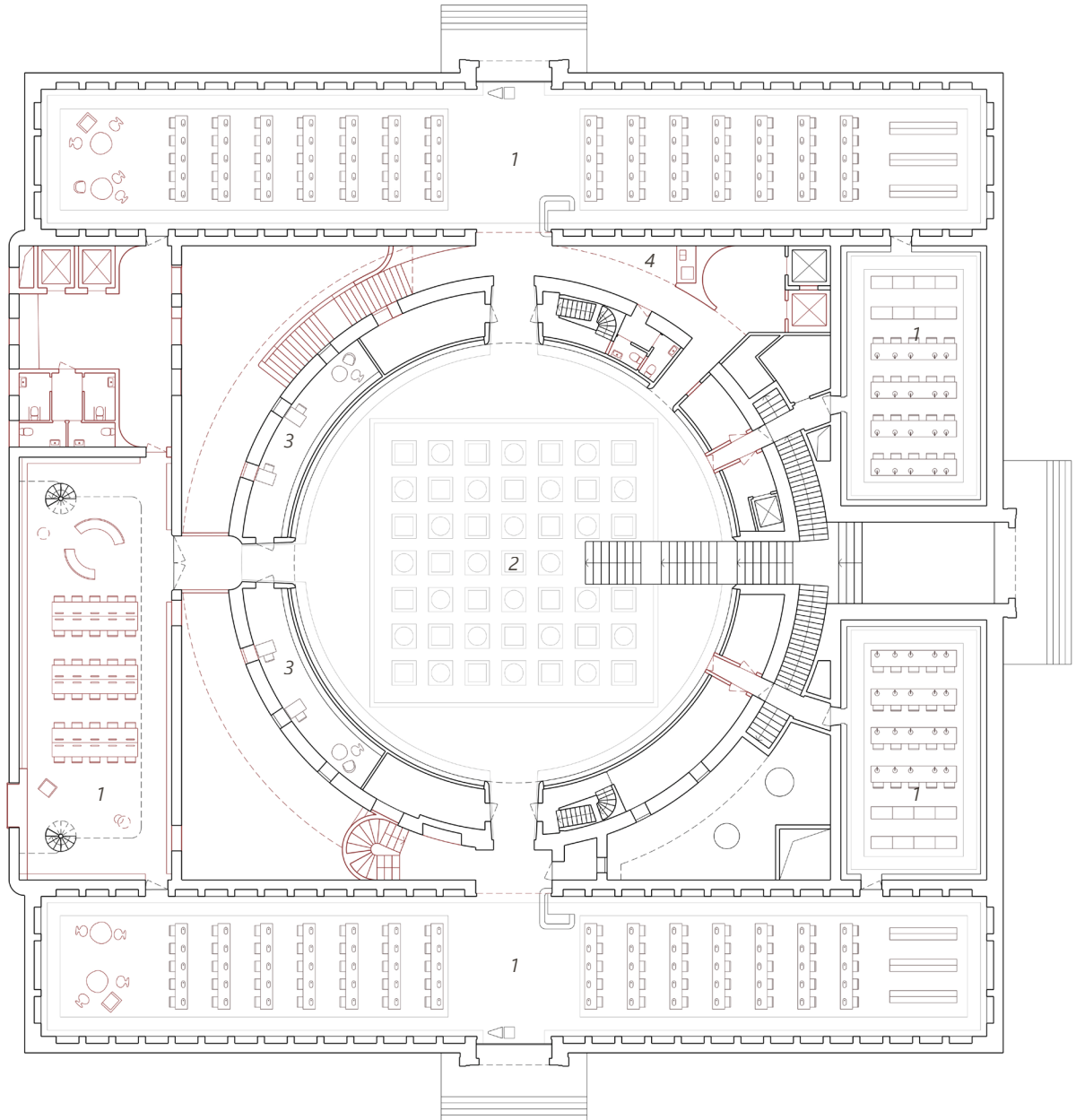




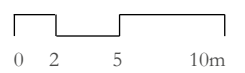




First Floor



- 1: reading room
- 2: bookhall/events
- 3: exhibition/reading
- 4: printer

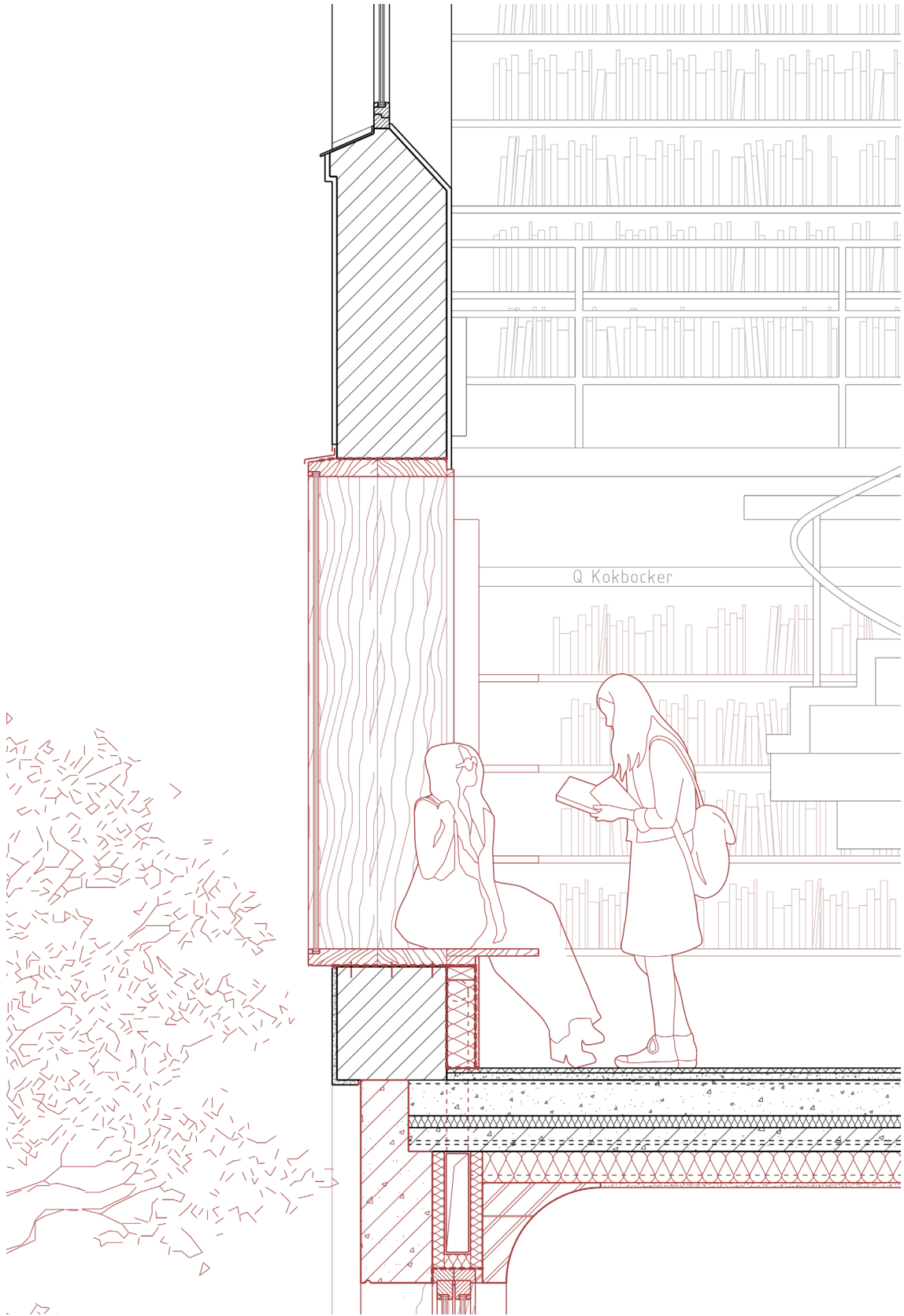






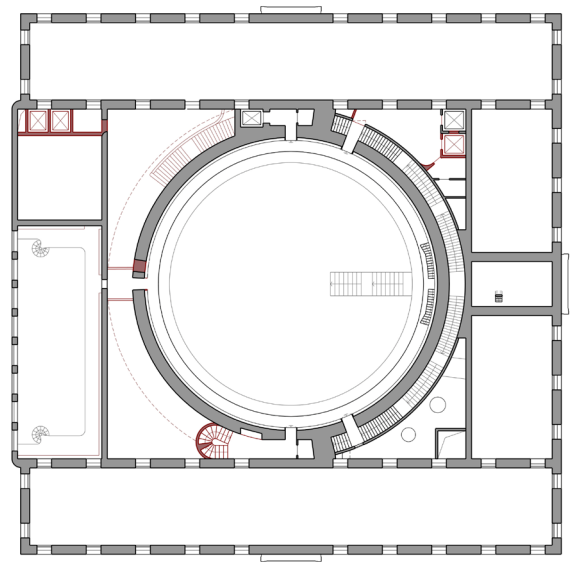
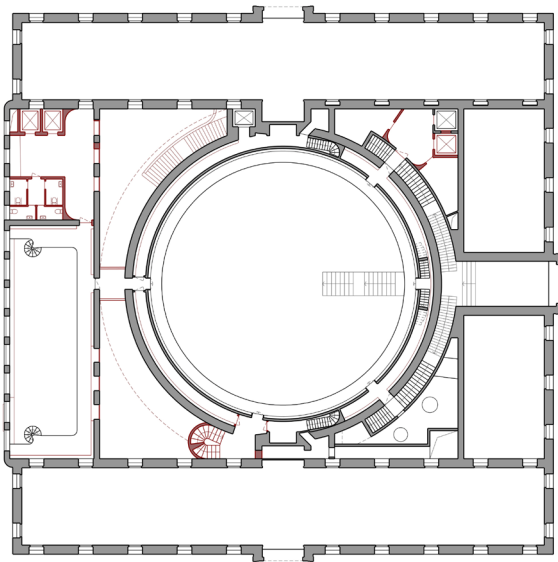






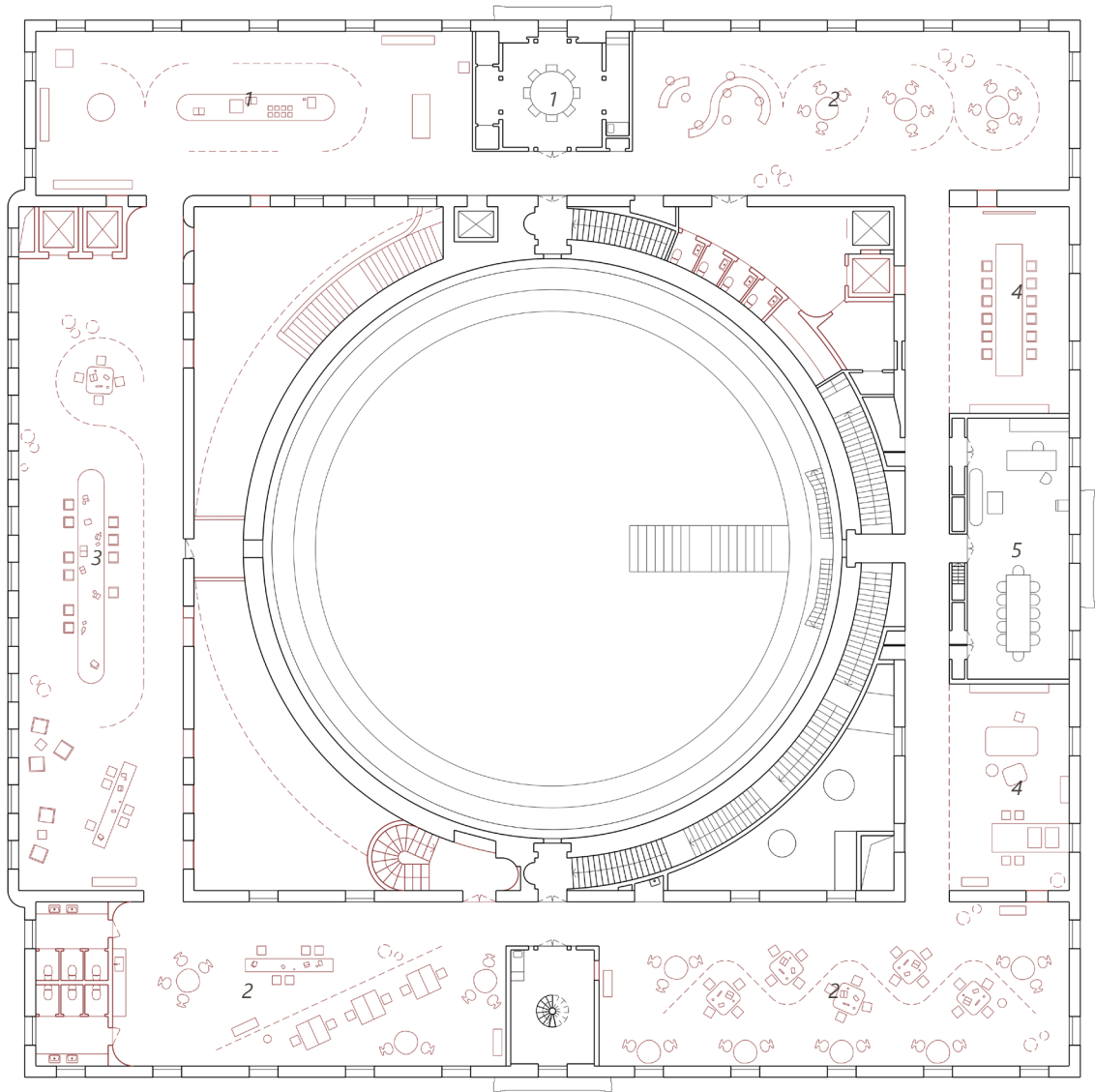


Mezzanines





Top Floor

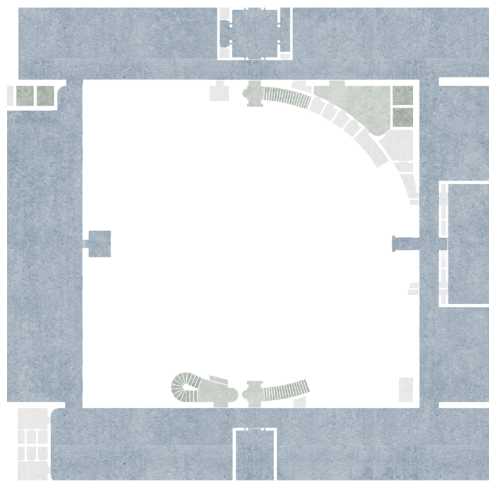
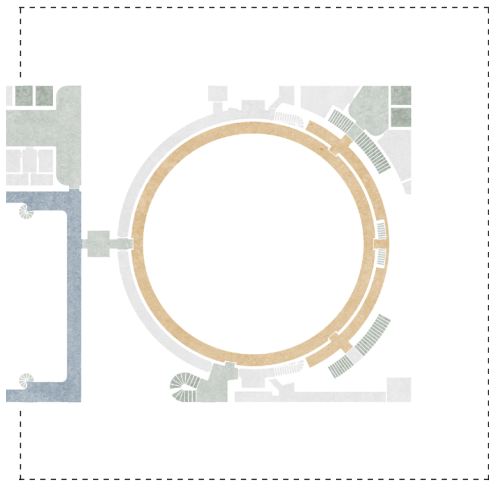
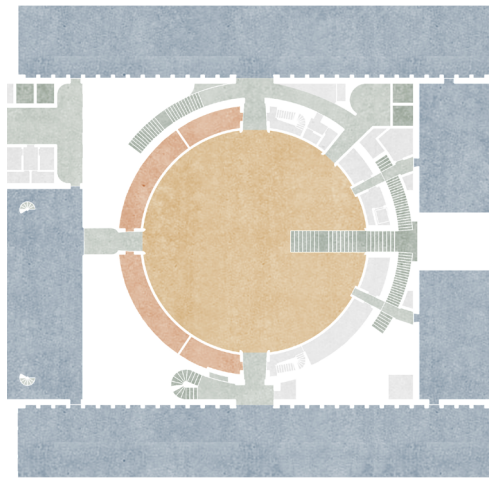
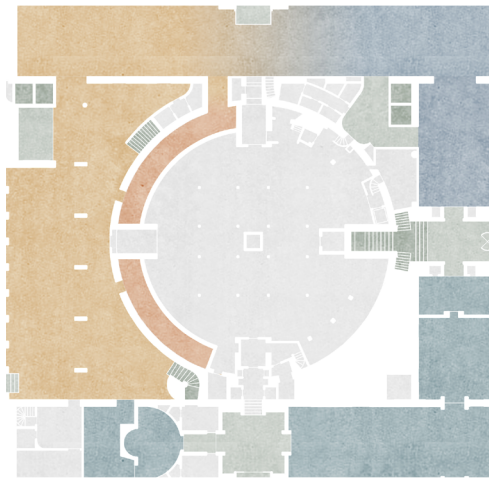


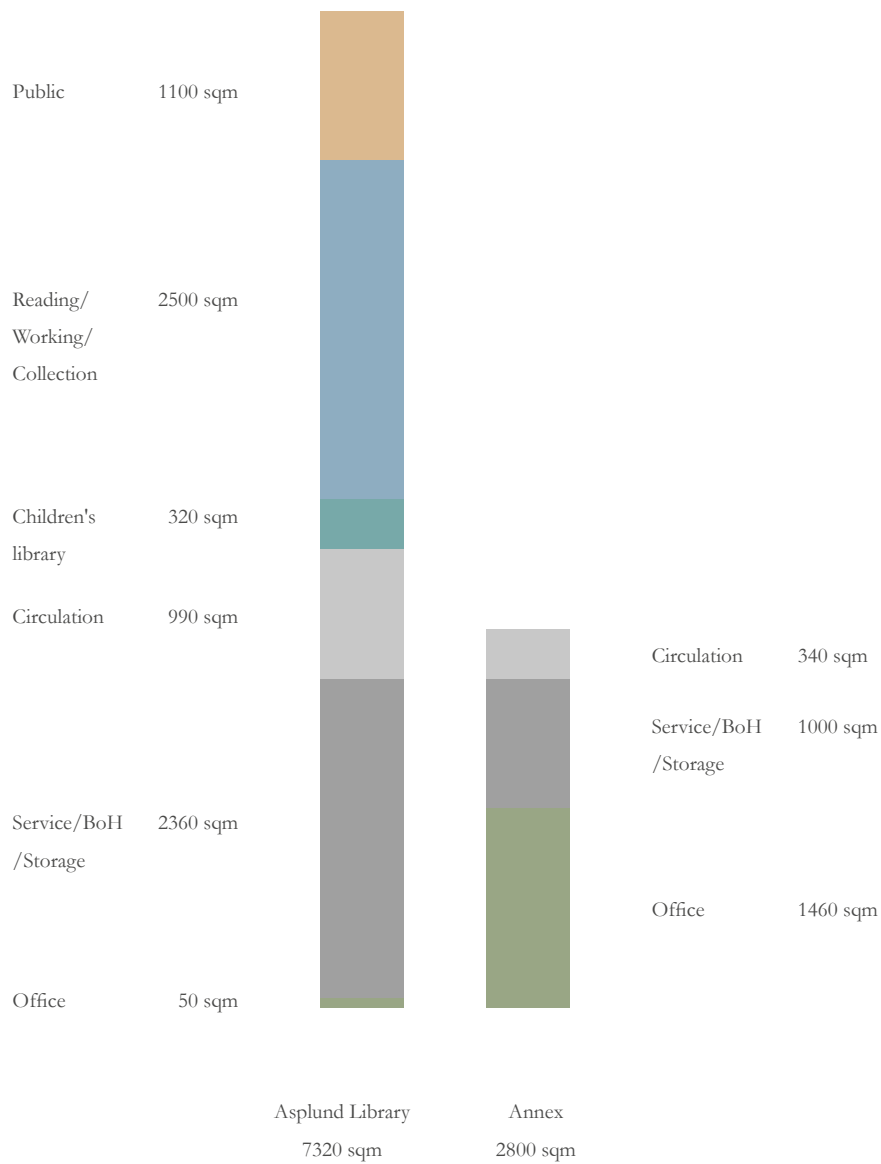
- 1: exhibition
- 2: shared working space
- 3: workshop
- 4: group room/meeting
- 5: meeting

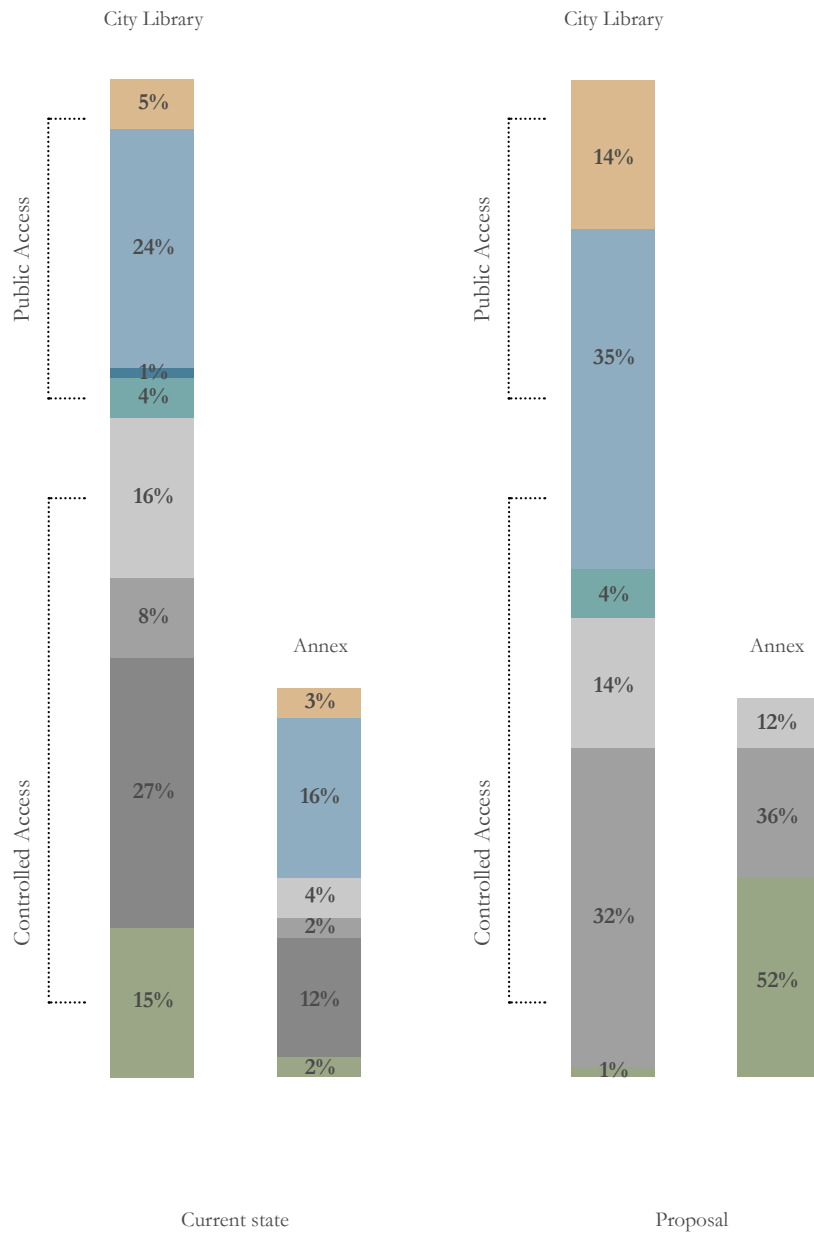


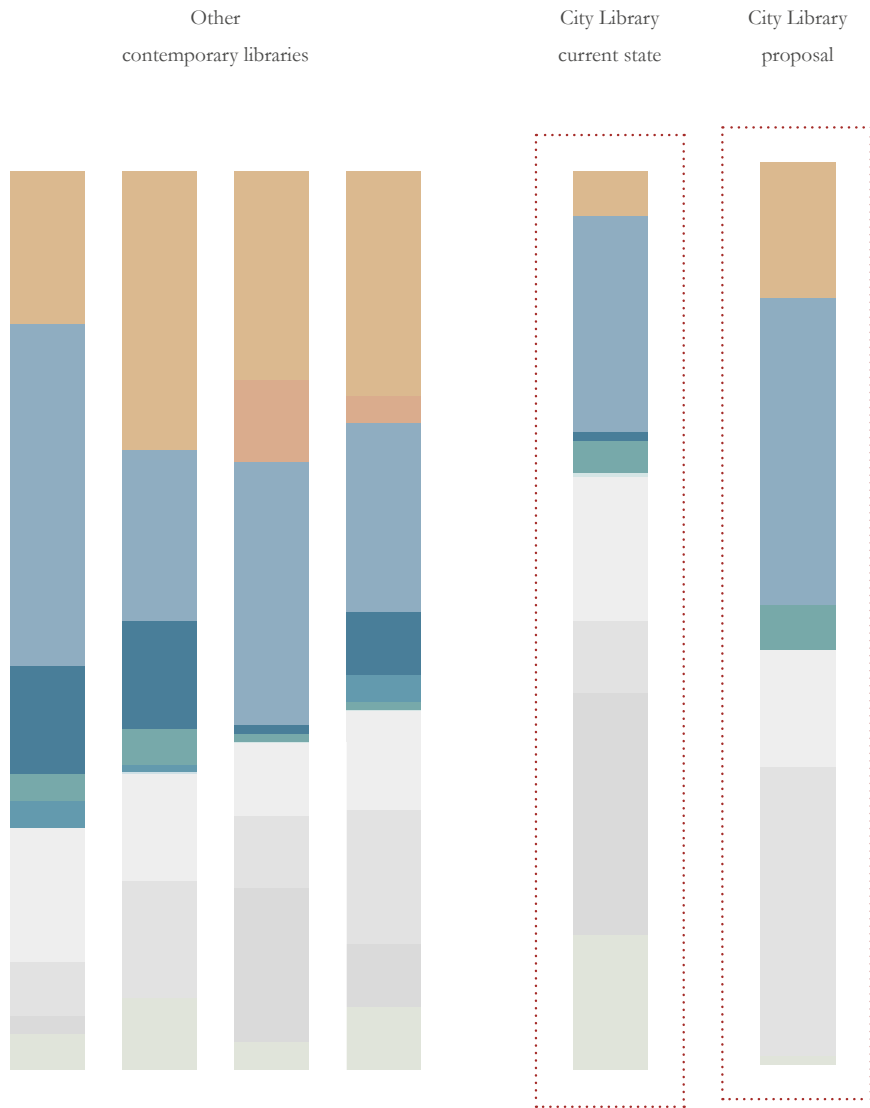


The Re-balanced Library









The Fourth Dimension





















Reflections

Libraries, *the Library*, and Current Issues

Libraries' roles evolve throughout time. Back then, "visiting the library" was a knowledge-acquisition ritual. Nowadays, however, public libraries have transformed from places devoted to "books and study" into open and expectation-free environments, embracing issues of equality and multiculturalism.

The Stockholm City Library, designed in 1928 by the renowned Swedish architect Gunnar Asplund, was groundbreaking for its day. As the first library in Sweden to welcome the general public, this building has always been a landmark in Stockholm. However, it feels somewhat ambiguous nowadays: the majestic front entrance is juxtaposed with McDonald's and 7-11 stores, the once atmospheric spaces are packed with cooperative-styled furnishings, and the building's monumental architectural language no longer corresponds to the variety of users and activities it currently accommodates.

There have been iterations of architectural debates on how this library should adapt itself as a contemporary public space: in 2006, a competition on expanding the City Library attracted entries from all over the world, yet most of these projects showed no consideration for the existing building; in 2012, a rather conservative brief sought to preserve the library as an architectural monument; in 2014, another competition had an idealised vision of making the City Library accommodating books of all languages; and finally in 2016, Caruso St John Architects was appointed to renovate the building, yet the project never got realised due to complex political reasons. Nowadays, the City Library is the elephant in the room that no one dares to touch, as an elderly from the last century, staring blankly at today's polarised society.

The Graduation Studio

As a graduation studio, we will each develop a proposal for Stockholm Library, exploring how this remarkable legacy can be transformed into a contemporary library in response to its current and future challenges. The previous competition in 2006 asked for a rapid expansion. The later brief in 2014, on the other hand, did not have prescribed areas but left it for the architect to decide how they might optimise the existing, to accommodate the original intentions, but in a more flexible manner, while also proposing that various elements could be reduced or removed. By testing and critiquing these briefs, we will develop our own attitude towards the Stockholm City Library, with the detailed programmes in respect to how we reconcile with the quality of the existing architecture.

The Process: Research – Design

The research and design processes were intertwined and influenced one another. In the beginning, we conducted research as a studio group on the past and present conditions of the Stockholm City Library, other works by Asplund, and other contemporary library buildings. Later, as I was developing my design, I also researched the functions and adjacencies of contemporary libraries, the iterations of changes that happened to the City Library over time, Asplund's approach to building with landscape, and the technical aspects and materiality of the existing.

The notion of "the layer time" was established quite early, especially aftering the site visit to Stockholm and seeing the contrast between past and present conditions of Asplund's works. As I stated in my research plan for P1:

This highlights two aspects to consider: people and time. How do various groups of users interact with the library at the same time? Will they have different encounters with this library over a more extended period? Furthermore, how can a contemporary library adapt to this ever-changing nature of society and culture? And how will the architectural interventions of the Stockholm City Library respond to all these?

Asplund, at his time, could not foresee today's drastic changes in socioeconomic and cultural context. Similarly, we cannot predict how the role of a library will evolve in the future. Therefore, we must be aware that our current architectural proposal may not be the ultimate solution."

After researching the functions and adjacencies of other contemporary libraries compared to the City Library, I noticed that this library has a disproportionately low percentage of areas accessible to the public, as a lot of the space is taken by redundant circulations. In addition, the monochrome character of reading spaces and the overly dominant role of the Rotunda in visitors' routing also result in the monumental, institutional feeling of the library, which mismatches people's expectations for a contemporary library.

This leads to a fundamental step in my design decision: *Do we really need to build a new library?* The City Library is in its current condition mainly because it lacked strategic intervention over the past few decades: people simply added things as needed. If we erect another building next to it as required without addressing the library's current concerns, this new expansion will quickly become another burden.

After making this decision at P2, the following design process seemed in general relatively smooth to me. The subsequent research came along as I narrowed down my design focus and further supported my design decisions.

Recording my process chronologically in the project journal was really beneficial to my design. I constantly have many thoughts and images in my head, and when I put them together in the book, it allows me to grasp those that appear repeatedly: the things I truly care about, even if I am not conscious of them. I hate putting my thoughts in nicely written words because I will lose them once I start phrasing the sentences. Therefore, I prefer keywords, short phrases and illustrations, and I find it helpful to handwrite whatever comes to mind and record it in my journal. Eventually, all these jumbled notions will emerge into a coherent design narrative.

Position

The master's programme in architecture constantly raises the subject of "positioning": How do we position ourselves as designers? How should architecture place itself in a broader environment? The graduation studio of Interiors Buildings Cities focuses on "Palace", referring to complex public interiors whose societal responsibilities are constantly re-interpreted over time. This project on the Stockholm City Library, in particular, urges us to reconsider the meaning of "libraries" as public spaces today – and in the future – and challenges us to adopt such transformation concerning Asplund's architectural legacy.

This also raises the question of how we, as future architects, deal with the past, present, and future.

The previous competition's intricacy emerged from the architecture and competing interests among the library institution, the municipality, and other political bodies. This project, therefore, seeks to form an opinion on how we treat a heritage building. This is especially relevant for architects nowadays because we need to know what to do with the old to build new.

Sustainability of architecture regards not only the tangible aspects but also the intangible ones. Adding another layer of time, therefore, gives the existing heritage building a new life. Yet, we must be aware that our current architectural proposal may not be, and will never be, the ultimate solution.

Just as a library holds books reflecting layers of human knowledge across time, its architecture bears traces of interpretation from different generations. I think that is the charm of this architectural intervention.





Thank you :)