

COMPLEX PROJECTS

BALANCING TRUST

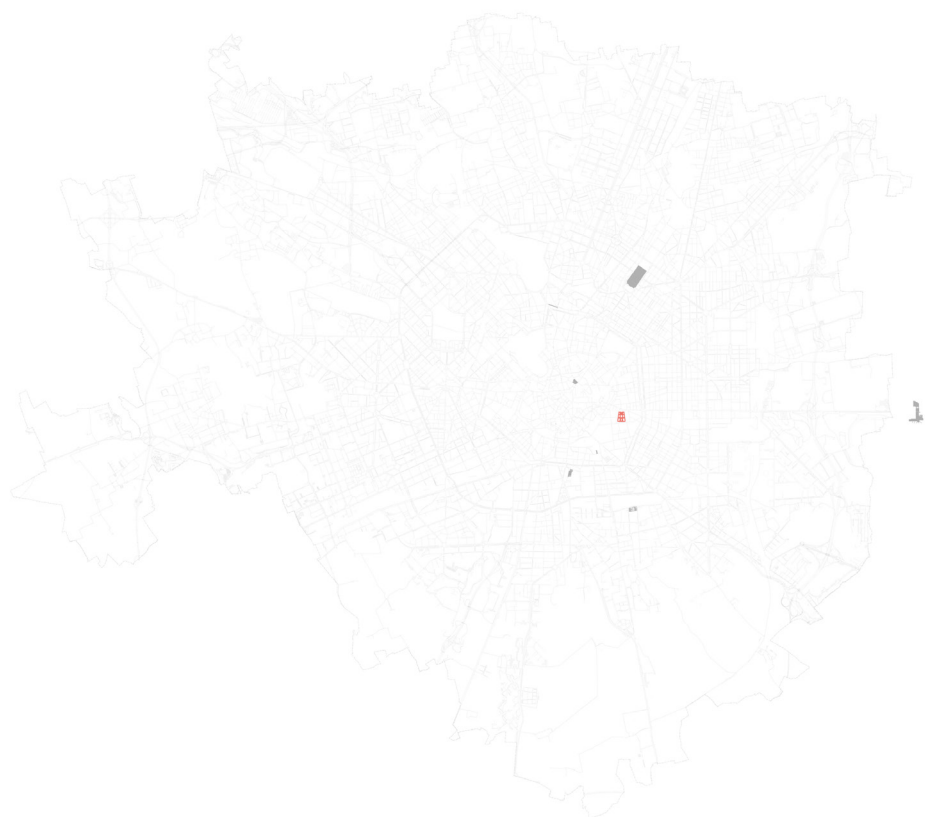
Courthouse Project in Milan



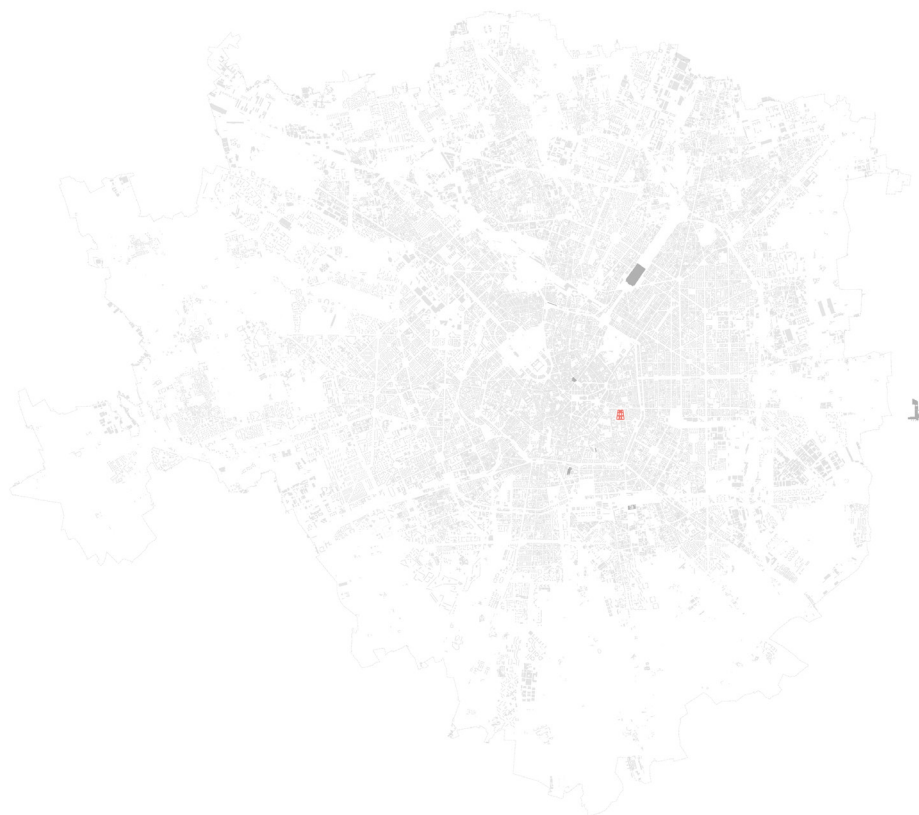
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Plot Location



INTRODUCTION

01



Palazzo di Giustizia, Milan, 1932-1940 Marcello Piacentini

Courthouses have historically reflected the power structures and societal values of their time, as seen in Italy's 20th-century architecture. Following Mussolini's rise to dictatorship in 1925, the regime employed various instruments of state control - police, military, and legislative measures - to reinforce its authority. This era, marked by a climate of force and punishment, influenced the architectural landscape, particularly the construction of civic buildings. Among these is the monumental Palace of Justice (Palazzo di Giustizia), built between 1932 and 1940 in central Milan. Designed by the politically influential architect Marcello Piacentini, this building was not only the largest constructed in Milan during the inter-war period but also served as a symbol of fascist power and central secured authority. Its construction reflected the regime's desire to demonstrate strength and control, especially in a city that held considerable wealth and security influence, which posed a threat to the authority of Rome.

This research plan focuses on the intricate relationship between courthouse design and its broader social implications. A courthouse is not just a building where legal proceedings occur; it is a civic institution that embodies the principles of security and community engagement. Functioning as the physical manifestation of the judicial system, courthouses play a crucial role in upholding the safe rule of law and ensuring that justice is accessible to all. These architectural structures are characterized by their grandeur and symbolic significance, often featuring security designs that communicates authority and stability. Courthouses serve as prominent landmarks within a city, reflecting the beliefs, priorities, and aspirations of the communities they represent.

Modern courthouse design seeks to strike a balance between this need for security and the growing demand for accessibility. A courthouse is not merely a venue for legal proceedings; it is a civic space meant to uphold justice, inclusivity, and public trust. Contemporary courthouses are therefore designed to communicate authority and stability while remaining open and accessible to the public, reflecting an evolution from past models of intimidation and exclusivity. As prominent civic landmarks, these buildings aim to be both symbols of the justice system and welcoming spaces that foster community engagement.

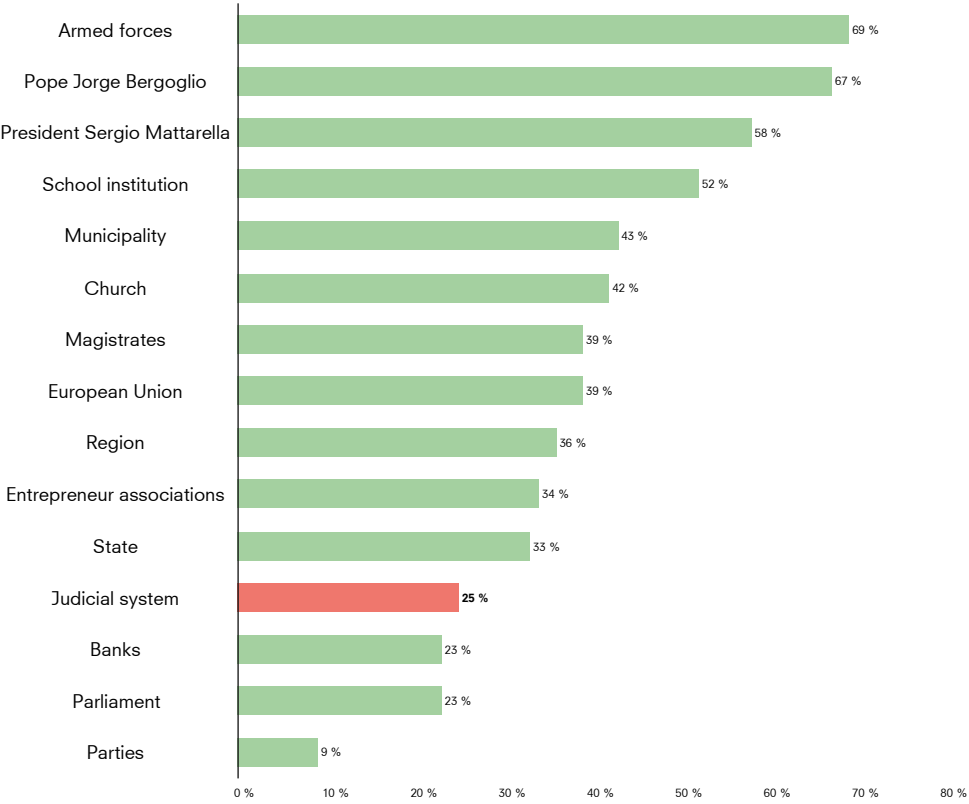
This research plan will lead to an exploration of how the design and function of courthouses have evolved. By analyzing contemporary courthouse projects alongside historical examples like the Palazzo di Giustizia, this study aims to uncover the complexities of courthouse design as a reflection of safety, secureness, and the ongoing dialogue between accessibility and the justice system.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

02

This research plan will use the Palace of Justice (Palazzo di Giustizia) in Milan as a primary reference, focusing on its dual role as a secure, large-scale courthouse and a public civic space. While analyzing this monumental building within its historical and architectural context, we aim to delve into how its design balances security with accessibility and the implications this balance has for those who enter its halls. Constructed during Mussolini’s dictatorship, the Palazzo di Giustizia embodies the era’s emphasis on authority and control, with its imposing architecture serving as a visible symbol of state power.

Italy faces a significant challenge in restoring public trust in its judicial system, with only 25% of citizens expressing confidence in it. This distrust stems from a complex history involving mafia influence, corruption scandals like “Mani Pulite,” and frequent judicial reforms. Historically, civic buildings were designed as monumental and imposing structures to symbolize the authority and power of municipal institutions, using heavy materials, grand entrances, and lofty spaces to convey gravity and permanence.



<https://www.statista.com/statistics/594561/level-of-public-trust-in-institutions-italy/>

“Court security is a balance. A courthouse is a place where people are supposed to come to find justice” (Murez, 2005)

This approach can easily lead to a thin line between respect and fear. In today’s society, where citizens are more interested in finding representation, inclusiveness, and openness within all of their institutions, the courthouses must be designed more open and inviting than dominating. That sets up the two-part problem of keeping the courthouse free-flowing to provide access and transparency for the public, yet still meeting harsh security requirements for preventing accidents and attacks. These competing priorities will need to be balanced, and the main focus of the project will be devising creative solutions in spatial planning, circulation design, and the integration of architectural elements to engender trust, safety, and public engagement.

This research will explore how the building’s formidable scale and design elements communicate authority while assessing the impact these choices have on accessibility for all users, including defendants, lawyers, staff, and the public. We seek to investigate how elements of monumentality and security shape the public’s perception of justice and contribute to the emotional experience within the space. For instance, does the design foster an intimidating atmosphere, or does it also provide accessible, welcoming elements that affirm civic inclusion and transparency?

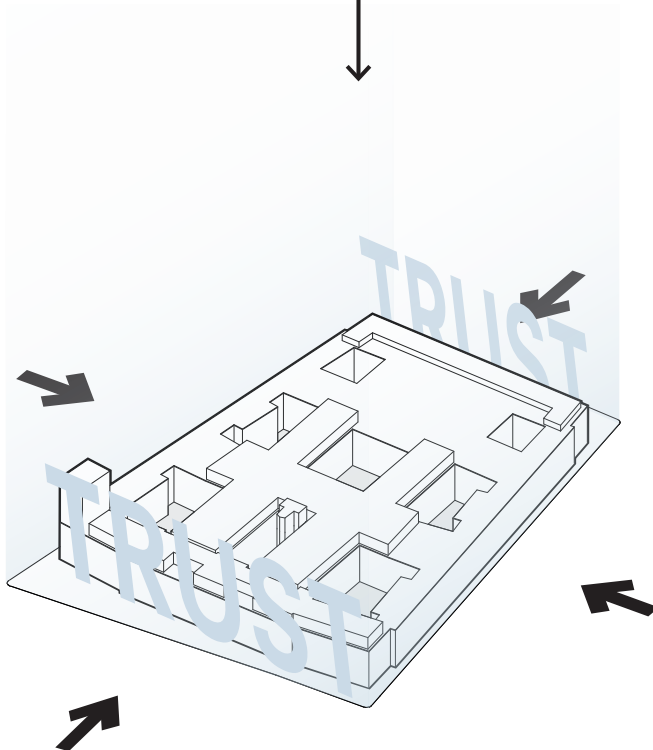
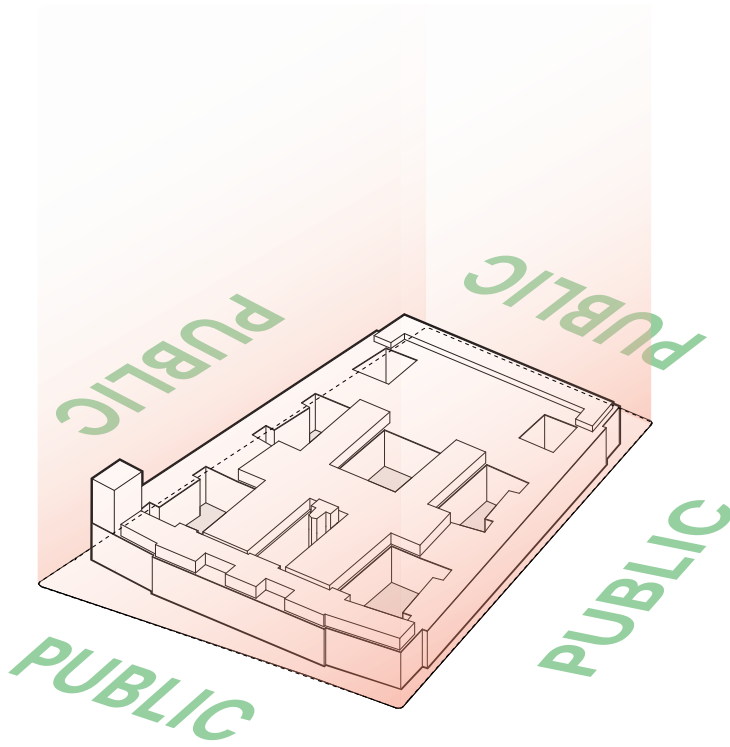
By examining layers of symbolism, structural layout, and security features, we aim to understand how the architecture of the Palazzo di Giustizia balances the need for safety with the goal of creating a space that is accessible and open to the community.

In the understandable move to raise the bar for court security, however, little formal evaluation has been conducted of the effects of heightened security on court operations or court users, including judges, litigants, lawyers, jurors, and the general public. To be sure, the effects of security measures may be an informal component of the decision to purchase a new security system or adopt new security protocols. Given the special nature of the judiciary as an open arbiter for the general public, the measures must be adopted by the courts to protect themselves and their users.

Exploring the rejection of the trivialization of courthouses and the fear of too much likeness with office buildings, coupled with the increasing judicialization of society, which undermines its exceptional symbolic weight, are compelling the judicial institution to envision a new evolution in courthouse design, shifting towards modern spaces that achieve optimal performance while possessing a contemporary monumentality that restores the sense and sacred dimension of the “time of justice.”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

03



This research will utilize several key theoretical perspectives to inform the architectural analysis:

- Architecture of Fear (Nan Ellin, editor):

Multiplication and Subdivision: A Paradox of Danger and Safety (Jane Garrison): Garrison's concept will help explore the paradoxical nature of courthouse spaces, where designs must accommodate both danger (through security measures) and safety (by promoting public openness). The courthouse must simultaneously subdivide space to manage risks and multiply access points to ensure public inclusion.

Walls of Fear and Walls of Support (Peter Marcuse): Marcuse's analysis will contribute to understanding how courthouse walls function not only as physical barriers for security but also as psychological symbols. Some walls generate fear and exclusion, while others provide support, reinforcing a sense of safety and inclusion for public users.

- Habermas and the Public Sphere (Jürgen Habermas):

The public sphere is seen as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed. (Habermas, 1991, 398) It can be seen as the breeding ground if you want. Habermas declares several aspects as vital for the public sphere. Mainly it is open to all citizens and constituted in every conversation in which individuals come together to form a public. The citizen plays the role of a private person who is not acting on behalf of a business or private interests but one who is dealing with matters of general interest to form a public sphere. This will explore how courthouse architecture enables public participation and trust in judicial processes by creating transparent, accessible spaces.

- Practical Guidelines from Courthouse Planning (www.ncsc.org/courthouseplanning/the-courthouse):

This resource from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) will guide the practical aspects of courthouse design, focusing on how space can be organized to support security, accessibility, and functionality. It provides essential insights into courthouse layout, security zoning, and public circulation, grounding the research in both theoretical and applied contexts.

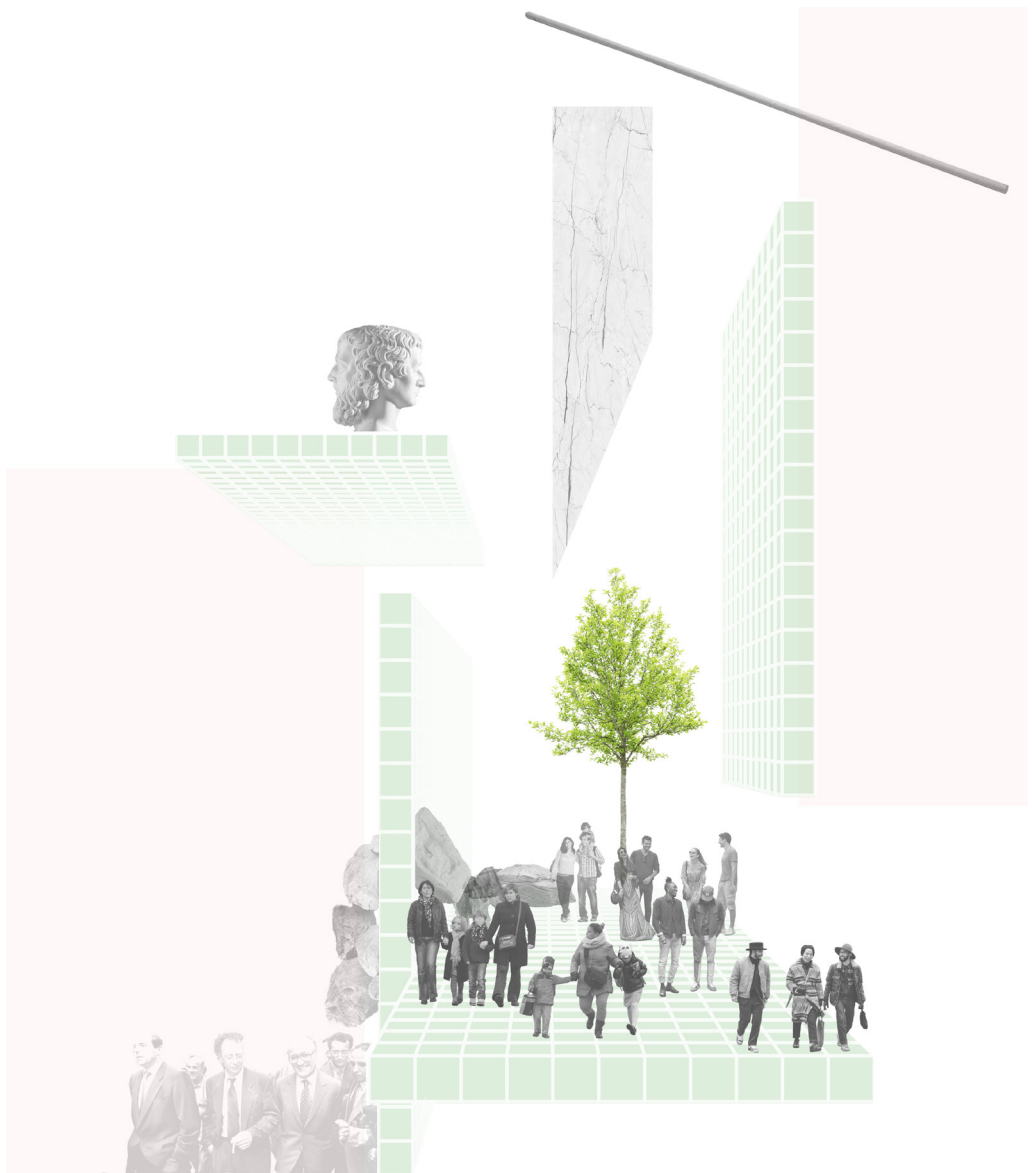
Courthouse design can incorporate transparency while simultaneously maintaining essential security measures by employing strategic architectural elements that balance openness with safety. The visual transparency of courthouse spaces significantly influences public perception and trust in the justice system, as open and welcoming environments can enhance confidence in judicial processes. Design strategies can be implemented to ensure that courthouse architecture conveys a sense of dignity while remaining approachable to the general public, fostering a welcoming atmosphere for all users. Additionally, modern courthouse layouts effectively manage flow and circulation to support security needs while ensuring public accessibility, creating a harmonious balance between safeguarding the judicial process and serving the community.

RESEARCH QUESTION

04



**HOW CAN THE COURTHOUSE BALANCE
ACCESSIBILITY AND SECURITY
TO FOSTER PUBLIC TRUST IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM?**



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ACCESSIBILITY AND SECURITY
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METHODOLOGY

05



AL-REGGAE AND AL-JAHRA COURT COMPLEXES - KUWAIT
103,000 M²



CALGARY COURTS CENTRE - CANADA
92,903 M²



NEW SUPREME COURT BUILDING - SINGAPORE
66,000 M²



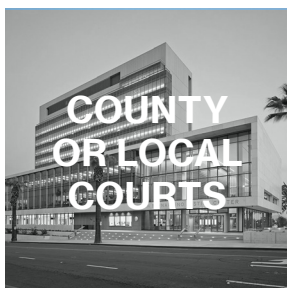
VICTORIAN COUNTY COURT - AUSTRALIA
52,000 M²



ROMA MITCHELL COMMONWEALTH - AUSTRALIA
22,000 M²



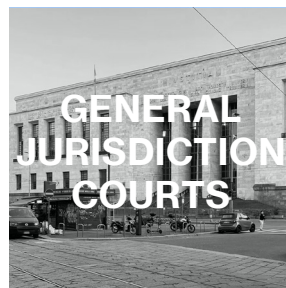
BROOKLYN SUPREME AND FAMILY - USA
78,967 M²



SAN BERNARDINO COURTHOUSE - USA
35,861 M²



COURTHOUSE AMSTERDAM - THE NETHERLANDS
50,000 M²



PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA - ITALY
161,000 M²

The research will adopt a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data to explore how courthouse designs affect security, openness, and public trust. The methods include:

- **Case Studies:** A comparative analysis of courthouse designs in Italy and other countries, focusing on spatial organization, public accessibility, and security protocols. The research will include a comparative analysis of notable large-scale courthouses to examine architectural and symbolic challenges in contemporary courthouse design. Case studies will include:

United States Courthouse in Phoenix - USA
 Supreme Court of Singapore - Singapore
 San Bernardino Courthouse - USA
 Brooklyn Supreme and Family Courthouse - USA
 Victorian County Court - Australia
 Roma Mitchell Commonwealth Law Courts - Australia
 Calgary Courts Center - Canada
 Al-Reggae and Al-Jahra Court Complexes - Kuwait
 Amsterdam Courthouse - Netherlands

Palazzo di Giustizia in Florence - Italy

- **Interviews and Surveys:** Gathering perspectives from architects, courthouse officials, and the general public allows for a well-rounded assessment of courthouse design and functionality. This qualitative data can reveal insights into how various stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of design elements, the importance of transparency, and the relationship between design and public trust in the justice system.

- **Site Analysis and Observation:** Conducting on-site evaluations of courthouse flow and circulation will provide empirical data on how well current designs accommodate security measures while ensuring accessibility. This observational approach can identify potential inefficiencies in the physical layout and suggest improvements that enhance user experience.

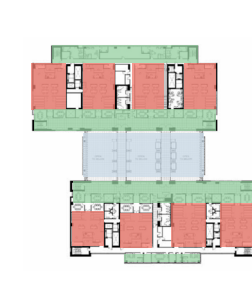
- **Architectural Plan Analysis:** Critically reviewing architectural designs in terms of flow, transparency, and space allocation enables you to assess their effectiveness systematically. This analysis will help determine whether existing designs meet the needs of users and stakeholders, and how they align with contemporary standards for courthouse functionality and aesthetics.

- **Historical Analysis:** Examining the evolution of courthouse architecture will contextualize current design practices within a broader historical framework. Understanding how architectural styles and functions have changed over time can reveal shifts in societal values, security needs, and access to justice, informing future design decisions that reflect current demands.

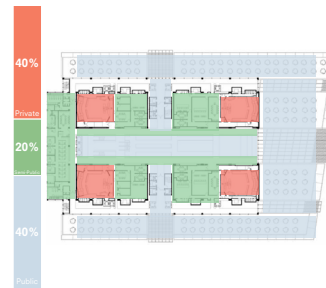
- **Italian Judicial System Analysis:** Investigating the challenges faced by the Italian judicial system, particularly the prolonged duration of proceedings, will highlight the critical need for



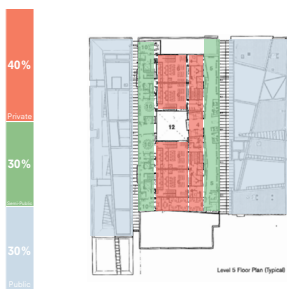
AL-REGGAE AND AL-JAHRA COURT COMPLEXES - KUWAIT
103,000 M²



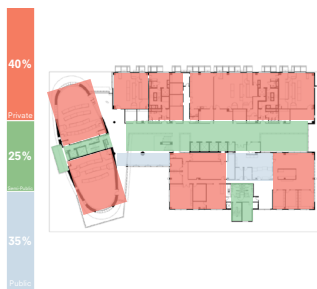
CALGARY COURTS CENTRE - CANADA
92,903 M²



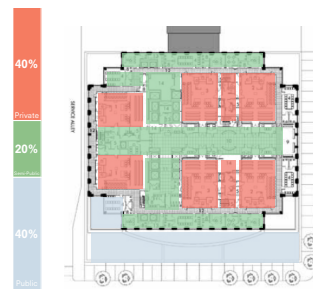
NEW SUPREME COURT BUILDING - SINGAPORE
66,000 M²



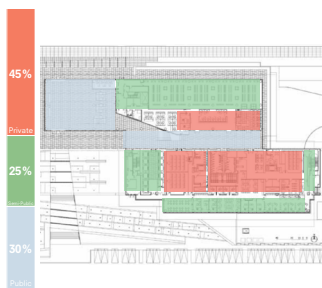
VICTORIAN COUNTY COURT - AUSTRALIA
52,000 M²



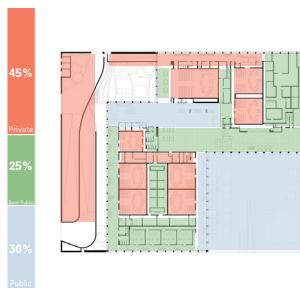
ROMA MITCHELL COMMONWEALTH - AUSTRALIA
22,000 M²



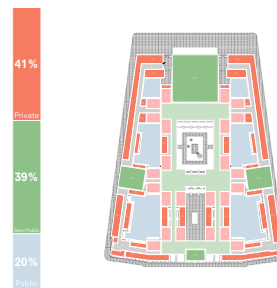
BROOKLYN SUPREME AND FAMILY - USA
75,967 M²



SAN BERNARDINO COURTHOUSE - USA
35,861 M²



COURTHOUSE AMSTERDAM - THE NETHERLANDS
50,000 M²

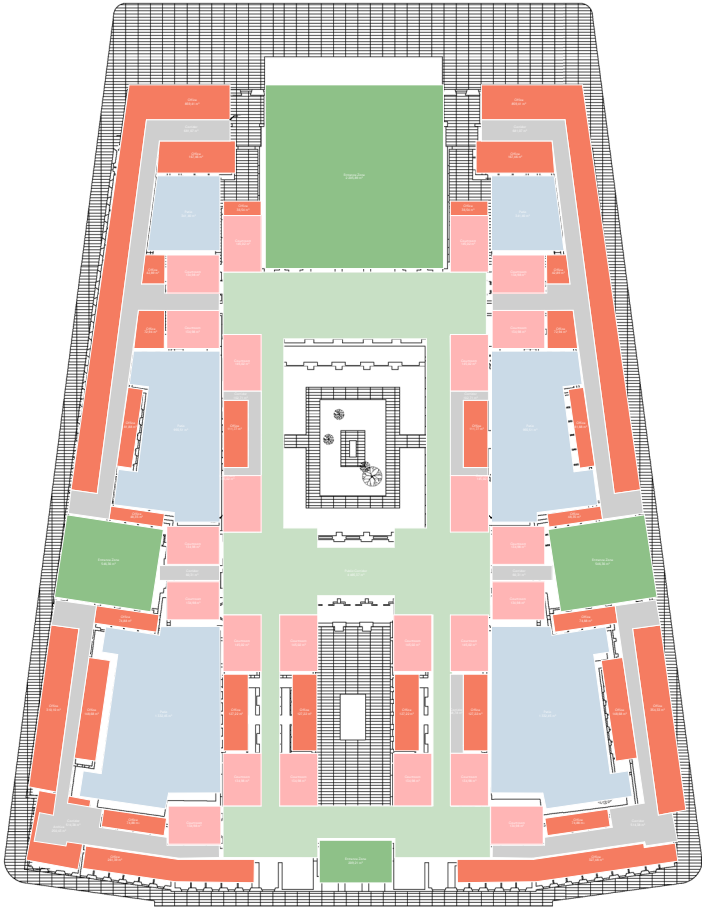


PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA - ITALY
161,000 M²

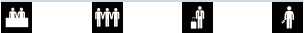
By focusing on these elements, the research will assess the implications of courthouse design on the Italian judicial system's efficiency and effectiveness. The findings will aim to inform future architectural projects, ensuring they align with the goals of the NRRP and contribute to a more accessible and responsive legal environment. Ultimately, this research will highlight the critical intersection between judicial processes and the built environment, offering insights that can shape the future of courthouse design in Italy.

DESIGN BRIEF

06



PUBLIC



SEMI-PUBLIC



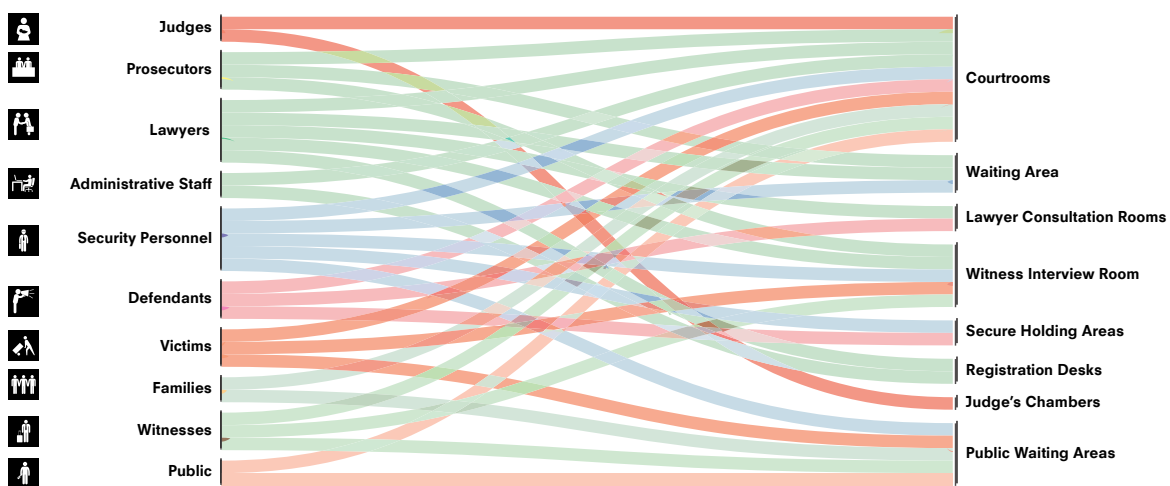
PRIVATE



1. Current Situation

reinforcing a sense of exclusivity and separation from public engagement. The mirrored floor plan places offices along the street-facing side and courtrooms toward the patio side, creating a rigid and formal spatial organization. Despite the incorporation of contemporary security measures, such as clear sightline management, adequate setbacks, visible barrier systems, blast-resistant construction, integrated security features at four entry zones, and controlled access points distributed along two main public corridors, these elements do little to address the building's fundamental shortcomings in accessibility and user experience.

The Palazzo di Giustizia also features seven expansive patios that primarily serve as parking lots, which, despite their size, contribute minimally to the building's relationship with the public realm. These patios, devoid of aesthetic or functional integration with public spaces, further emphasize the disconnection between the courthouse and the surrounding urban environment. The monumental scale and excessively long, enclosed corridors add to the sense of intimidation and inaccessibility, making the building unwelcoming and unpleasant for visitors. Meanwhile, the large entry hall, which should ideally serve as an active public space, remains perpetually empty and underutilized, failing to provide a sense of openness or civic engagement. At one corner of the building stands a special archive tower, which, despite its prominence, is largely inaccessible, underscoring the broader lack of user-centered design throughout the complex.

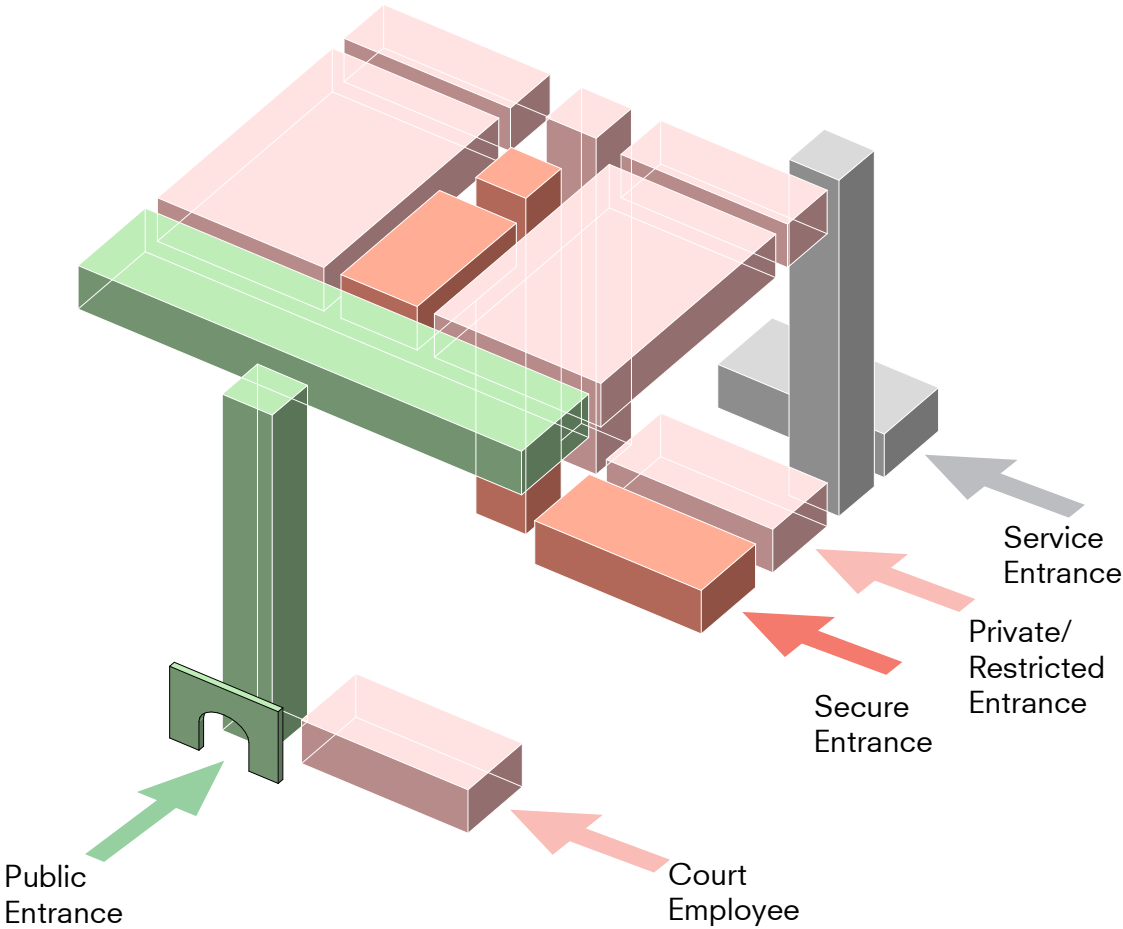


2. Challenges

The future design of the Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan faces significant challenges in balancing accessibility and security, while also addressing public perception and institutional functionality. One of the critical tasks will be redesigning the flow of different users—such as judges, lawyers, defendants, and the public—to ensure their paths do not intersect before trial. The current layout, with its rigid and segregated routes, achieves this separation but at the expense of accessibility and transparency. Reimagining these flows to maintain the necessary security and privacy while creating a more user-friendly environment will be a complex but essential undertaking.

The monumentality of the building adds another layer of difficulty. Its imposing scale, characterized by long, enclosed corridors and an austere design, contributes to a sense of inaccessibility and intimidation. Reducing this sense of monumentality without compromising the seriousness and authority of the institution will be a delicate balance. Opening up corridors, introducing natural light, and integrating interconnected functions that encourage interaction and usability will be crucial steps toward regaining public trust. By creating spaces that feel more welcoming and transparent while preserving the dignity and gravitas of the courthouse, the building can foster a stronger connection with the community.

Ultimately, balancing these elements requires a design that is forward-thinking yet respectful of the courthouse's role as a symbol of justice.



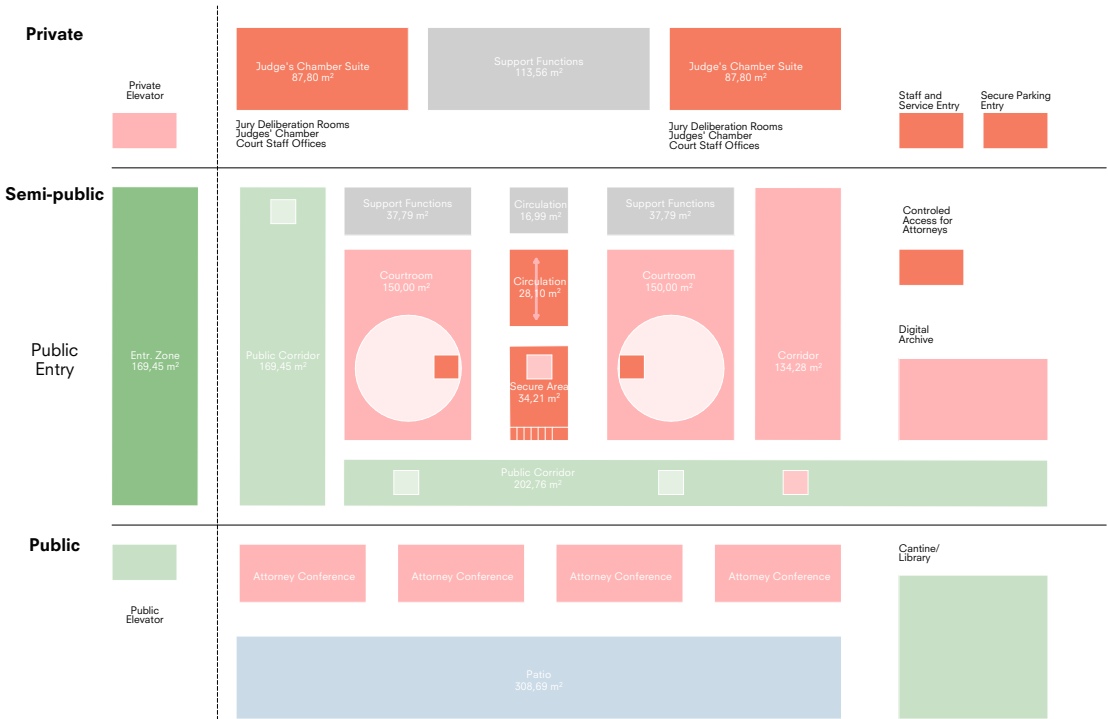
The 3 circulation system in the courthouse building

3. Client Ambitions

The client's ambitions for the redesign of the Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan reflect a multifaceted approach to addressing security, accessibility, and public trust while embracing modern standards. A key priority is ensuring the security of three distinct access routes, clearly delineating the building into public, semi-public, and private zones with secure entrances tailored to each category. These zones must be designed to facilitate seamless, controlled movement, preventing unauthorized access and ensuring that user groups, such as the public, judiciary, and defendants, remain separate yet unobstructed in their respective paths.

The client envisions a modern courthouse that champions accessibility by adhering to universal design principles, ensuring inclusive and equitable access for all users, regardless of ability. The goal is to create spaces that are easy to navigate, intuitive, and welcoming, counteracting the intimidating monumentality of the current design.

Security is to be maintained through innovative layout strategies and discreet safety measures that integrate seamlessly into the architectural design without overwhelming the space or detracting from its functionality. This will involve leveraging modern technologies to secure entry points, monitor movement, and manage access across zones while preserving the courthouse's seriousness and institutional gravitas.



4. Relation Scheme

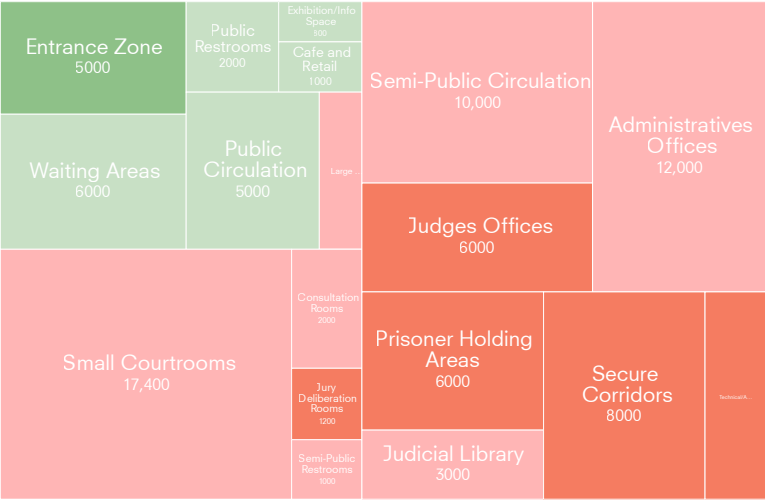
The relation scheme divides the Palazzo di Giustizia into three main zones—public, semi-public, and private—with controlled access points tailored for specific user groups to ensure security and clear separation of functions.

Public Zone: This includes public entries, public elevators, corridors, and spaces accessible to the general public, such as waiting areas and attorney conference rooms. These zones are designed to be welcoming, accessible, and user-friendly, fostering trust and transparency.

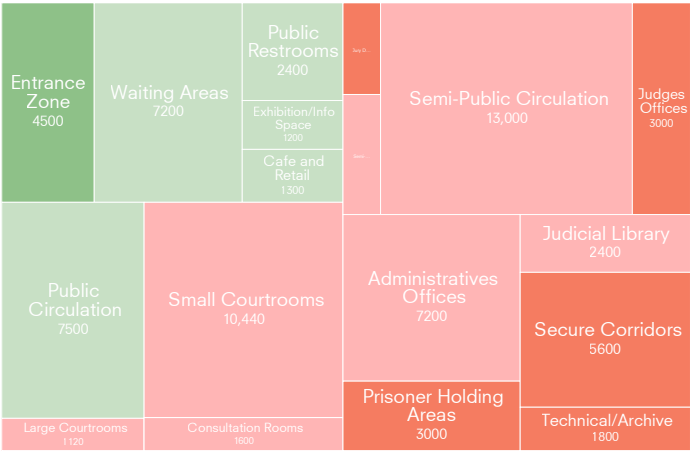
Semi-Public Zone: This intermediary area includes spaces like cantines, libraries, and certain support functions. These zones are accessible to specific authorized personnel, such as attorneys or administrative staff, and serve as transitional spaces between public and private areas.

Private Zone: This highly secured area comprises judges' chambers, jury deliberation rooms, court staff offices, and other sensitive spaces such as private elevators and secure parking entries. These zones are designed to ensure privacy, safety, and confidentiality for court proceedings and personnel.

The design ensures that security and privacy are maintained through controlled circulation and well-defined access points, while public and semi-public zones remain accessible, enhancing functionality and inclusivity.



PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA: 91,000 SQM

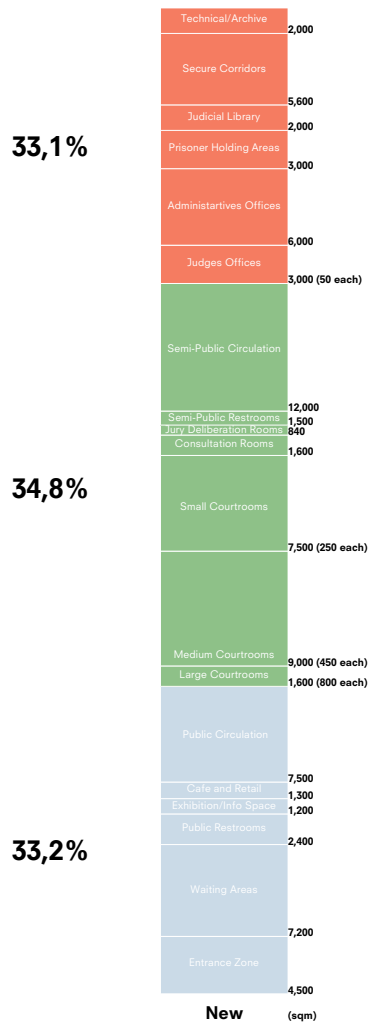
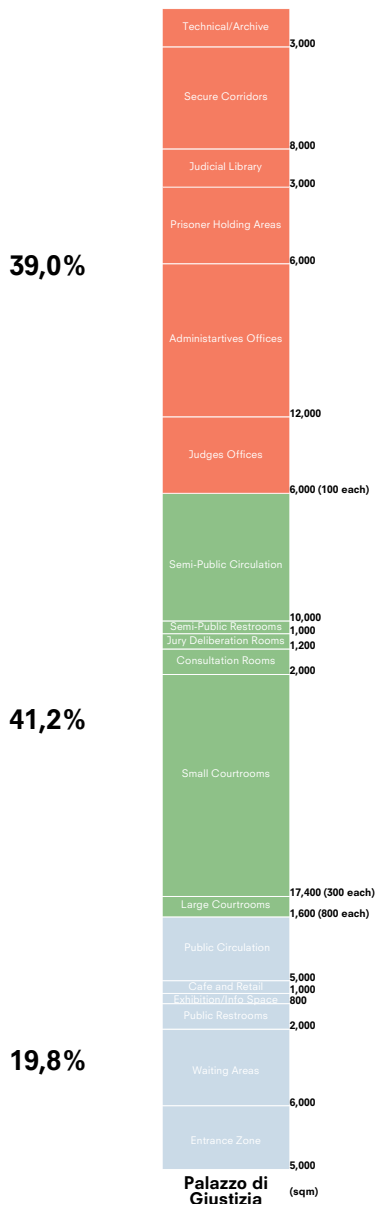


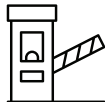
NEW PROPOSAL REDUCED DUE TO PUBLIFICATION AND DIGITALIZATION: 75,200 SQM

5. Fostering Public Trust

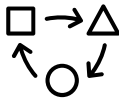
Fostering public trust begins with a fundamental rethinking of the Palazzo di Giustizia's scale and layout. By making the building smaller, achieved through improved circulation, digital integration, and the creation of multifunctional or temporary-use rooms, the design can become more approachable and efficient. A reduced physical footprint not only enhances accessibility but also symbolizes a shift towards transparency and inclusivity. Transparent elements, such as glass partitions in public areas, will visually communicate openness and accountability, reinforcing public confidence in the judicial process. Additionally, the inclusion of public educational spaces like judicial libraries and exhibition areas will demystify the legal system, fostering a deeper connection between the institution and the community.

Community engagement spaces designed for workshops and public programs will further strengthen this relationship by promoting active participation and dialogue. Flexible workspaces, featuring adaptive office layouts, will support hybrid working models and encourage collaboration among legal professionals, showcasing a modern, forward-thinking approach to functionality. By scaling down the building and optimizing its layout for accessibility and inclusivity, the courthouse will move away from its current intimidating monumentality, creating an environment that embodies trust, openness, and a commitment to serving the public.





ENHANCED SECURITY MEASURES



FUTURE-PROOFING AND ADAPTABILITY



IMPROVED CIRCULATION AND FLOW

S → S,M,L

RESTRUCTURED COURTROOM TYPES



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



INCREASED PUBLIC SPACE FOR ACCESSIBILITY

6. Reflection

The proposed changes reflect a approach to addressing the challenges of accessibility, functionality, and public trust, tailored to the needs of each zone

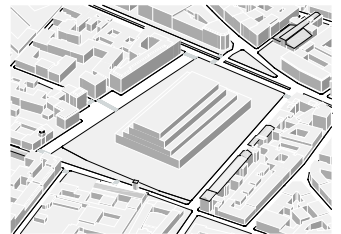
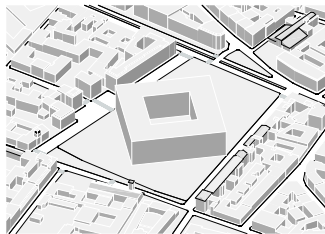
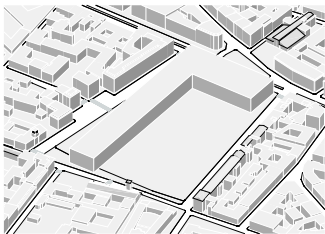
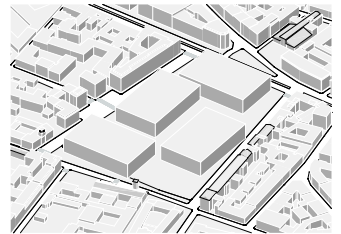
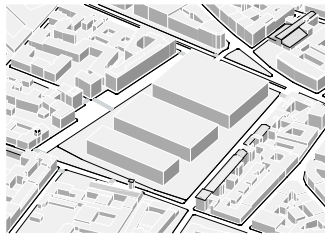
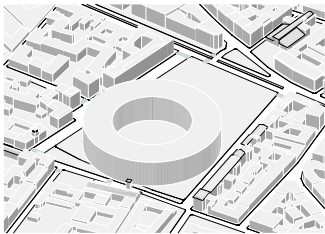
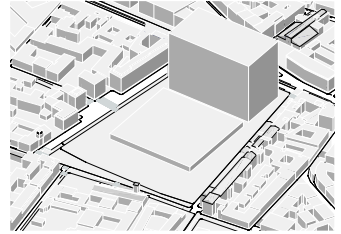
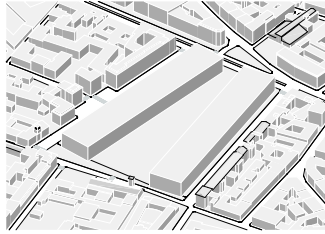
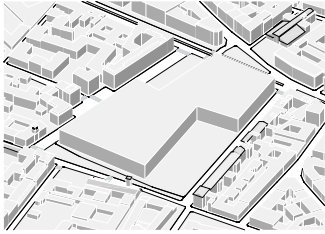
Private: Ensuring the safety of sensitive areas such as judges' chambers, jury deliberation rooms, and court staff offices. These measures will include controlled access points, secure circulation routes, and private elevators. Additionally, the design will emphasize future-proofing by incorporating adaptable layouts and infrastructure capable of accommodating technological advancements and evolving security needs.

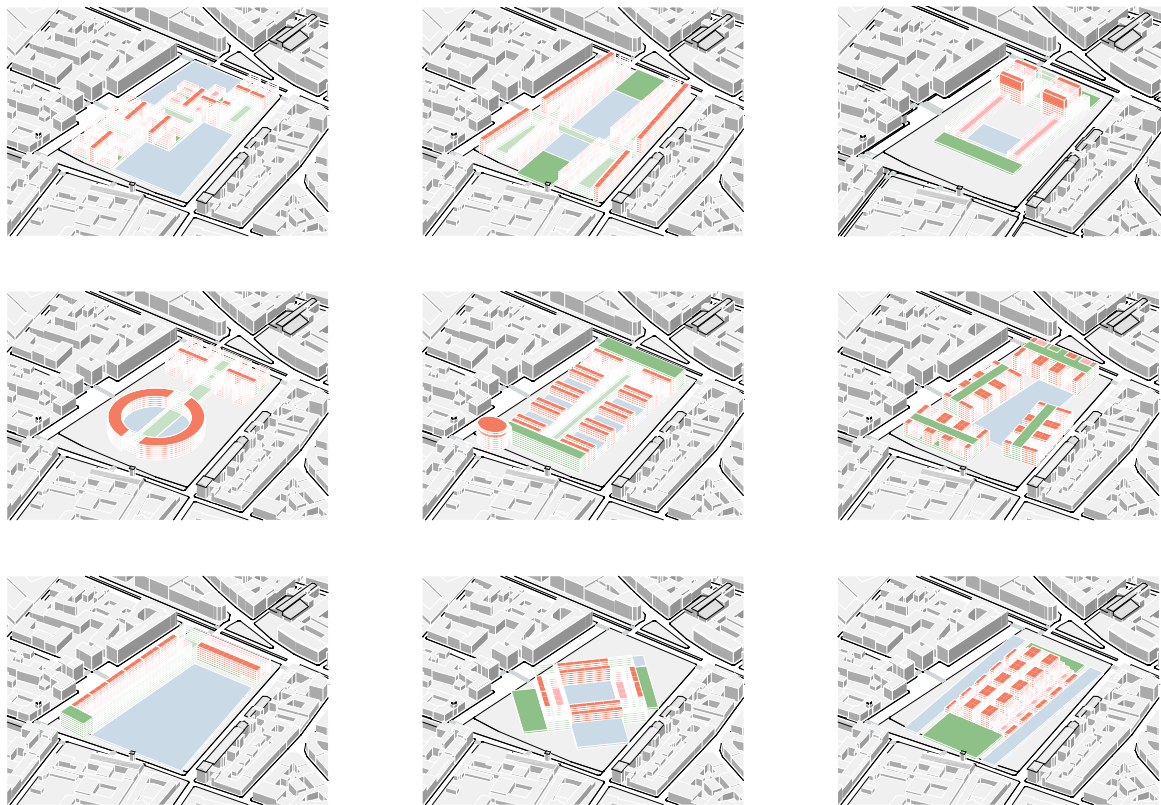
Semi-Public: Improved circulation and flow will redefine the semi-public areas, ensuring seamless movement while maintaining necessary security. A major innovation will be the restructuring of courtroom types, offering small, medium, and large options instead of a uniform one-size-fits-all design. This adaptability will allow the courthouse to meet varying needs efficiently, reducing wasted space and better serving the diverse requirements of different cases.

Public: A focus on community engagement and increased public spaces will transform the courthouse into a more welcoming and accessible institution. By expanding educational and interactive spaces, such as judicial libraries, exhibition areas, and community workshops, the design will foster a stronger connection between the public and the legal system. Transparent architectural elements, along with open and functional public zones, will enhance the building's accessibility and inclusivity.

Room Name	Square Meters_Palazzo di Giustizia	Percentage of Palazzo di Giustizia
Entrance Zone	5000	5,60%
Waiting Areas	6000	6,72%
Public Restrooms	2000	2,24%
Exhibition/Info Space	800	0,90%
Cafe and Retail	1000	1,12%
Public Circulation	5000	5,60%
Large Courtrooms	10000	11,20%
Medium Courtrooms	3000	3,36%
Small Courtrooms	1200	1,34%
Consultation Rooms	2500	2,80%
Jury Deliberation Rooms	10000	11,20%
Semi-Public Restrooms	1600	1,79%
Semi-Public Circulation	17400	19,48%
Judges Offices	1600	1,79%
Administrative Offices	9000	10,08%
Prisoner Holding Areas	7500	8,40%
Judicial Library	2000	2,24%
Secure Corridors	2500	2,80%
Technical/Archive	1200	1,34%
Total (sqm)	89300	

Square Meters_New	Percentage of Total_New	Change in Size (sqm)	Reasons for changing
4500	5,87%	-500	Reduced to optimize space utilization while maintaining functionality.
7200	9,39%	1200	Increased to accommodate larger crowds or improve comfort.
2400	3,13%	400	Expanded to meet higher usage demands.
1200	1,57%	400	Enlarged for better visitor engagement and display flexibility.
1300	1,70%	300	Slight increase to provide more services or seating capacity.
7500	9,79%	2500	Expanded to improve movement and reduce congestion.
9000	11,74%	-1000	Reduced to align with anticipated caseloads or space constraints.
3000	3,91%	0	Maintained as the current size meets operational needs.
1600	2,09%	400	Slightly increased for functionality or ergonomic improvements.
840	1,10%	-1660	Reduced due to optimization of usage or relocation of functions.
1500	1,96%	-8500	Reduced to better fit actual requirements.
12000	15,66%	10400	Increased significantly to enhance accessibility and convenience.
3000	3,91%	-14400	Reduced to optimize layout and minimize unused space.
6000	7,83%	4400	Increased for improved comfort and functionality
3000	3,91%	-6000	Reduced to encourage shared spaces or remote work options.
2000	2,61%	-5500	Decreased to align with updated safety standards or reduced usage.
5600	7,31%	3600	Expanded to accommodate more resources or study areas.
2000	2,61%	-500	Reduced due to better layout or optimized security routes
3000	3,91%	1800	Increased for improved capacity and future storage needs.
76640		-12660	





Program adaptation

RELEVANCE

07

This study will focus on achieving a balance between robust security features and open, welcoming spaces that maintain a connection with the surrounding city. The goal is to prevent the courthouse from becoming isolated or intimidating, instead fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity and transparency.

My research will prioritize the integration of advanced security measures that are discreet yet effective, combined with efficient spatial organization to streamline workflows and improve accessibility. Ultimately, this study will lead to a design proposal for a modern courthouse that upholds security while promoting openness and accessibility—a courthouse that embodies dignity and a progressive approach to justice, meeting the needs of both the judicial system and the communities it serves.



In seeking Finding Architectural Responses to Symbolic and Practical Tensions, I will focus on creating a courthouse that is dynamic—not merely through its physical structure, but by developing an experiential space that engages the public on visual, physical, and psychological levels, all while maintaining a sense of security and authority. In doing so, the architecture of the courthouse must reflect the fluid and nuanced nature of the Department of Justice, offering a space that feels accessible while upholding the institution's dignity and gravitas.

This exploration will include the assertion of a “toned-down” monumentality, the embodiment of justice as care, and the pursuit of exemplarity. Modern courtrooms are no longer the dark, austere places described by Dickens, nor are they furnished in the lavish and majestic splendor of buildings such as the Palais de Justice. Instead, I would like to find out, that why the design of courthouses integrates open pathways, corridors, and glass facades that theoretically symbolize justice, borrowing architectural elements to represent strength and stability.

Moreover, Socially, it tackles the issue of public trust in the judicial system by proposing a design that fosters transparency and accessibility. Professionally, it advances the practice of designing complex public buildings by integrating security and accessibility in a way that is sensitive to both functional and symbolic needs.

Tackling down program relations and users accessibility it in the coming weeks will help guide the integration of these design responses within courthouse layouts, balancing accessibility with stringent security. This exploration will provide insights into creating a welcoming and safe public space, incorporating elements such as intuitive way-finding, secure perimeter setbacks, and trauma-informed areas. By refining these design choices, the aim is to ensure that courthouses remain approachable yet secure, reflecting the judiciary's commitment to both justice and community needs.

**How can the courthouse balance
accessibility and security
to foster public trust in the judicial
system?**

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