



The

Architecture for temporary citizen participation, political education, and democratic experience in The Hague

Design, Data, and Society
Graduation report

Civic

Residence

Supervisors:
Marija Mateljan and
Angela Rout

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Foreword

This report is part of a master's thesis in architecture. It explores how architecture can facilitate civic engagement by bridging the gap between citizens and political institutions, translating societal and democratic challenges into spatial solutions. The project focuses on creating a building that enables immersive participation in the political system, combining educational and practical experiences to foster understanding, trust, and active involvement.

The proposal brings together politicians and citizens from across the country through a 'democratic duty', calling on every Dutch adult once in their life to temporarily participate in the political system. To ensure accessibility, the building provides a state-facilitated stay and is located near major train stations in The Hague, allowing participation regardless of financial or geographic constraints.

Functioning as a bridge between citizens and political institutions, the building hosts briefings, workshops, and educational programs while allowing participants to engage with current political issues directly. Through first-hand experience, citizens gain greater insight into the democratic system and develop a stronger sense of connection to political institutions, aiming to increase their trust and understanding of the system. The architectural proposal is supported by research and speculative design methods that address the main research question and related sub-questions explored throughout this thesis.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

1.1.1 The problem

Democracy is not a given. The latest data about the democratic state of the world shows that more countries declined in democracy level than those that increased (Freedom House, 2024). Throughout the world, there is a varying amount of trust for institution, stable in some countries, volatile in others (Eurofound, 2018). The same can be said for the increasing political polarization (Our World in Data, 2025), for some it's increasing exponentially, for others it stays stable. In general, we are going through a charged period in history with several crises and conflicts dominating the news and social media. The institutions of today and tomorrow should operate in this environment knowing that not everyone may understand, appreciate or trust their work.

In The Netherlands, trust in national politics is especially low, only 29% of people have faith in the current government (Ipsos I&O, 2025). However, the overall trust in institutions has been increasing for the last decade, except for the trust in big corporations and the Tweede Kamer (Cbs, 2025). Historically the trust in the Tweede Kamer has always been lower than other institutions in The Netherlands.

The Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (2024) found that "43% of people believe that the government does not listen to citizens enough and almost 60% of people believe that politicians do not stand up enough for people like them. Additionally, politicians pay too little attention to 'ordinary people', the 'hard-working Dutch citizens' or 'middle groups'. Many believe that rich people, people living in the Randstad and those with higher education qualifications receive enough or even too much political attention."

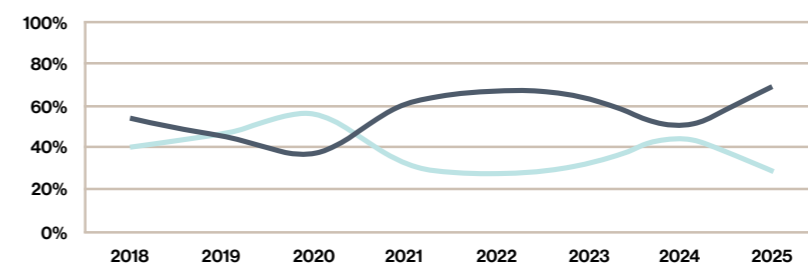
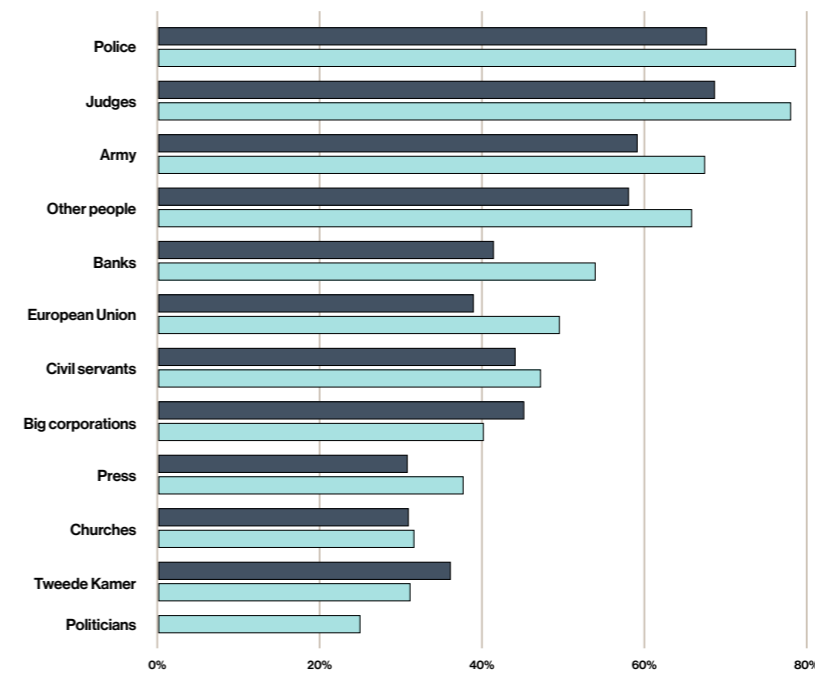
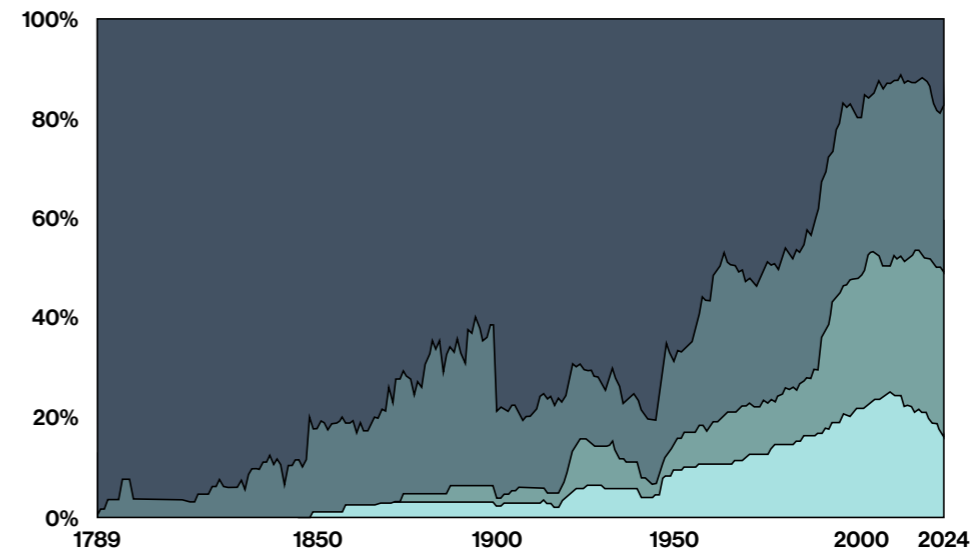
The sentiment that the Randstad is overrepresented in politics has been true for decades, how further away from this region, the higher the dissatisfaction among citizens (NOS, 2023). To ensure that citizens feel more heard they want politicians to go out into the country more. Although from earlier SCP research it is precisely those people who feel they are not being heard who are less likely to participate in public consultation in practice.

1.1.2 My proposal

So, what if instead of getting the politicians out into the country, we bring the people from the country to the politicians? A direct experience with the system can educate people and show them how politicians are working to help them. Several ways of getting people directly involved and educated about various systems already exist, two of them being the jury duty and mandatory military conscriptions around the world.

Jury service is seen as a civic duty, calling upon citizens to participate in the judicial system. Once passed through the selection procedure, the juror is present at the trial for several days together with a few other jurors. This direct participation in form of the jury duty is found to have a positive impact people's trust and perception of the system (Pennington & Dolliver, 2022) (Dolliver, 2024). A similar mandatory service is military conscription. Studies found that this service increases trust in the military, national identity, and the likeliness to vote (Cáceres-Delpiano et al, 2021). However, it should be noted that this same military service also decreases trust in other democratic institutions (Bove et al., 2022).

While both duties have its problems like accessibility, hostility, and more, it's the first-hand experience with their respective systems that is valuable. In a similar vein to those services, I propose a mandatory 'democratic duty' where adults are called to participate in the political system for a week. I believe that this will have the same result as the other two services in cultivating a better relationship and understanding of the political system.



Chapter 1. Introduction

Additionally, it's increasingly important to see how systems work in real life to avoid fake news and unreliable information on the internet (University of Derby, n.d.). Finally, it's at the base of a good democracy that its citizens are involved in the system and contribute to keeping it alive and well (Democracy International, n.d.). Altogether, the 'democratic duty' is not an entire system change, it's an expansion of civic duties and education about democracy.

1.1.3 The spatial consequences

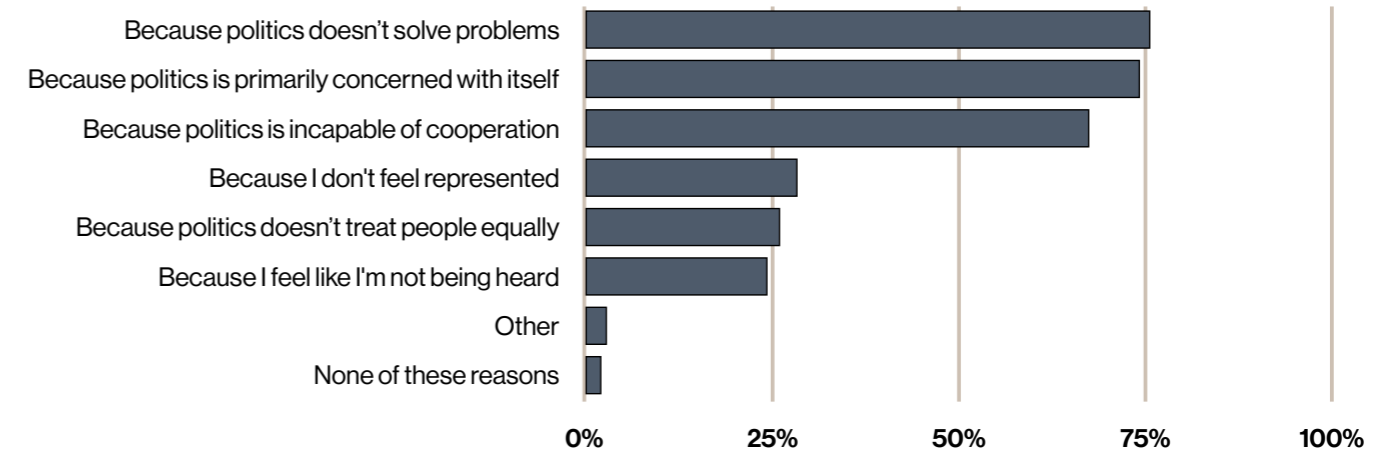
But bringing people from all over the country together for a first-hand experience of the system does have spatial consequences. Because where will they visit, what are they allowed to do there, and where will they stay? Turning part of the public into a temporary participant has impact on the way spaces are used, arranged, and designed. The institutional building will be its own standalone entity functioning as a link between citizens and the state, not directly involving citizens in normal day-to-day operations and policy making, but a recognized body for learning and experience in the democratic constitutional state.

This change in function relates directly to the studio brief: "We empower you to rethink how architecture can visualize and support public trust, inclusion, and democratic interaction. We explore the future of governance not as a political abstraction, but as a crucial spatial and institutional question—one that architecture must help answer." (DDS manual, pagwe 5)

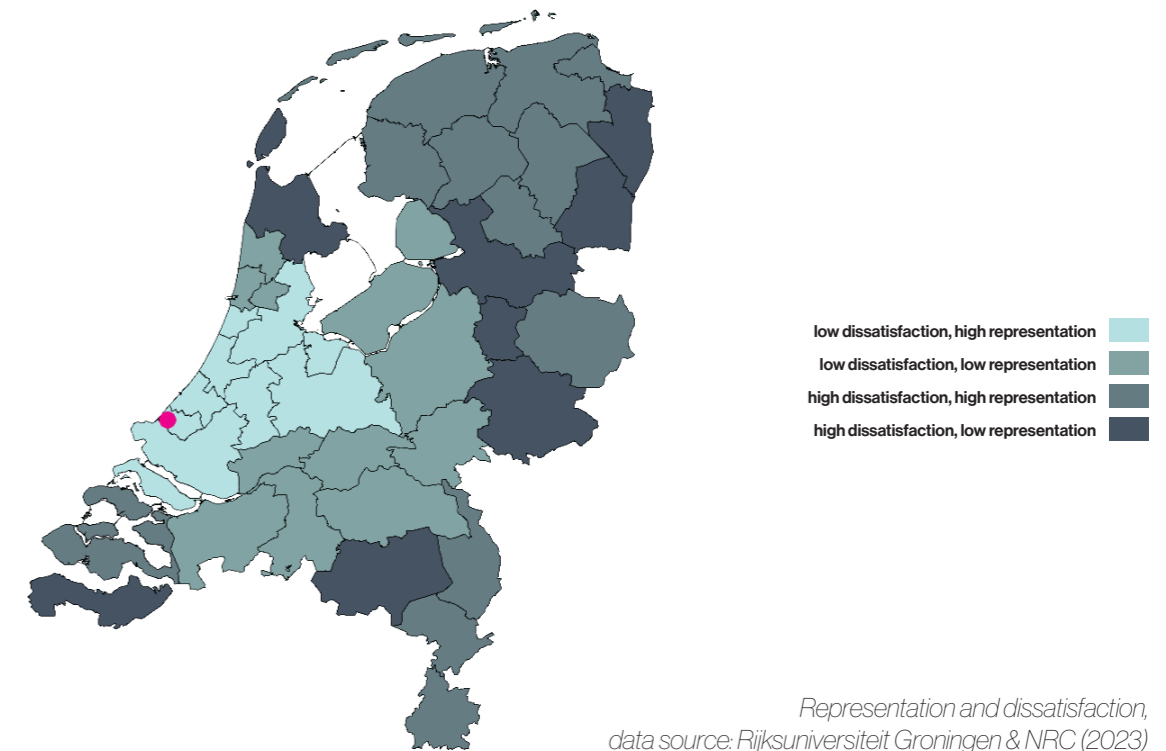
1.1.4 The design

The design assignment is developed to facilitate a design to counter the backwards movement of distrust and polarization regarding politics in The Netherlands as outlined above.

The design of a radical, mixed-use institutional building that lets citizens directly participate and experience the political and democratic system in The Netherlands, educating them, aiming to increase trust in the system and its players.



Little trust in Dutch politics, data source: Ipsos I&O (2025)



Representation and dissatisfaction, data source: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen & NRC (2023)

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.2 Relevance

As outlined in the problem statement, trust in politics and democracy is an urgent issue. Researchers have analyzed its causes, yet proposals for new systems still struggle to gain broad support. Meanwhile, millions of people feel unheard. Bringing these two worlds together to collaborate could be a difficult but effective solution.

Architecturally, this means translating ideas of inclusion and exclusion into space, bringing together people of all walks of life. It requires reinterpreting historic relationships and classifications that shape institutions and their layouts. This is a crucial step toward a new way of governing and of collaborating in a volatile world. Through architecture, a (semi) system change can be pushed by redefining how spaces function, who can access them, and how institutions listen to the citizens.

1.3 Objective and motivation

I'm very interested in democracy and politics, a fascination that began with history classes in high school, where I learned how systems work in the Netherlands, the EU, and the USA. Over time, I started following political and historic events as they unfolded and educating myself on how the world operates. Large systems like politics and something as concrete as a building are deeply connected: political choices shape everything, and we are all affected by them.

Recent democratic decline and growing distrust in government are deeply concerning to me. I believe the system itself carries major responsibility for addressing these issues, but it is also a two-way street in which the public has a role to play. Together, we can rebuild trust and a functioning democracy.

I believe that architecture can play a role in taking citizens seriously, through design showing that they are valued and create an inclusive and focused environment for learning, collaborating, working, and debating.

1.4 Research and design questions

Several research questions will guide the design process. The main question is:

How can architecture facilitate radical education about the Dutch political and democratic system, in the form of mandatory temporary participation (a 'democratic duty'), through a hybrid, mixed-use governmental building?

Sub research and design questions are formed to help answer the main research question:

How can governing, learning, living, and leisure be combined within a new building typology?

How can the residence unit represent the democratic duty?

How can participation and education be stimulated architecturally within the building?

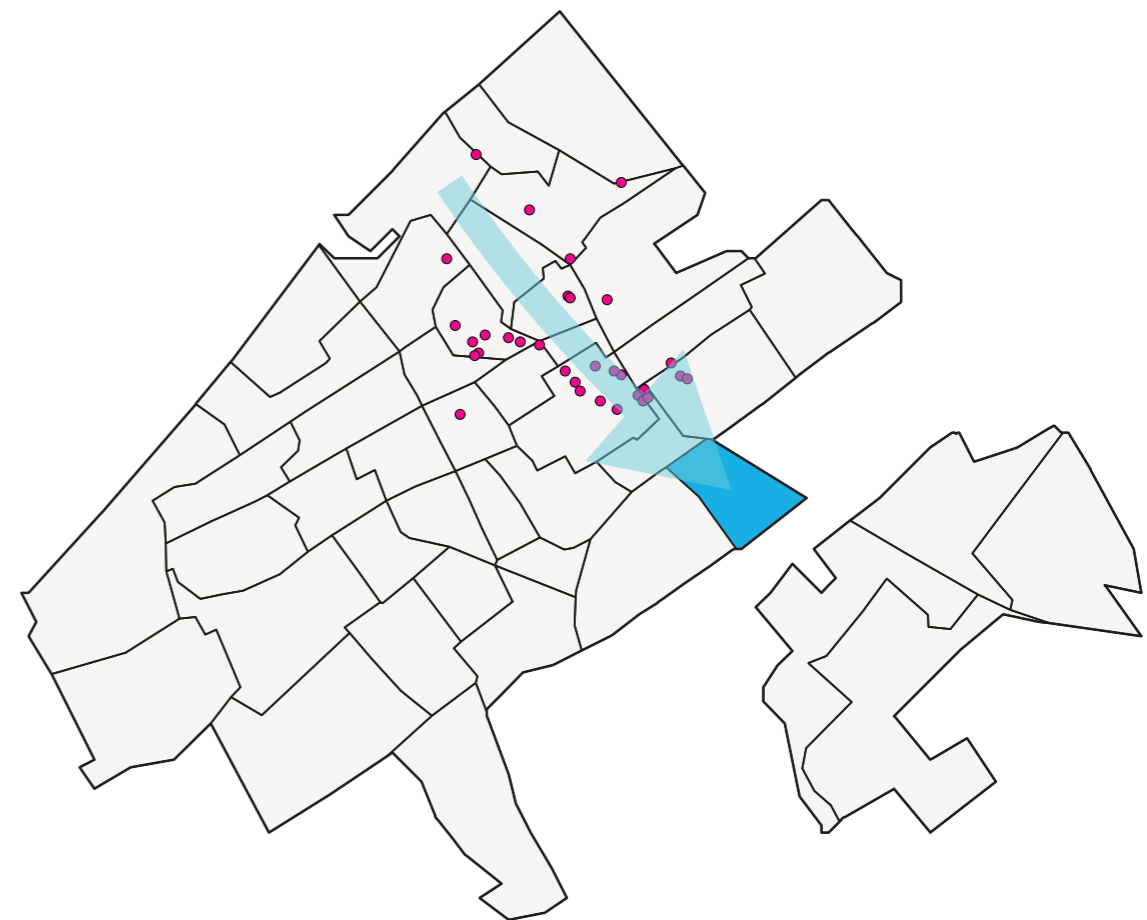
How can the building's architectural appearance communicate its public role and importance in relation to the political institutions of The Hague?

1.5 Scope

1.5.1 Location

The design will be located in The Hague, a city of major importance for political and institutional life. The region hosts 491 international organizations (Van Ommeren et al., 2023). On a national level, it includes the city hall, the province house of South Holland, the national parliament, the ministries, and the supreme court. Internationally, it is home to institutions such as the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, Europol, and many embassies. Overall, The Hague is a city defined by institutions, making it a natural place for a new one.

I have chosen Binckhorst Northwest as the site for this project. It is currently an industrial area with waste collection, but there are plans to redevelop it into a mixed-use urban district. The masterplan designates this part of the neighborhood for larger functions such as business, education, and social programs with a large mixing program, creating a vertical city. Existing elements like Trekvlietplein, the Afvalkathedraal, and Poolsterhaven will remain and be reimagined within the new urban fabric. Because of the masterplan I see strong potential for a forward-looking, mixed-use institutional building here.



Locations of important institutions in The Hague in relation to Binckhorst

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.5.2 Typology

A place where citizens can learn about the political system by temporarily participating in it does not currently exist. This building therefore combines several existing typologies into a new one: it educates, hosts debate, provides housing, and more. It is a mixed-use building designed to support this “democratic duty”. The building is most similar to a cruise ship on land. It is able to host people, feed people, and entertain people. The building is fully self-sufficient so that residents wouldn’t have to leave but still are able to if they want. Additionally, the building is structured around a schedule or itinerary that repeats every week, with a new group of people every week. Yet this building also has a more serious role in education people are facilitating participation.

1.5.3 Program

Public space	Function
Entrance hall	Main access to the building through car and bus drop off
Multi-purpose classroom	Space for interactive sessions and a social hang out spot
Restaurant	Space for shared eating, resting, and meeting
Leisure spaces	<p>Spaces for use outside of the main week schedule, meant to entertain, energize, relax, activate, and explore.</p> <p>Spaces include: a lounge, a library, exhibition space, several cafes, a swimming pool, a yoga studio, gyms, a cinema, karaoke bars, bowling hall, laser tag, escape rooms, trampoline park, mini golf, game room, climbing park, basketball courts, tennis courts, a viewing deck.</p>

Private space	Function
Single residence	Space for ‘democratic duty’ people to stay during their service
Double residence	Space for ‘democratic duty’ people to stay during their service, together with a friend or a family member.
Accessible residence	Space for ‘democratic duty’ people with accessibility needs to stay during their service.
Offices	Workspaces for representatives and staff

Outdoor space	Function
Landscaped plaza	Public civic space for gathering, encountering, and recreation. An extension of the New Binckhorst park.
Sporting facilities	Basketball courts and tennis courts

not a parliament --> it does not make decisions
not an embassy --> it does not represent external interests
not a museum --> it is not a passive explanation
not an university --> it does not award degrees
not a ministry --> it does not make policy

...it’s a bit of everything

Parliament



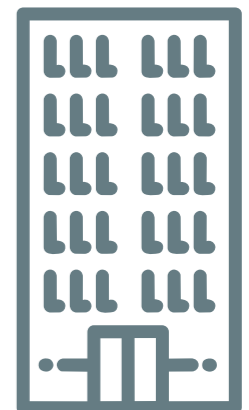
Makes laws
 Represents people
 Checks government

The Civic Residence



Citizen recommendations
 Rating laws & policy
 Educating about parliament & ministries

Ministry



Executes laws
 Runs the country
 Checked by parliament

Chapter 2. Approach

2.1 Methods

The following research strategies helped to answer the main research question by splitting it up into a strategy per sub question (section 1.4), and one for general architectural theory to support the project. Each strategy goes from theory to design method that were used throughout the design phase of the project.

2.1.1 Research on typology & mixed-use buildings

To answer the question 'How can governing, learning, and living be combined within a new building typology?' I read literature relating to mixed-use buildings and analyzed mixed-use residential buildings in section and ground floors of conference centers in plan for input and learnings that were used in the design phase. During the design phase I worked on sections to display function mixes and iterate on layouts.

The literature I read:

- 50 hybrid buildings: catalogue on the art of mixing uses — A+T research group

The precedent buildings I analyzed:

- The Valley in Amsterdam, The Netherlands by MVRDV
- AvB Tower in The Hague, The Netherlands by Wiel Arets Architects
- Wonderwoods in Utrecht, The Netherlands by MVSA Architects and Stefano Boeri Architetti
- Centre des Congrès de Nîmes in France
- New Rome-EUR Convention Center and Hotel in Italy
- Te Pae Convention and Exhibition Center in New Zealand
- BMO Convention Center in Canada
- The Arcade conference center in China
- Anji International Convention and Exhibition Centre in China

2.1.2 Research on the residence unit and conceptual thinking

To answer the question 'How can the residence unit represent the democratic duty?' I read literature about speculative design for inspiration on how to rethink a short stay residential unit through the lens of the democratic duty. Throughout the design process I iterated on the unit design in plan and axonometric projection to determine the functionality and look and feel.

The literature I read:

- Towers of choices — The Why Factory
- Porocity — The Why Factory
- (w)Ego — The Why Factory

2.1.3 Research on participation and education in relation to space

To answer the question 'How can participation and education be stimulated architecturally within the building?' I designed a hierarchy for the building and mapped the feeling a resident should have throughout their stay in the building. During the design phase I translated that framework into the layout of spaces, their relation to each other and their design in plan and section. Additionally, modeling the spaces in 3d showcased the look and feel of the spaces and how would be experienced.

2.1.4 Research on architectural appearance

To answer the question 'How can the building's architectural appearance communicate its public, educational role in relation to the political institutions of The Hague?' I conducted site analysis of the project area and analyzed various contemporary governmental buildings in The Netherlands through elevation studies. During the design phase I worked in elevations and iterating on those to achieve the desired architectural appearance for my proposal.

The precedent buildings I analyzed:

- Helicon & Castalia, original design by Jos van Eldonk & Sjoerd Soeters, renovated by Cepezed
- JuBi torens by Kollhoff Architekten
- Rijnstraat 8 by OMA
- Ministerie van Financiën original design by Vegter & Bolten, renovated by MVSA Architects
- Temporary parliament original design by Dick Apon, renovated by Zecc Architecten

2.1.5 Research on architectural theory

Alongside research into specific questions, I explored broader architectural theory to support my project and provide a foundation for the design. I was especially interested in how architecture is experienced, so I selected books that reflect this focus.

The literature I read:

- Experiencing architecture — Steen Eiler Rasmussen
- Atmospheres: architectural environments, surrounding objects — Peter Zumthor
- Scenography — Atelier Brückner

Chapter 2. Approach

2.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework forms the base for the design project. It outlines the outputs and gatherings from research that informed my design approach and situates the work within a broader architectural discussion. Together, these outputs clarify the project's conceptual foundation and methodological foundation.

2.2.1 Output from research on mixed-use buildings

This research made me understand how conventional buildings mix different functions and relate them to each other (appendix 1).

Conclusions from the analysis of the mixed-use buildings are:

- Housing always occupies the top levels
- When offices are present, they are in between the housing and plinth
- A plinth is used to house several functions that can serve the building itself but are also meant as facilities for the direct neighborhood
- Car parking is always underground
- The shape of the building starts with a wide base of about 2 to 6 levels before slimming down to a high-rise tower for the remaining levels
- Rigid boundaries between functions exist

Conclusions from the analysis of the conference centers are:

- Grand entrances, foyers, and lobbies connect all the spaces
- Meeting rooms are all separated
- Exposition floors are linked together, offering the possibility to alter the size of the space
- Hotels are part of some centers but aren't directly linked to the main hall

2.2.2 Output from research on the residence unit and conceptual thinking

The Why Factory publications present a design approach in which a singular idea or spatial ambition is pushed to an extreme and becomes the primary generator of the entire architectural proposal. For example, a desire for greater access to outdoor space leads to circulation areas being transformed entirely into balconies, while an emphasis on cooking positions the kitchen as the central element of a dwelling. With this methodology, the conceptual premise becomes the driver of the design process, supported by radical explorations of spatial experience and everyday inhabitation.

2.2.3 Output from research on education and participation in relation to space

Appendix 2 presents the democratic duty translated into spatial consequences. I needed to know exactly what would be going on in the building. How does a resident's day to day look like? How do I want them to feel throughout the day? How do I make a building with such a large scale operate while making people learn and participate?

To answer these questions, I calculated that my building would need to host 6000 people a week, made a detailed week schedule, charted the experience of days based on intimacy and crowdedness, and decided on a hierarchy of groups within the building. The building is structured around several levels of groups:

- 4000 houses: the most personal place where the resident stays for the week, a room with a bed and a bathroom.
- 100 streets: a multi-purpose classroom that is assigned to the same 60 people throughout the week.
- 30 neighborhoods: several multi-purpose classrooms together on a floor.
- 8 districts: 12 'streets', 1 restaurant, and several activity spaces.
- 1 nation: a central void in the building made up off all the houses and their negative space.

This system allows for more intimate experiences and connections with a select group of people within the same group. Residents will always see the same people in their street and neighborhood and district, yet they are free to visit other districts for activities that are outside the main week schedule. It balances the facilitation of deeper connections with exploration of everything that the building has to offer in environments that will feel familiar over the course of the week without feeling stale and boring.

2.2.4 Output from research on architectural appearance

A selection of elevations from contemporary governmental buildings in The Hague show that the aesthetic of these institutions is consistent in its formal system (appendix 3). Brick, concrete, stone, and glass are repeatedly organized within rigid grid structures, appearing strict, orderly, and neutral. As these buildings primarily function as offices, their architectural expression reflects values of efficiency, stability, and rationality. There are no grand gestures, forms, or strong material contrasts; instead, the architecture communicates restraint and permanence through repetition, regularity, and composition.

Chapter 3. Results

3.1 The design process

As part of the 'Radical Institutions' studio, I wanted this design to take an unconventional approach. However, finding the right balance between functionality, appearance, meaning, and experience took time (appendix 4). During the first phase of the design process, I analyzed residential mixed-use buildings and conference centers, which resulted in safer design proposals. I implemented elements seen in precedents: a broad plinth with towers on top and strict zoning between residences, classrooms, and other functions. This approach led to designs similar to existing dwellings and hotels rather than the radical institution I had in mind. The designs did not represent my idea of living and breathing democracy in a resort-like destination. The entire design and experience needed to be integrated with this idea and revolve around it as the central concept.

A shift in approach came after researching the work of The Why Factory (section 2.2.2). I applied conceptual thinking to the core idea of staying at an institution for a week. The residence should not simply function as a standard hotel room but become central to the building's concept of democracy. The room should double as a space where residents listen to presentations, vote on policy, and experience major political events. Each residence has an extended balcony where this takes place, together these balconies shape the building's core.

Shaping this space still took time. What began as a rectangular layout evolved into a tapered octagonal form before arriving at the final oval shape. The balcony also changed, moving through variations with rotating platforms, enclosed spaces, and direct connections to the room. In the final design, this central gesture becomes the literal core of the building, around which all functions are organized and where most activities take place, while also defining the building's appearance from the outside. Figuratively, it represents the core of the project: living and experiencing democracy through architecture. The final design flows from this concept (appendix 5).

3.2 The final design

3.2.1 Logic of the building

With the residences at the center of the building and other functions surrounding them, the mixing of functions differs from the precedents. Spaces are woven together rather than stacked. Individual residences are positioned between collective spaces such as the central void, classrooms, restaurants, and activity spaces. The arrival and check-in area is located beneath the central void and accessed by ramps, offering visitors a first glimpse of the space when arriving by car or bus. Logistics are resolved within the basement, allowing the building above ground to remain as open as possible for monumental architectural expression.

3.2.2 Residences

The most important connection between levels is the relationship between the residences and the central void. What in theory appear to be the most distant levels are actually intertwined. The rooms are arranged in a staggered sequence, forming the "nation" space for events, lectures, and voting moments. In this way, the residence becomes an integral part of the program and central to the building's concept, rather than functioning as a standard hotel room used only for sleeping and getting ready.

The transition between the room and the void is defined by glass doors. Once residents step through them, they become part of the governing system. The balcony features an adaptable table system with a movable chair, space for taking notes, and a monitor for voting and viewing presentations. During certain moments, adjacent residents are encouraged to collaborate or discuss topics together. The balcony system supports this interaction by allowing focus to shift from the center of the void to neighboring residents.

Residences come in single, double, and accessible variants, accommodating 6,000 people per week. Their design and materiality bridge the formal atmosphere of the central core with the more informal character of the democratic city.

3.2.3 Central void

As mentioned, the democratic core is a strictly formal space. Although visible from the rooms, it cannot be physically entered except through the room balconies. Only lecturers and speakers addressing the residents can enter the space. This maintains its special character and distinguishes it from the rest of the building.

Shaped as a terraced oval, the central void takes on stadium-like proportions. It becomes a monumental formal space at the center of the building and is appropriately positioned within its interior. A glass oculus in the roof offers a view of the sky and nothing else, emphasizing the democratic process and limiting outside distractions. On the floor, two stages are positioned around a glass center, which offers a glimpse into the void from the arrival area below. Projection mapping equipment integrated into the domed roof can transform the space into different environments, immersing residents in the various policies and topics discussed throughout the building's life.

3.2.4 The democratic city

On the opposite side of the residence is the democratic city, composed of "streets", "neighborhoods", and "districts". These spaces are more informal and aim to broaden people's understanding of co-governing and differing perspectives. Functions in this area include multi-purpose classrooms, restaurants, cafés, a viewing deck, gyms, and leisure spaces such as a cinema, yoga studio, and escape room. These spaces are freely accessible outside scheduled program hours and aim to create a true getaway experience, offering more opportunities for residents to connect outside 'working hours'.

Chapter 3. Results

3.2.5 Classroom

The multi-purpose classroom becomes the main space for discussion, bonding, and exchange. Alongside the residence and democratic core, it is where residents spend most of their time. However, the design differs significantly from a traditional classroom. It combines tribune seating for presentations, tables for working, sofas and armchairs for informal moments, and a kitchenette for coffee breaks. Split levels integrate circulation for residence floors above the main level and create nooks for secluded moments.

The space accommodates different levels of interaction, from formal classes to informal gatherings. Residents are assigned a classroom for the duration of the week, allowing them to personalize the space and build stronger connections with peers. As classes are led by professionals, office spaces for staff are located at the intersection of two classrooms.

3.2.6 Restaurant

A restaurant is located in each of the eight districts for daily meals. As the schedule includes multiple sittings in one location, seating capacity can be reduced from 6,000 to 3,000 seats. The restaurants operate with a buffet-style system, allowing residents to sit where they choose. Circulation is integrated through split-level seating, while walls perpendicular to the façade and planters segment the open space.

3.2.7 Activity spaces

Activity spaces are distributed throughout the building between classroom and restaurant floors. These spaces extend the building's program beyond 'business hours' and encourage residents to move beyond their own districts to meet more people. Functions requiring enclosed spaces are located within the lower levels of the cone, while open-plan functions are placed on the outer floors. Spaces on the lower levels and those extending to the street level are accessible to the public during program hours.

3.2.8 Logistics layer

The building's logistical functions are placed in the basement to prevent them from obstructing views of the central cone from the outside. Four cores serve as dedicated service elevators connecting the basement to the building above. Employee parking is accessed through a ramp from street level. Due to the large road intersection above which the building is positioned, the basement does not extend beneath the entire footprint.

3.2.9 Aesthetics

The building has two distinct faces: one visible from the outside and one experienced only by the residents from the inside. Externally, the building appears as a floating monumental object held in place by a metal structure. A surrounding curtain wall maximizes visibility, while light strips along the floors illuminate the object from within. The cone is clad in wooden panels with varying cut-out patterns, representing different opinions and voices coming together as a whole. This also reflects the more informal nature of this side of the building. The interior core presents a different character. This space is highly structured and organized, with all balconies designed identically to express unity. Steel and wood details balance softness and hardness, reflecting elements visible on the exterior.

3.2.10 Urban implementation

The building's cone can be seen from a great distance due to its location in the north of Binckhorst, floating above the intersection of the Supernovaweg and Binckhorstlaan, which will be transformed into Binckhorst Avenue. Its positioning parallels nearby large-scale buildings bridging the A12 highway to the northeast. The site was selected because of its strategic proximity to major train stations and its role as a gateway between the area and the center of The Hague.

The building floats above the site to prevent its large footprint from interrupting urban flow. Roads remain unobstructed and pedestrian routes are maintained, avoiding the need for detours around the building. During warmer periods, the building's canopy creates a shaded park-like environment, offering pleasant outdoor space for recreation.

3.2.11 Structure

The building floats above the ground through its structural system. The central cone is constructed in concrete to create a rigid yet flexible structure capable of supporting the alternating staggered residences. A steel framework connects to the cone to stabilize it and support the surrounding floors. Large truss columns and triangular beams minimize the number of interior columns, creating open space around the cone so it can be experienced as a central object within the building.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

This thesis explored how architecture can facilitate radical education about the Dutch political and democratic system through mandatory temporary participation within a hybrid governmental building. The project proposes a new institutional typology in which governing, learning, living, and leisure are integrated into a single experience through radical inclusion of every Dutch adult once in their life. Rather than treating democracy as an abstract system communicated only through policy or representation, the design approaches democracy as something that can be lived, experienced, and practiced through space, routine, and interaction by anyone.

The project demonstrates that governing, learning, living, and leisure can be combined by weaving functions together instead of separating them through strict zoning. Residences, classrooms, restaurants, activity spaces, and the democratic core are positioned in close relation to one another, creating constant interaction between formal and informal activities. This mixed-use organization transforms the building from a conventional governmental or educational institution into an environment where democratic participation becomes part of everyday life practiced by anyone and everyone in the country. By integrating leisure and informal encounters alongside formal learning and governing spaces, the building encourages social exchange and collective experience beyond structured political activities. It aims to alternate moments of seriousness and importance with moments of energy and fun.

The residence unit became the central architectural representation of the democratic duty. Instead of functioning solely as a hotel room, the residence acts as both a private and political space. Through the balcony system connected to the central void, residents participate directly in presentations, events, and voting moments from their own living space. In this way, the room itself becomes part of the governing structure. The staggered arrangement of the residences collectively forms the democratic core of the building, expressing how individual participation contributes to a larger collective system. The residence therefore represents the merging of private life and civic responsibility within the architectural concept. The possibility of collaboration between units reflects the values of togetherness and cooperation needed in politics and democracy.

Participation and education are stimulated architecturally through spatial organization, interaction, and schedule structuring. The central void acts as the symbolic and functional heart of the building, constantly visible to residents and reinforcing the presence of democratic activity. At the same time, the democratic city surrounding the residences provides informal spaces for discussion, collaboration, and exchange. Multi-purpose classrooms, restaurants, and activity spaces encourage encounters between residents throughout the duration of their stay, offering both moments of focused groups and collective experience. The emphasis on multifunctional spaces treats users not as a monolithic group directed toward fixed activities in predetermined locations, but as individuals with different ways of learning, interacting, and participating. The architecture allows flexibility where needed, enabling residents to shape their own experience within the building. One group may choose to work in silence at traditional tables, while another may prefer discussion on sofas or tribune seating. By offering multiple spatial scenarios and choices in how spaces can be used, the building gives residents influence over their own journey and prevents the architecture from feeling overly forced. Participation therefore emerges not only through organized democratic events, but also through the freedom to engage with the building in different ways. Architecture is therefore used not only to accommodate democratic education, but also to actively shape social interaction and engagement. The project suggests that participation increases when people are immersed within an environment designed around collective experience, flexibility, and interaction.

The architectural appearance of the building communicates its public role and importance through monumentality, visibility, and contrast. Positioned above a major intersection in Binckhorst, the building becomes a visible landmark within The Hague. Its floating form and monumental scale express the significance of the institution while maintaining openness at street level. Located just outside the city center, where the ministries of The Hague are concentrated, the building maintains a visual relationship with these governmental institutions, all of which are visible from within the project. This creates a dialogue in which the building positions itself as separate from the existing political system, yet directly connected to and influential on the decisions and policies formed within those ministries. The transparent curtain wall exposes the central cone to the city, symbolizing accessibility and visibility within the democratic process. At the same time, the contrast between the structured democratic core and the more informal outer layers reflects the balance between institutional order and public life. The building therefore positions itself as both a civic monument and an inhabitable democratic getaway environment connected to the political landscape of The Hague.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that architecture can play an active role in democratic education by transforming political participation into a lived spatial experience. Through the combination of residence, governance, education, and leisure, the project proposes an alternative governmental typology in which democracy is not only represented architecturally, but continuously experienced through inhabitation and collective engagement, contributing to dialogue and reinvigorating citizen's democratic duty.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

4.2 Implications and recommendations

This thesis suggests that architecture can play a more active role in democratic culture than is currently common within governmental architecture. Contemporary institutional buildings in The Hague often communicate neutrality, efficiency, and control, functioning primarily as office environments for governance. This project instead proposes that governmental architecture can also become a space for participation, education, and collective experience. The design envisions how architecture can move beyond representation alone and actively influence how people engage with democratic systems.

For the architectural profession, the project highlights the potential of hybrid institutional typologies that combine functions traditionally kept separate. By integrating governing, living, learning, and leisure, architecture can create environments where civic participation becomes part of everyday experience rather than a distant political act only practiced by a selective few. This challenges conventional approaches to governmental and educational buildings, which rely on strict zoning and singular use. The project therefore argues for more experimental and socially driven institutional architecture.

The thesis also raises questions about flexibility and user agency within architecture. Instead of prescribing one fixed way of inhabiting space, the project proposes multifunctional environments that allow users to shape their own experience. This approach may become increasingly relevant as architecture responds to more diverse forms of working, learning, and social interaction. In this sense, the project suggests that democratic values such as participation, accessibility, and plurality can be embedded not only symbolically, but also spatially.

Finally, the project recommends that future governmental architecture should reconsider its relationship with the public realm. Rather than remaining isolated or inaccessible, institutional buildings could become more visible, interactive, and connected to everyday urban life. Especially in political capitals such as The Hague, architecture has the opportunity to strengthen the relationship between citizens and democratic institutions through public functions and experiences.

4.3 Reflection

Before starting my graduation project, I set out with the ambition that I wanted to create an unconventional design, quite a challenge. The project began with the idea of rethinking governmental architecture as a place for democratic participation and education rather than solely administration and execution: a place for social dialogue and first-hand political experience. Throughout the process, the project evolved significantly, both conceptually and architecturally.

Early design proposals relied too heavily on precedents of mixed-use residential and conference buildings. While these studies helped me understand scale, organization, and program, they initially led me toward conventional solutions based on strict zoning and familiar typologies. Reflecting on this phase, I realized that my reliance on precedents limited the radical potential of the project, resulting in designs that resembled hotels, dwellings, and office complexes rather than a new democratic institutional typology.

A turning point came through the conceptual design methods inspired by The Why Factory. Instead of approaching the building primarily through program and functionality, I began designing from the qualities the residence should embody as this was the heart of my project. The concept was no longer something applied afterwards, but became the generator of the spatial organization, form, and experience. This approach helped create a stronger architectural identity and a clearer relationship between concept and spatial experience. The iterative nature of the process was essential to the final outcome. The central void and residence system gradually developed into the core of the project. Setting out schedules, mapping user experience, and studying occupancy helped me make more informed design decisions. In particular, the evolution of the balcony and void geometry highlighted the importance of continuous testing and refinement.

At the same time, the project revealed the challenges of designing radically. Balancing conceptual ambition with practical concerns such as circulation, logistics, structure, and capacity required constant adjustments. However, speculative thinking also became an important part of the project, allowing me to question existing architectural norms and propose alternative spatial solutions.

Overall, the project lived up to my expectations of being able to design a radical unconventional building, combining research and speculative design within architecture. I believe that architectural projects can function not only as a response to existing societal conditions, but also as a medium for critically imagining new forms of civic life, participation, and collective experience, and I hope this project can contribute to that discussion.

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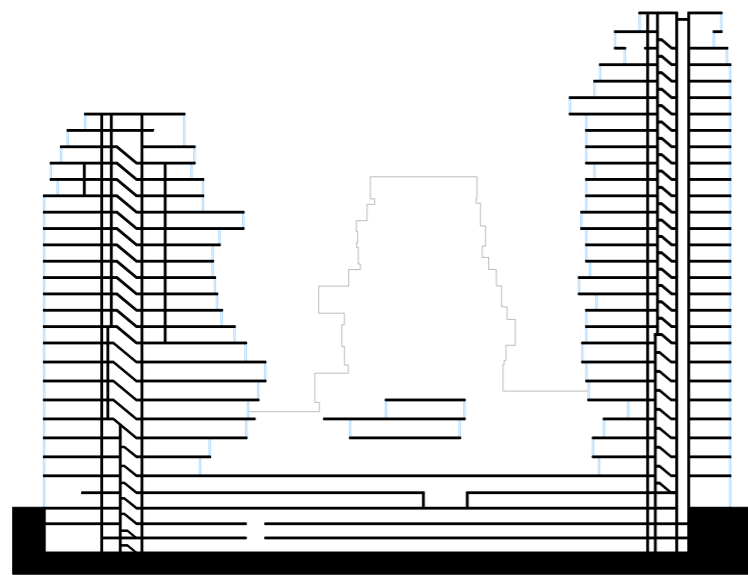
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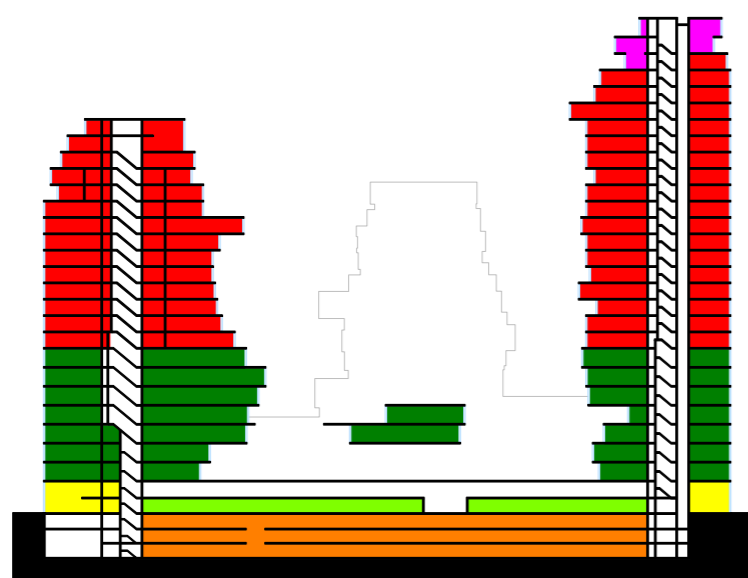
Appendix 1. Precedent analysis

The Valley

Location: Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Year: 2022
Architect: MVRDV
m2: 75.000
Height: 61, 81 & 100 meters



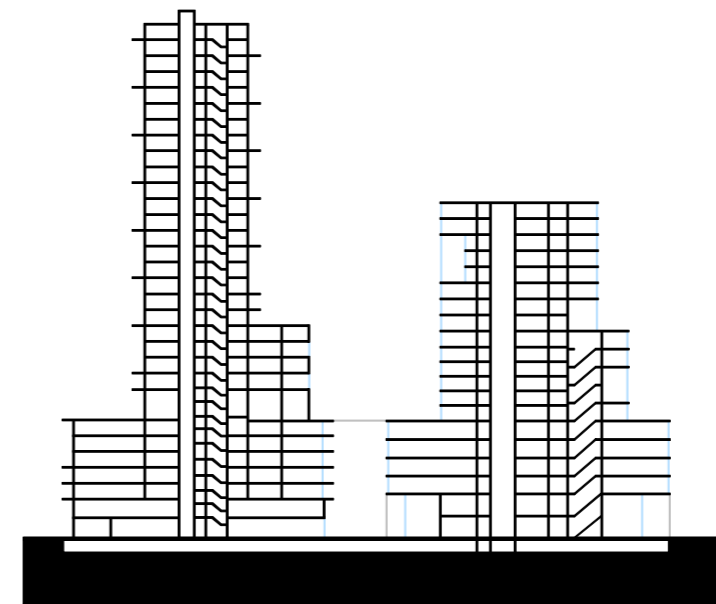
The Valley is a mixed-use landmark in Amsterdam's Zuidas that combines offices, housing, shops, restaurants, and public spaces in a single, terraced building. Aimed at international businesses, urban professionals, residents, the tower targets the higher segment, having become a luxury status symbol. It promises residents and visitors a vibrant, high-end city environment.



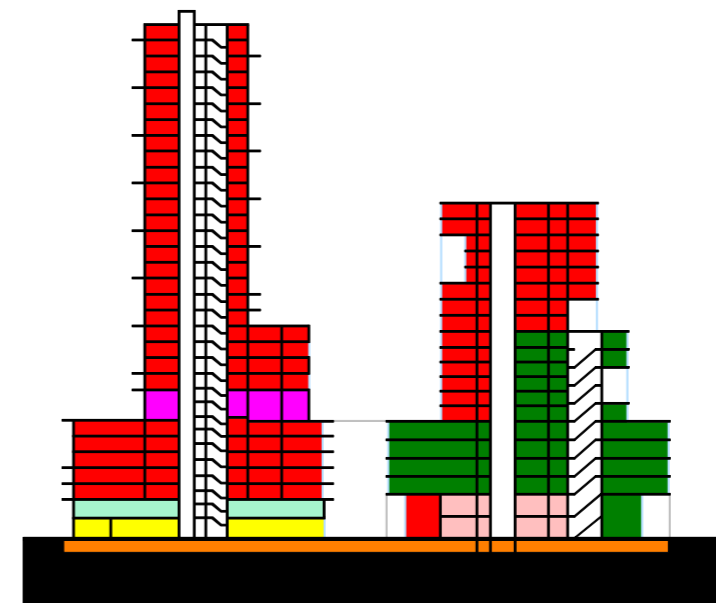
- Housing ■
- Food ■
- Offices ■
- Retail ■
- Car parking ■
- Bike parking ■

WonderWoods

Location: Utrecht, The Netherlands
Year: 2024
Architect: MVSA Architects & Stefano Boeri Architetti
m2: 65.000
Height: 70 & 90 meters



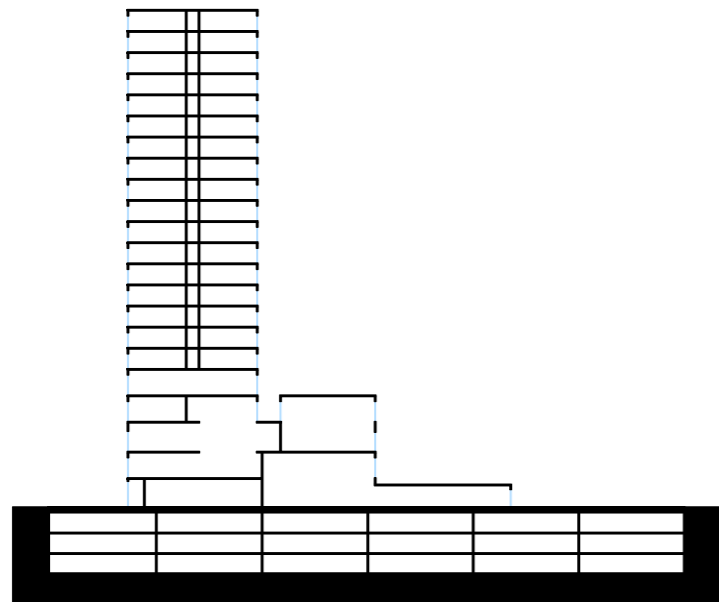
WonderWoods is a mixed-use high-rise near Utrecht Central Station that brings dense urban living together with extensive vertical greenery, combining apartments, offices, shops, restaurants, and public amenities in two towers. Stand out functions are a gym and digital museum targeting urban residents, professionals, and visitors who value nature-integrated city life in a central, well-connected location.



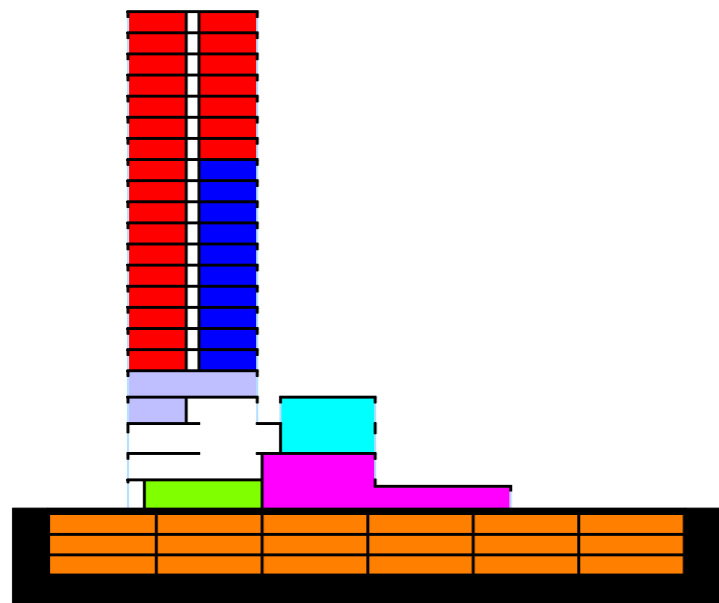
- Housing ■
- Food ■
- Offices ■
- Retail ■
- Car parking ■
- Gym ■
- Museum ■

AvB Tower

Location: Den Haag, The Netherlands
Year: 2013
Architect: Wiel Arets Architects
m2: 24.500
Height: 72 meters

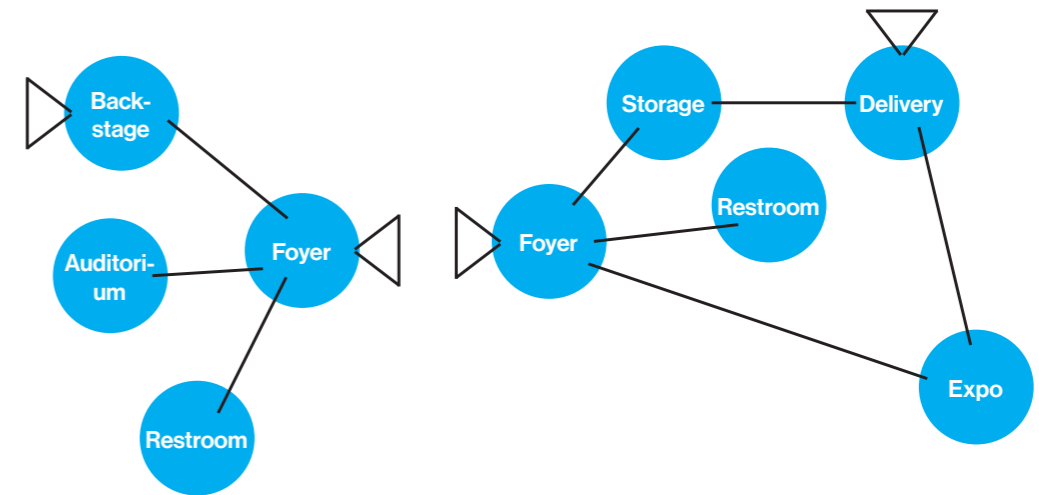


AVB Tower is a mixed-use tower in the city center that combines housing, offices, educational, and commercial functions, hosting Leiden University College The Hague with students living in the same building where they study. It also features a public food hall on the ground floor, creating a compact vertical campus for students, and offering other functions for professionals and visitors in the central station area.

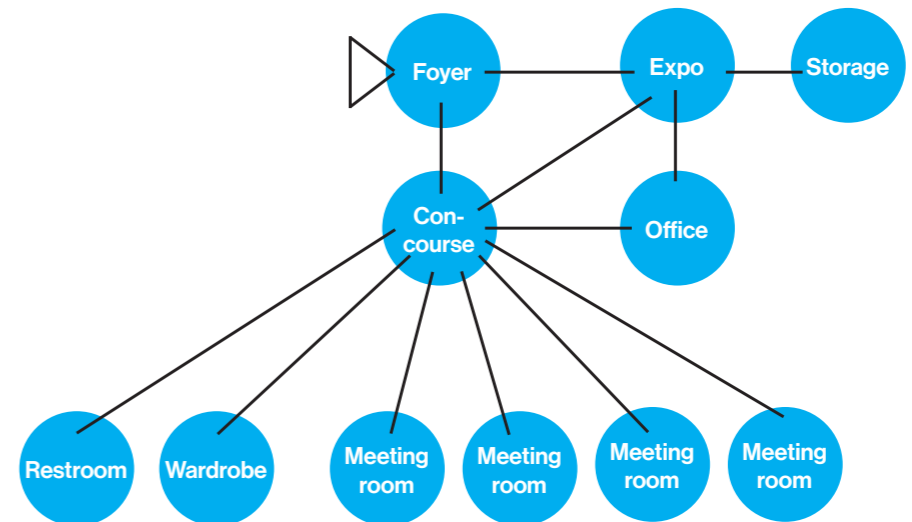


- Housing ■
- Food ■
- Communal ■
- Study ■
- Auditorium ■
- Car parking ■
- Bike parking ■

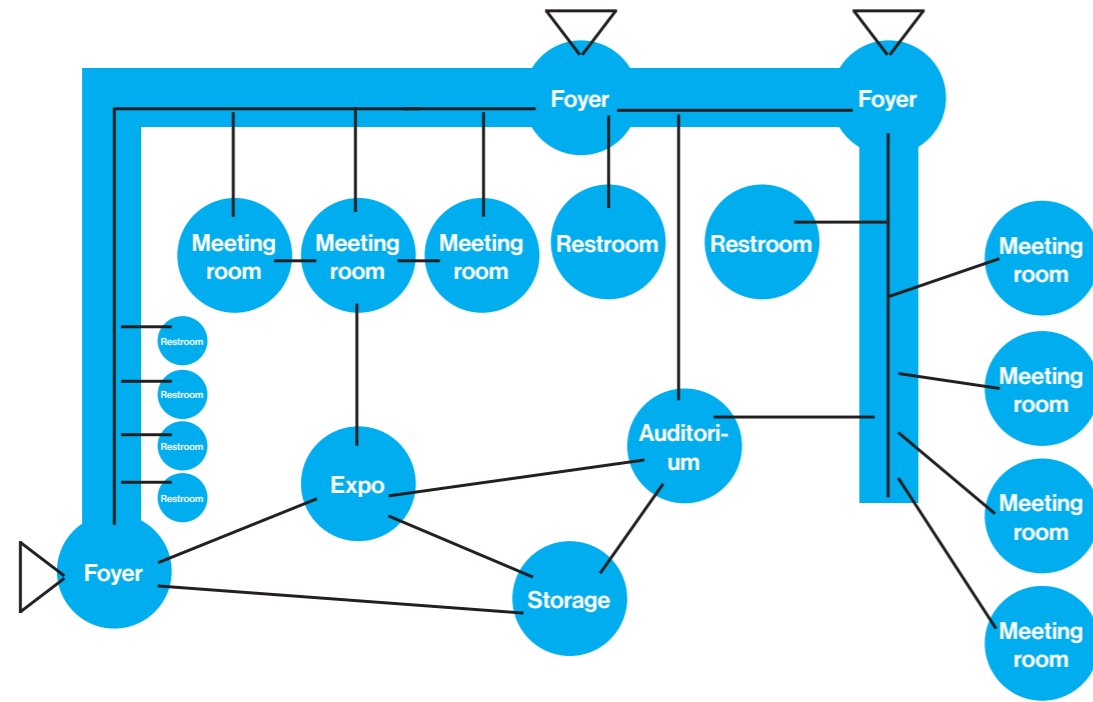
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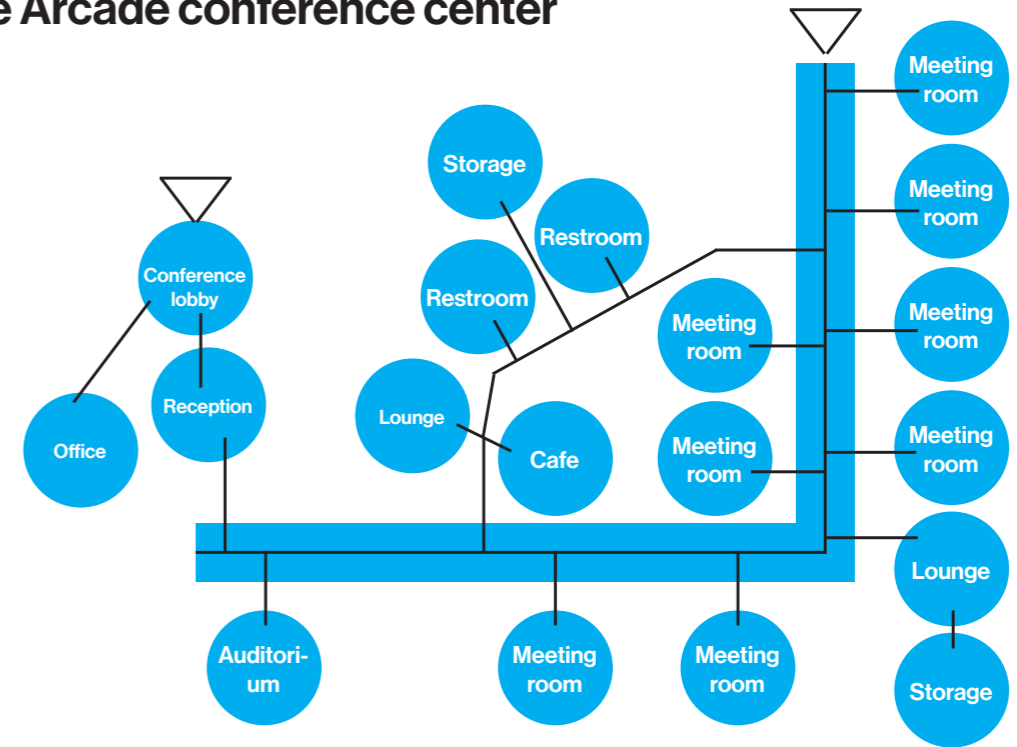
New Rome-EUR Convention Center and Hotel



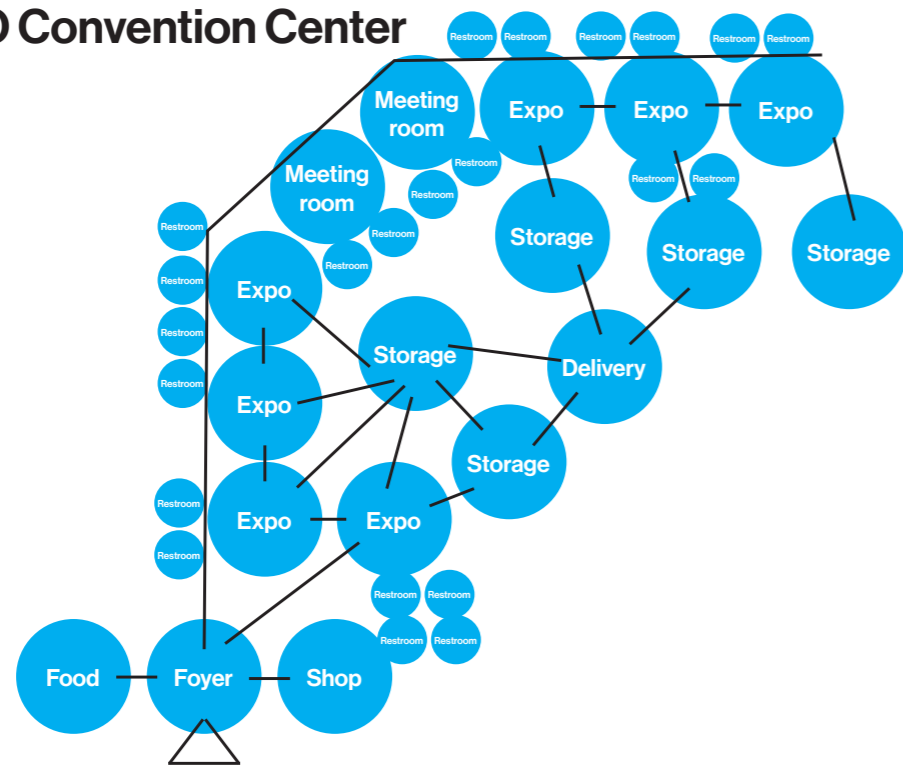
Te Pae Convention and Exhibition Center



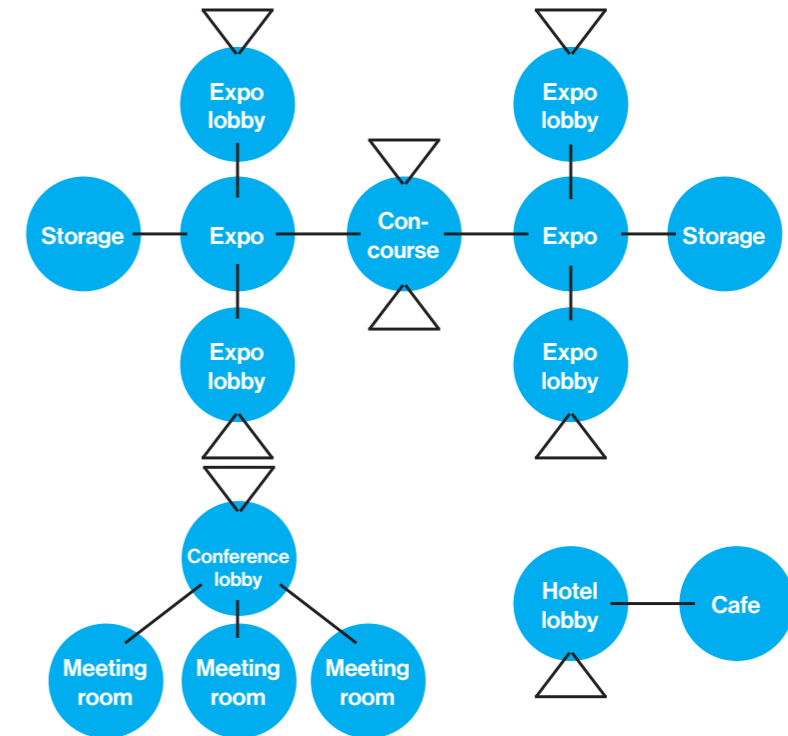
The Arcade conference center



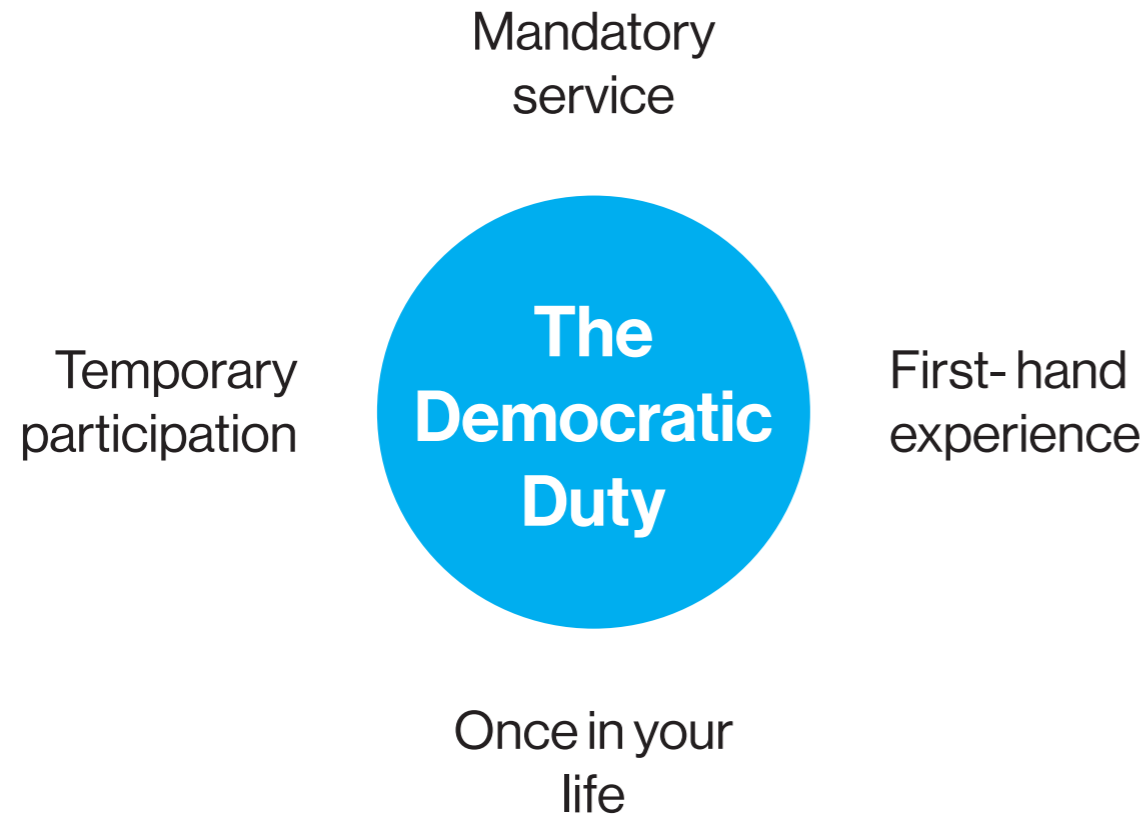
BMO Convention Center



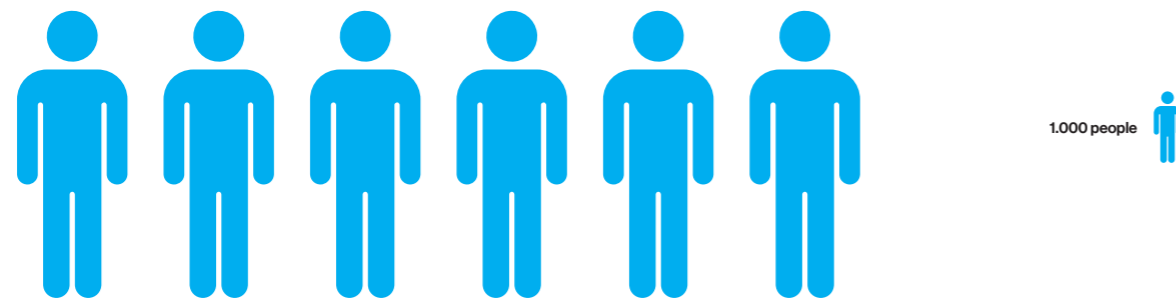
Anji International Convention and Exhibition Centre



Appendix 2. The democratic duty



Adults between 20 and 80 years old per week



The Civic Residence Week Schedule

Monday (settling in & getting familiar)

When	What happens	Where does it happen
Until 14:00	Residents check in day	Arrival zone
15:00 – 16:00	Welcome moment / kick-off	Democratic core
16:30 – 18:00	First meeting with 'study group', what will the week look like, get to know each other	Classroom
18:30 - 20:00	Dinner	Restaurant
	Free evening activities	Activity spaces

Tuesday (learning the basics)

When	What happens	Where does it happen
08:00 - 09:00	Breakfast	Restaurant
09:00 - 13:00	Introduction to the week's topic (what law / policy / problem), 3 policy options are presented	Democratic core
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch	Restaurant
14:00 - 18:00	Information on Dutch political system (speedrun; how does it work), how does The Civic Residence fit into the system	Classroom
18:00 - 19:30	Dinner	Restaurant
	Free evening activities	Activity spaces

Wednesday (in-depth information topic of the week)

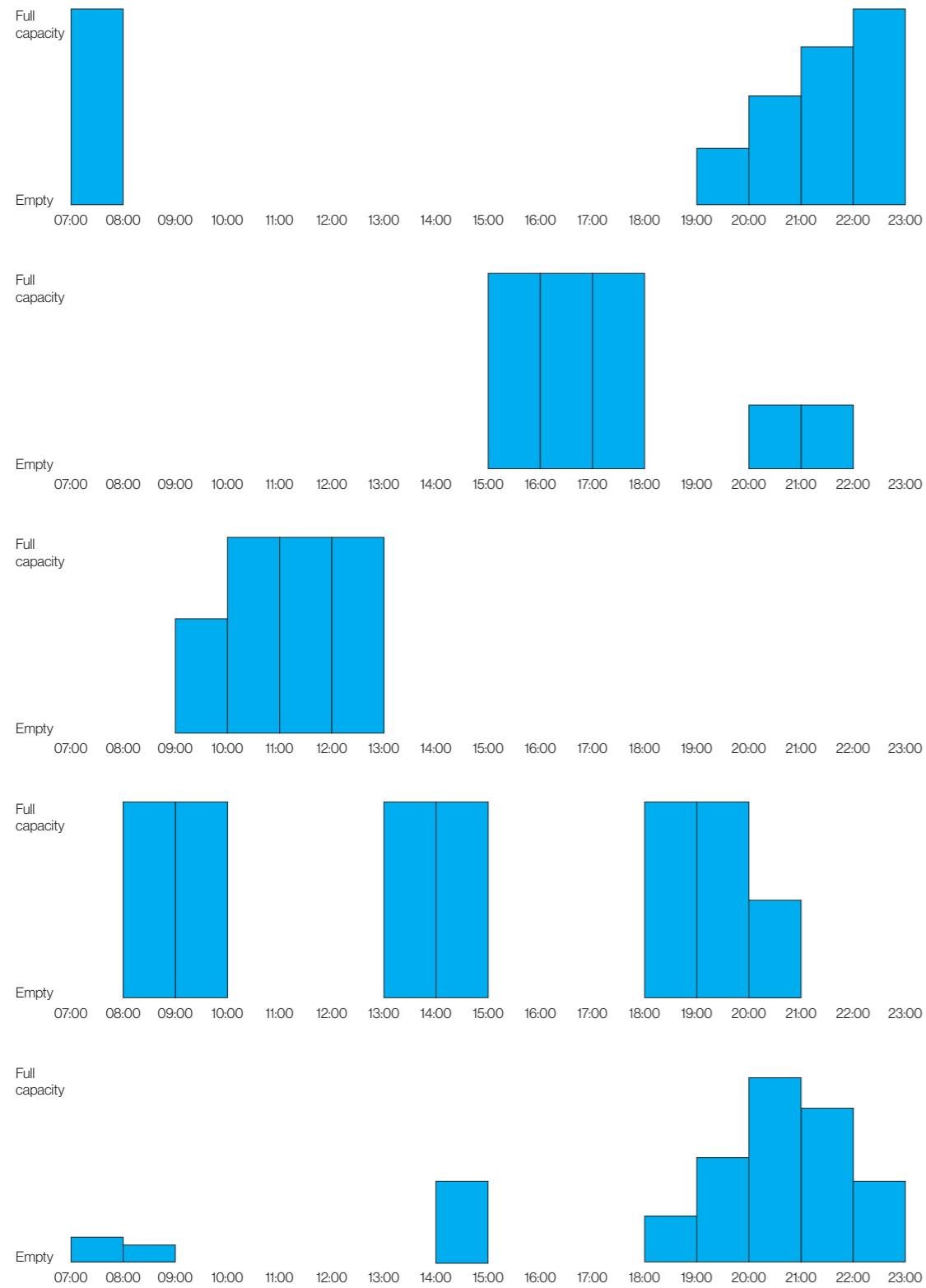
When	What happens	Where does it happen
08:00 - 09:00	Breakfast	Restaurant
09:00 - 13:00	Stakeholder presentations	Democratic core
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch	Restaurant
14:00 - 16:00	Meeting with study group to discuss topic of the week	Classroom
16:00 – 18:00	Recap of prior information, first polling vote	Democratic core
18:00 - 19:30	Dinner	Restaurant
	Free evening activities	Activity spaces

Thursday (in-depth information governing)

When	What happens	Where does it happen
08:00 - 09:00	Breakfast	Restaurant
09:00 - 13:00	Consequence simulation 'game'	Classroom
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch	Restaurant
14:00 – 18:00	Governing workshop	Classroom
18:00 - 19:30	Dinner	Restaurant
	Free evening activities	Activity spaces

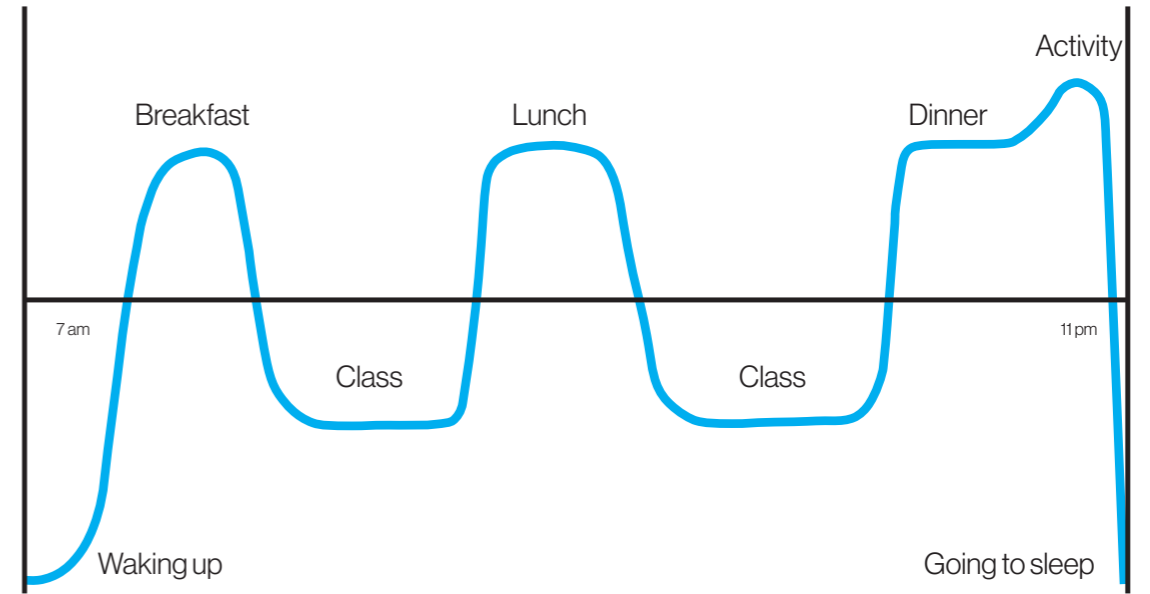
Friday (wrap up & final vote)

When	What happens	Where does it happen
08:00 - 09:00	Breakfast	Restaurant
09:00 - 11:00	Closing study group discussion & recap	Classroom
11:00 - 13:00	What happens in the afternoon and in the future with the results	Classroom
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch	Restaurant
14:00 - 17:00	Final vote and closing moment	Democratic core
After 17:00	Option to check-out	Arrival zone
23:00	Final check-out	



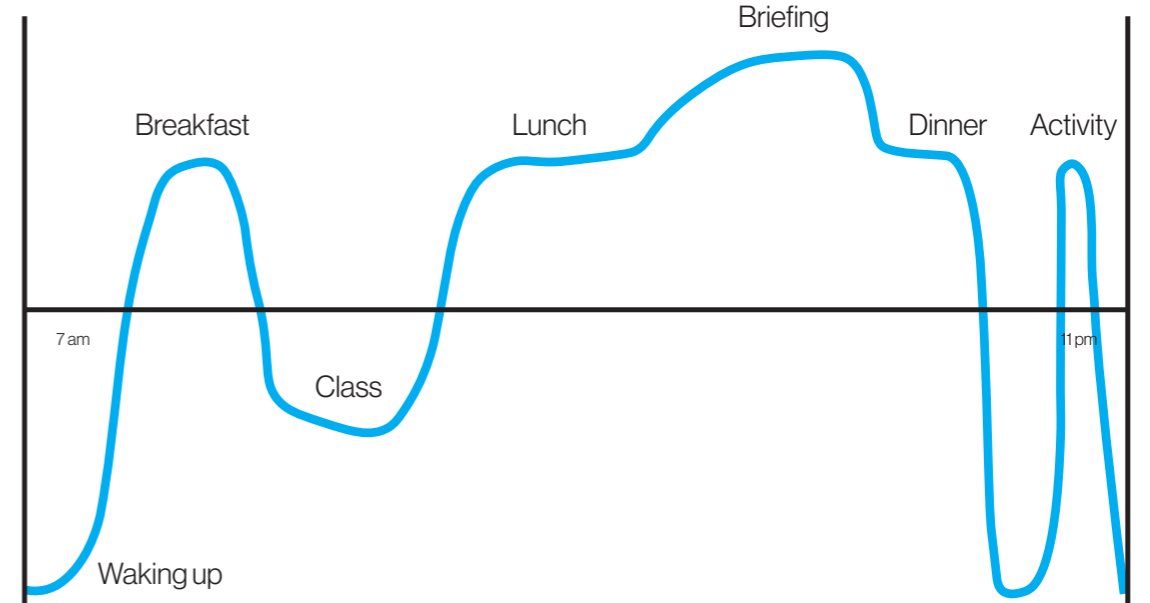
Occupancy of different spaces within the building throughout the day

Crowded



Intimate

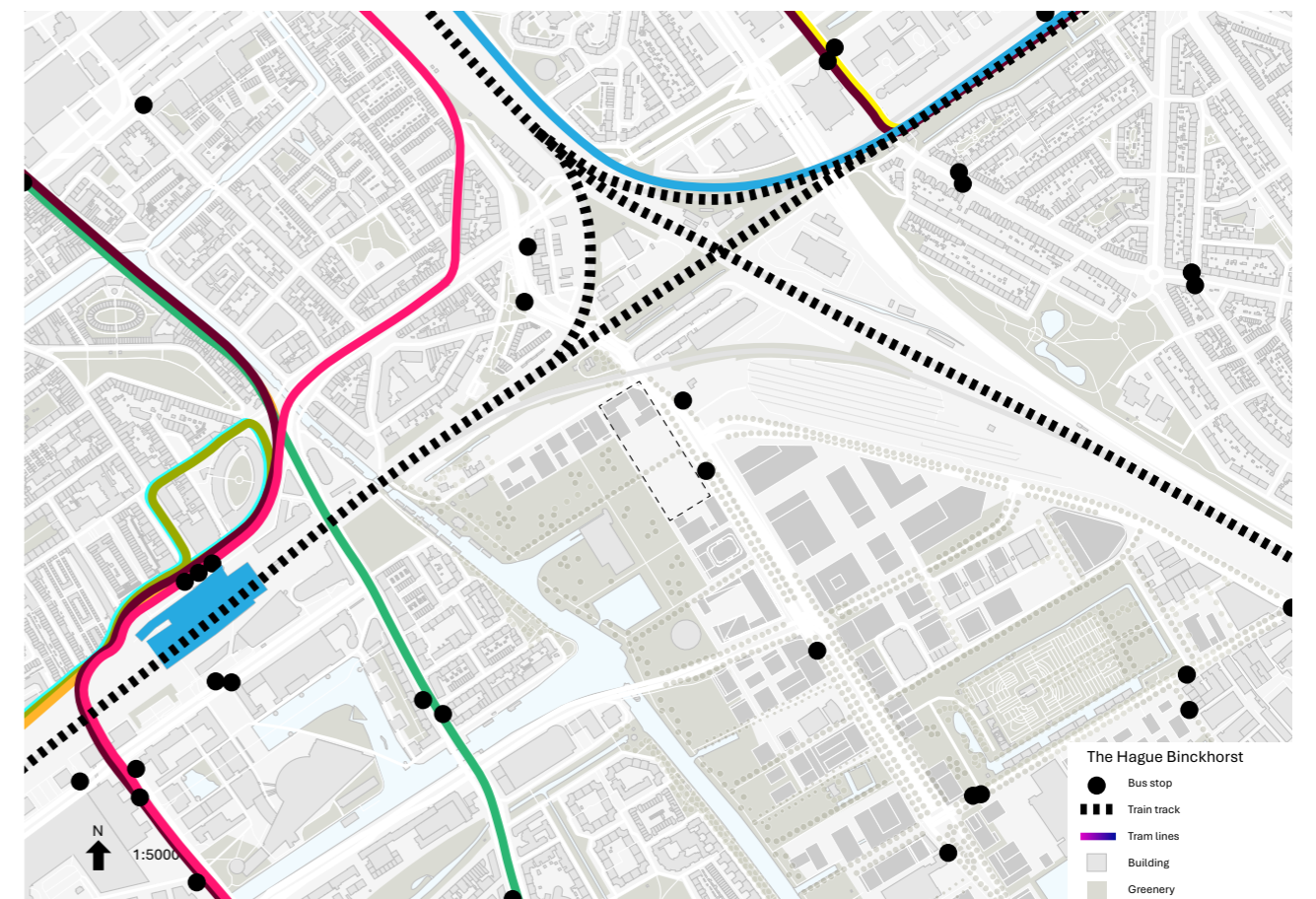
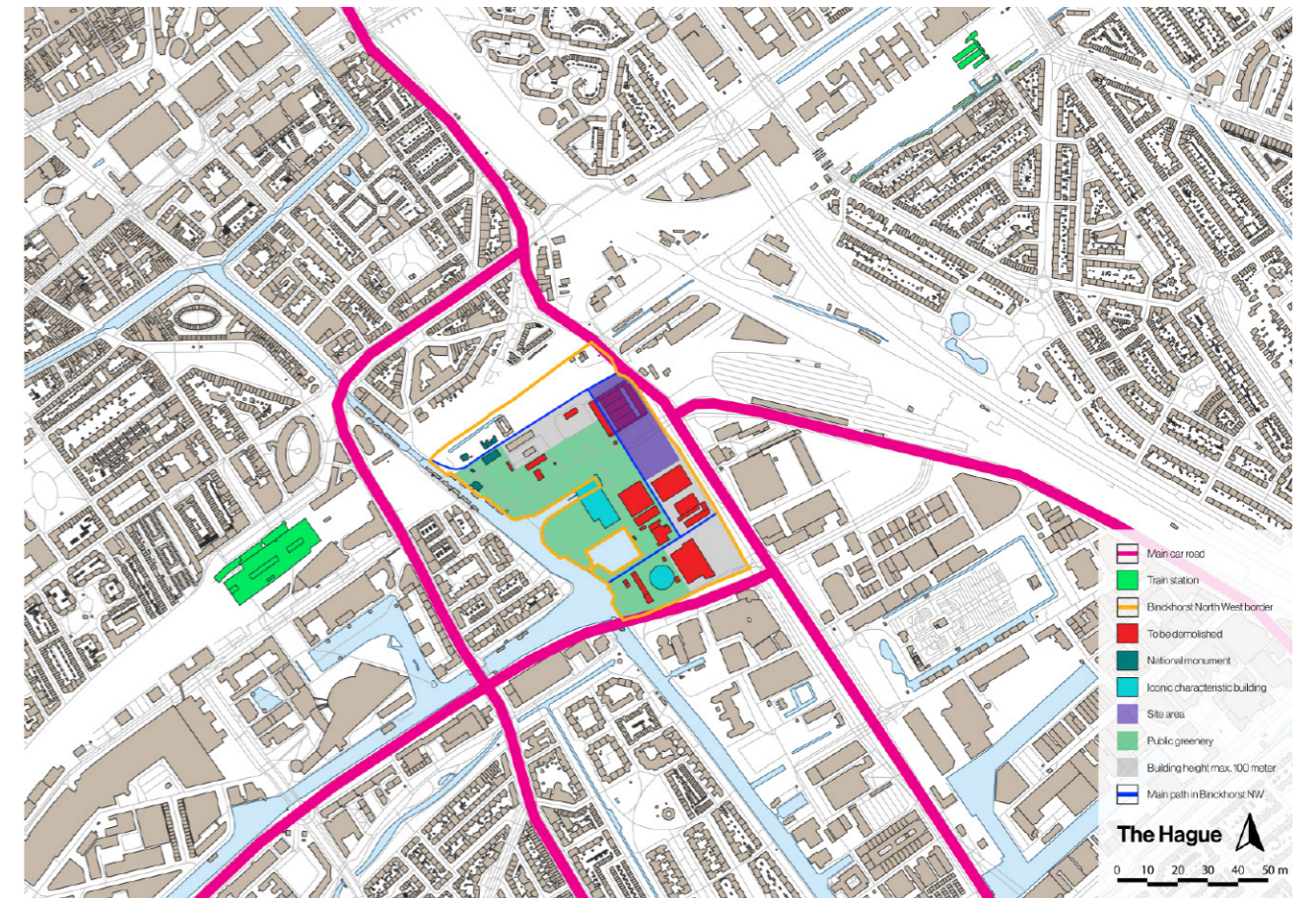
Crowded



Intimate

Feeling throughout different days of the schedule (top = Thursday, bottom = Friday)

Appendix 3. The Hague analysis





1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

- 1. Rijnstraat 8, glass
- 2. De Resident, Brick, glass
- 3. Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, stone, glass
- 4. JuBi torens, brick, stone, glass
- 5. Temporary parlement, brick, concrete, glass

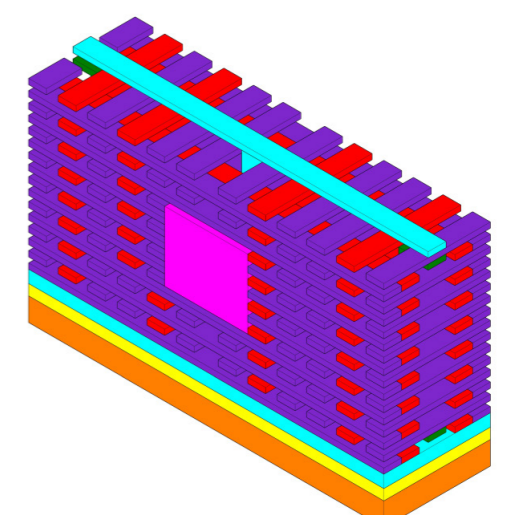
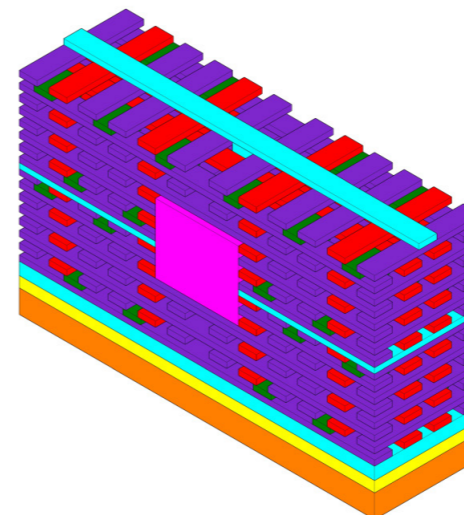
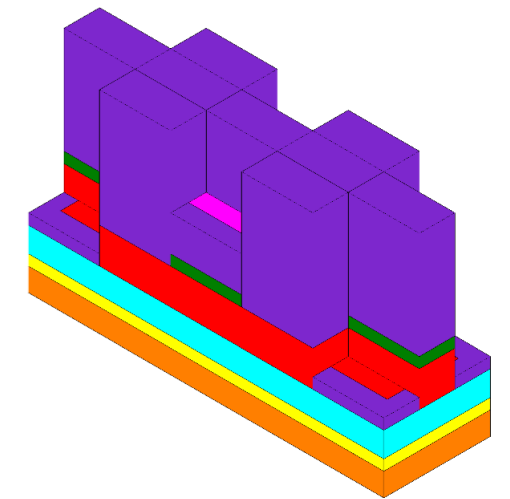
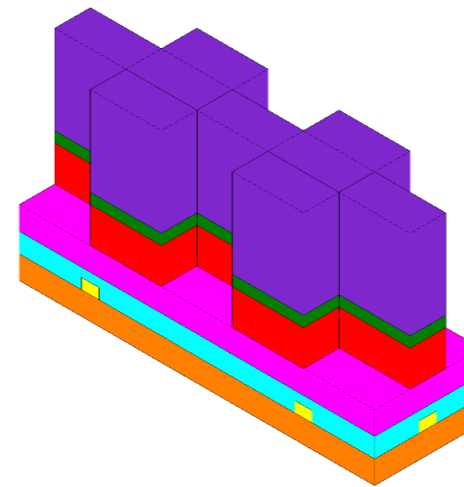
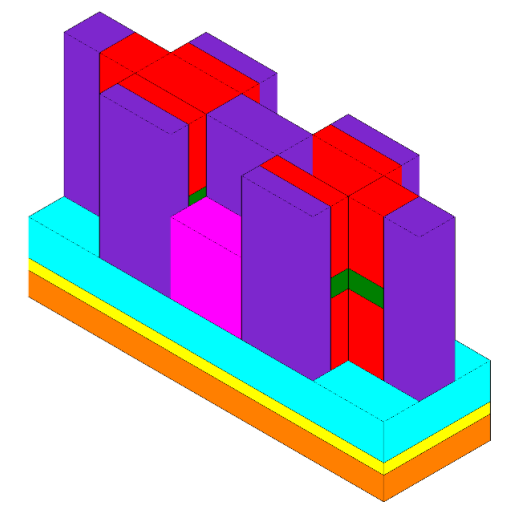
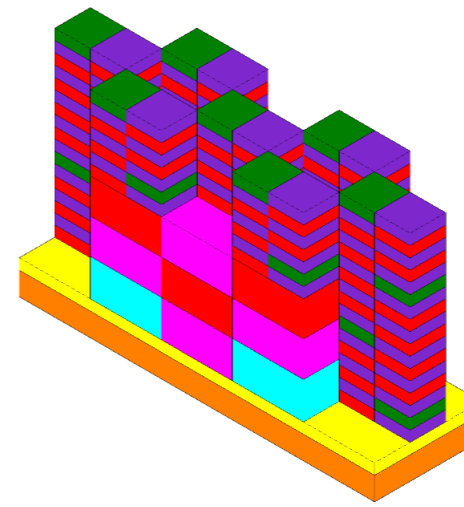
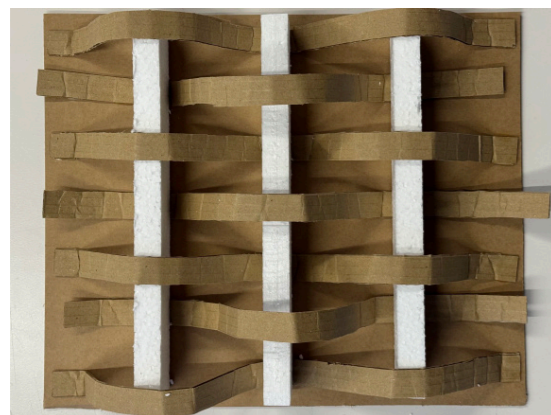
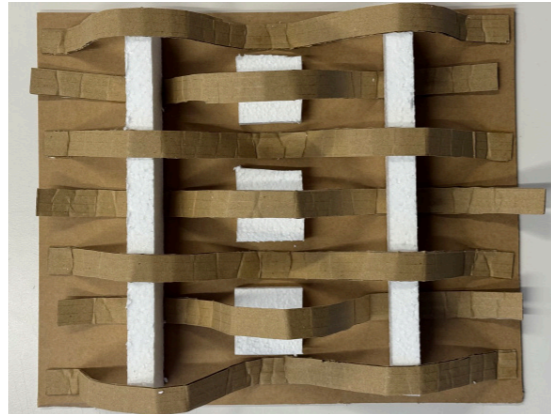
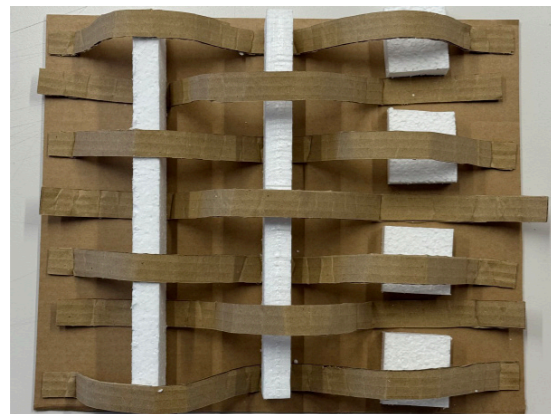
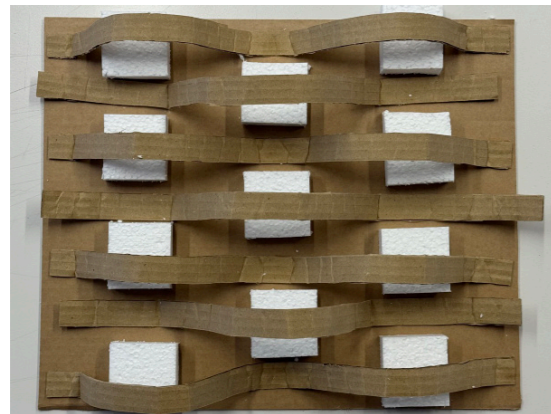
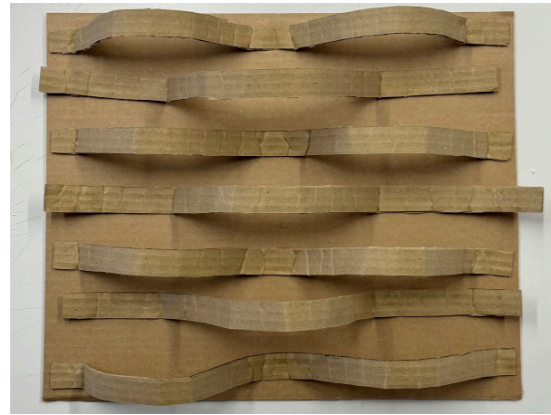


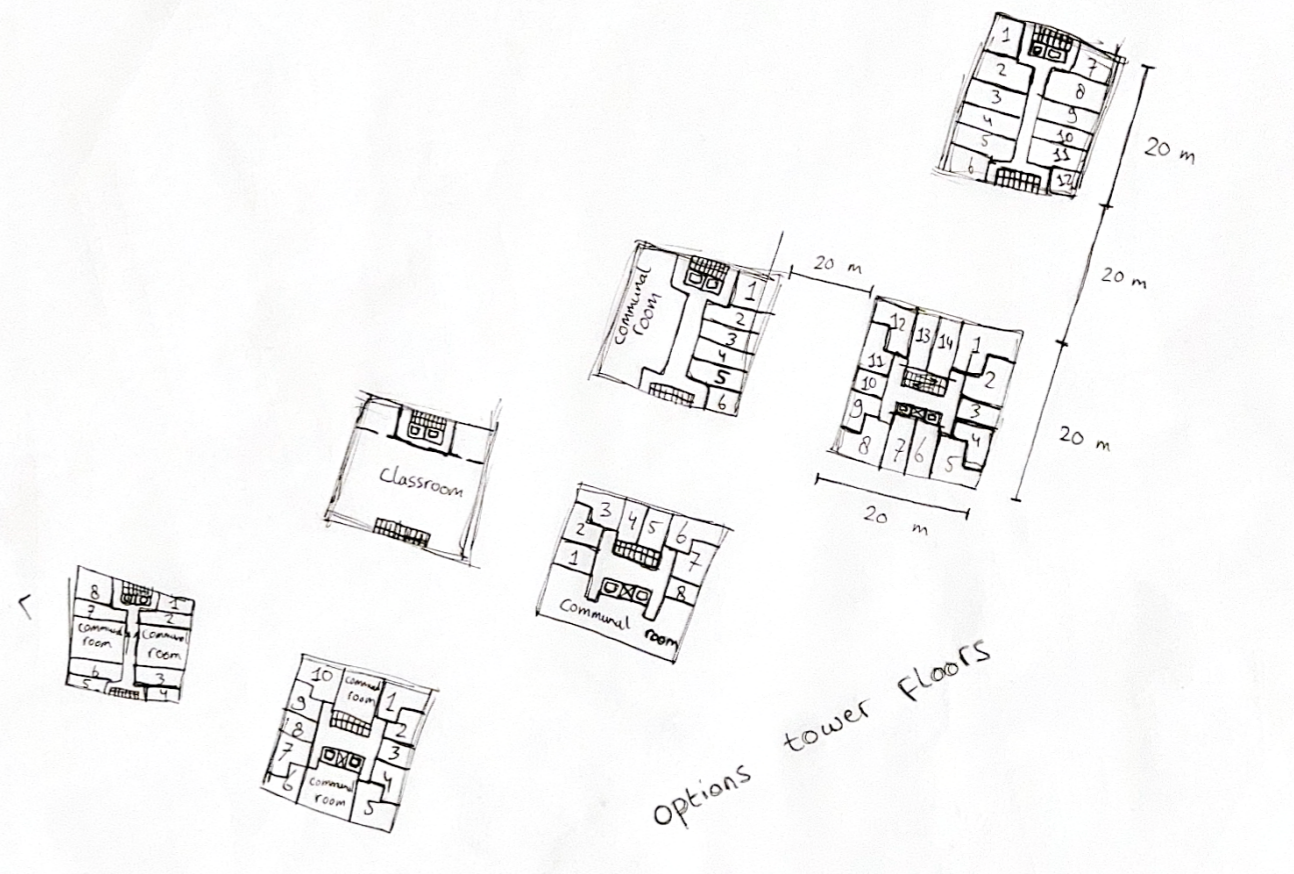
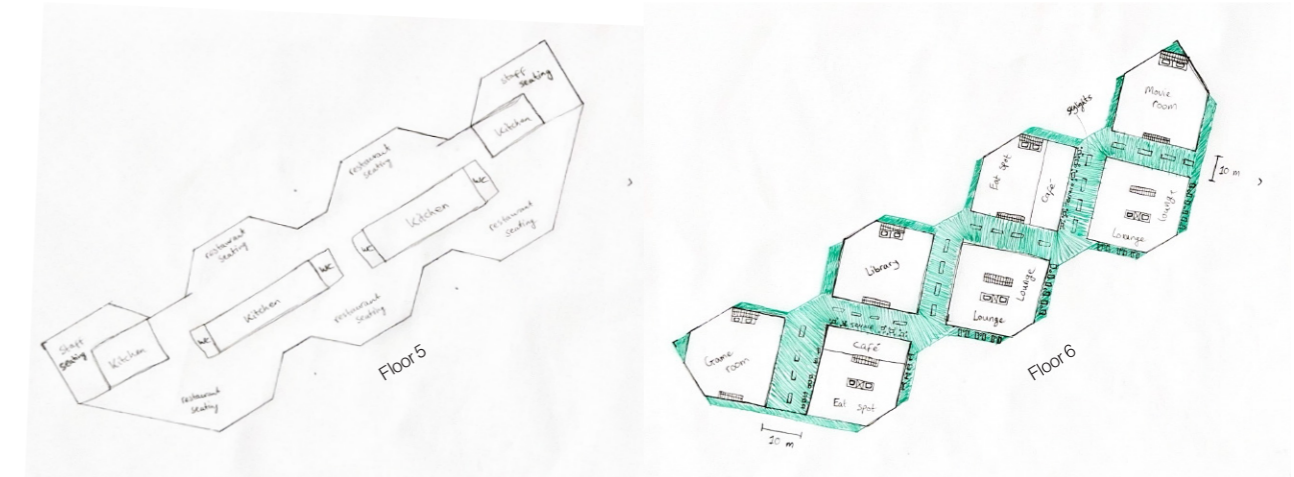
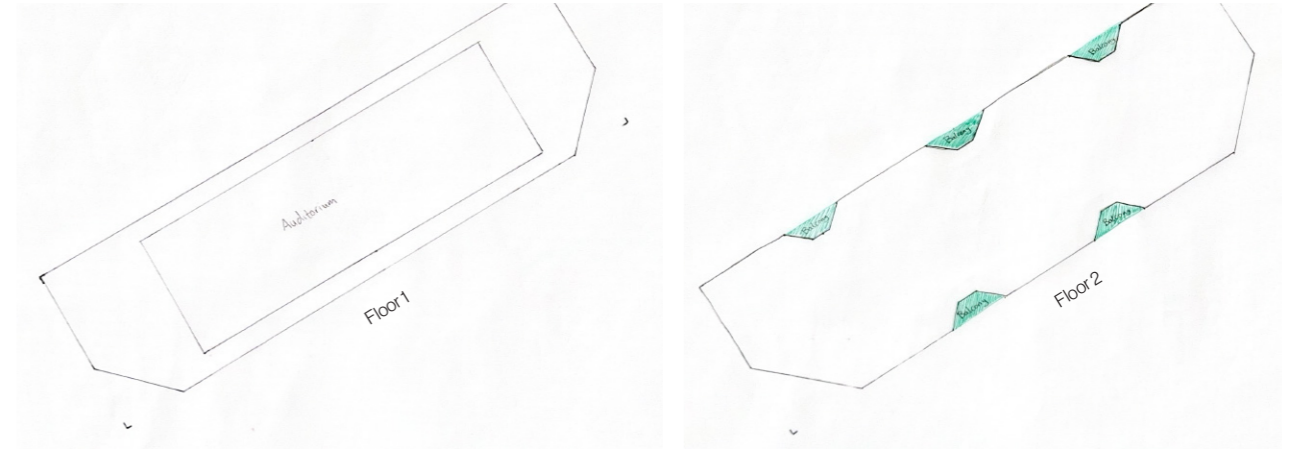
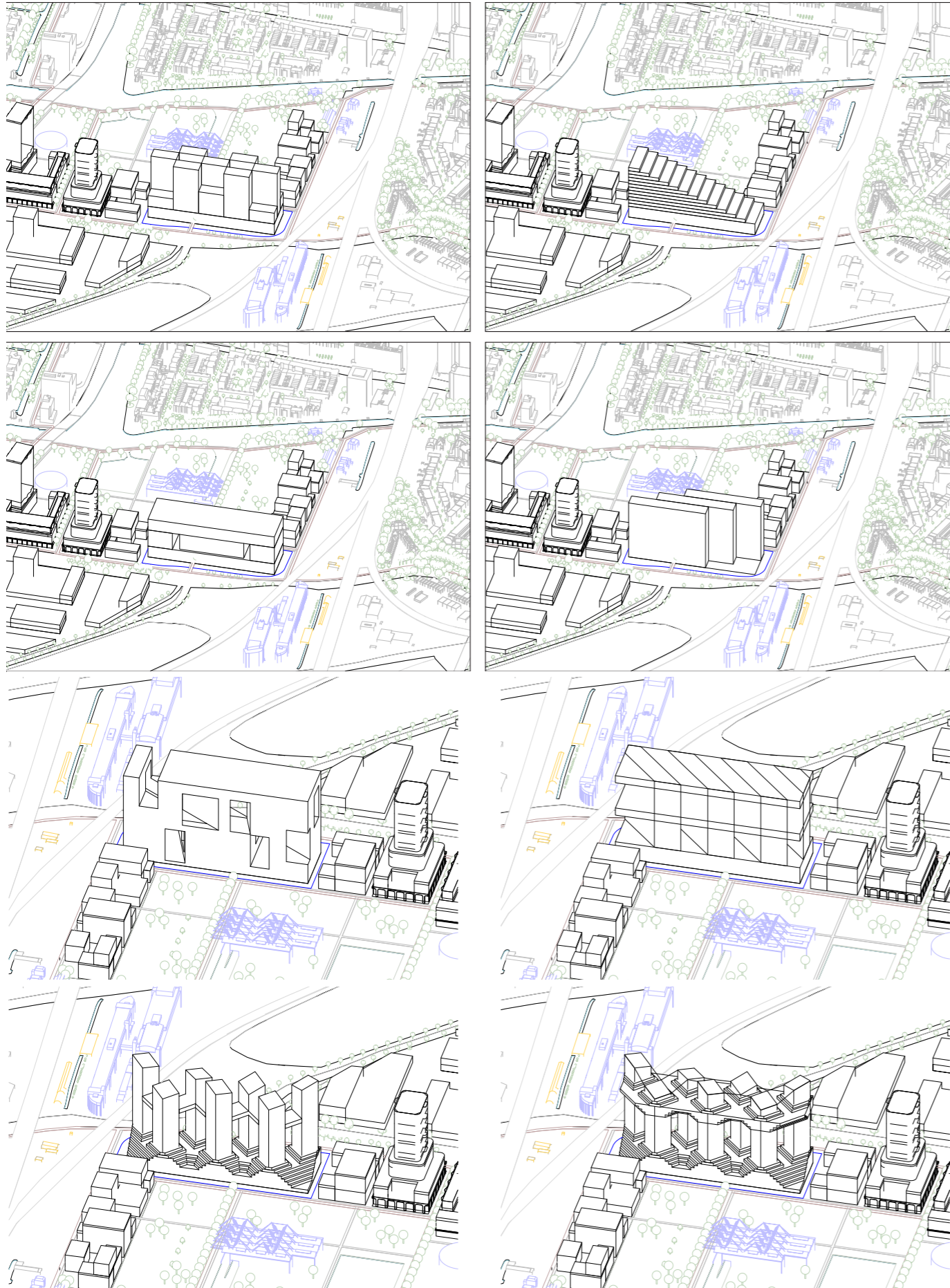
Conceptual collage of building concept

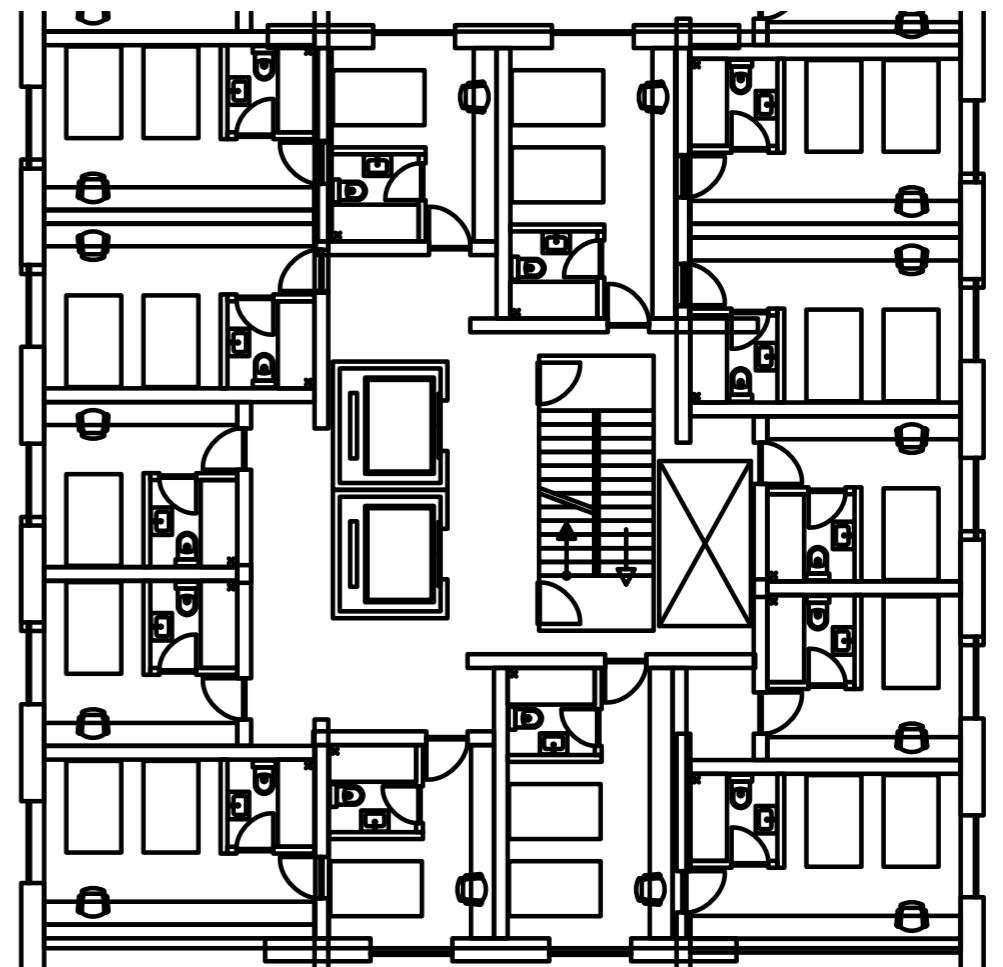
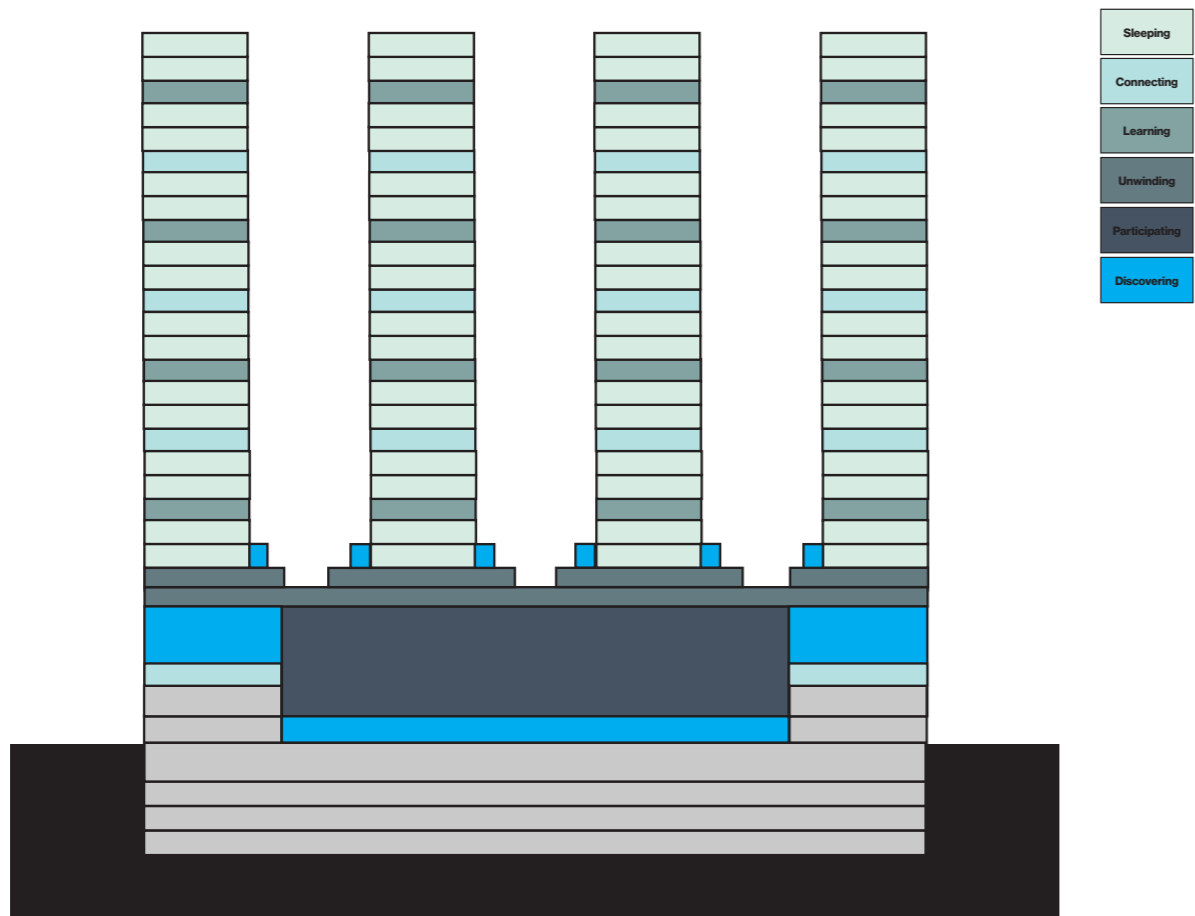
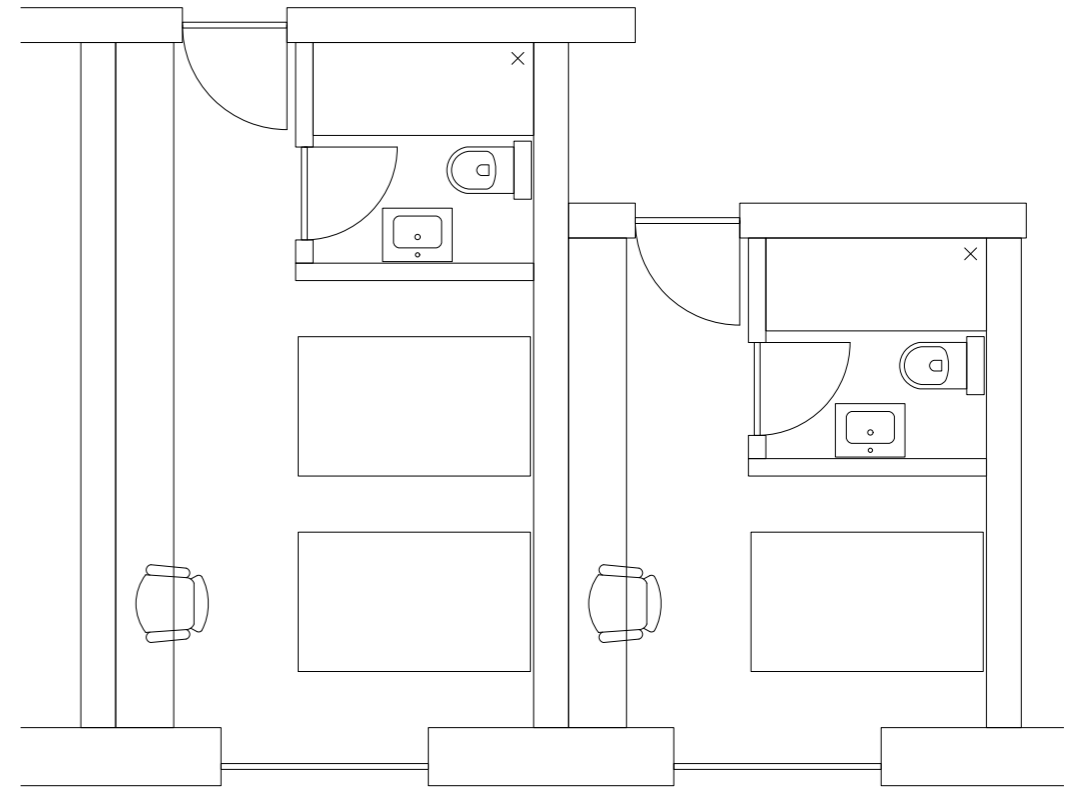
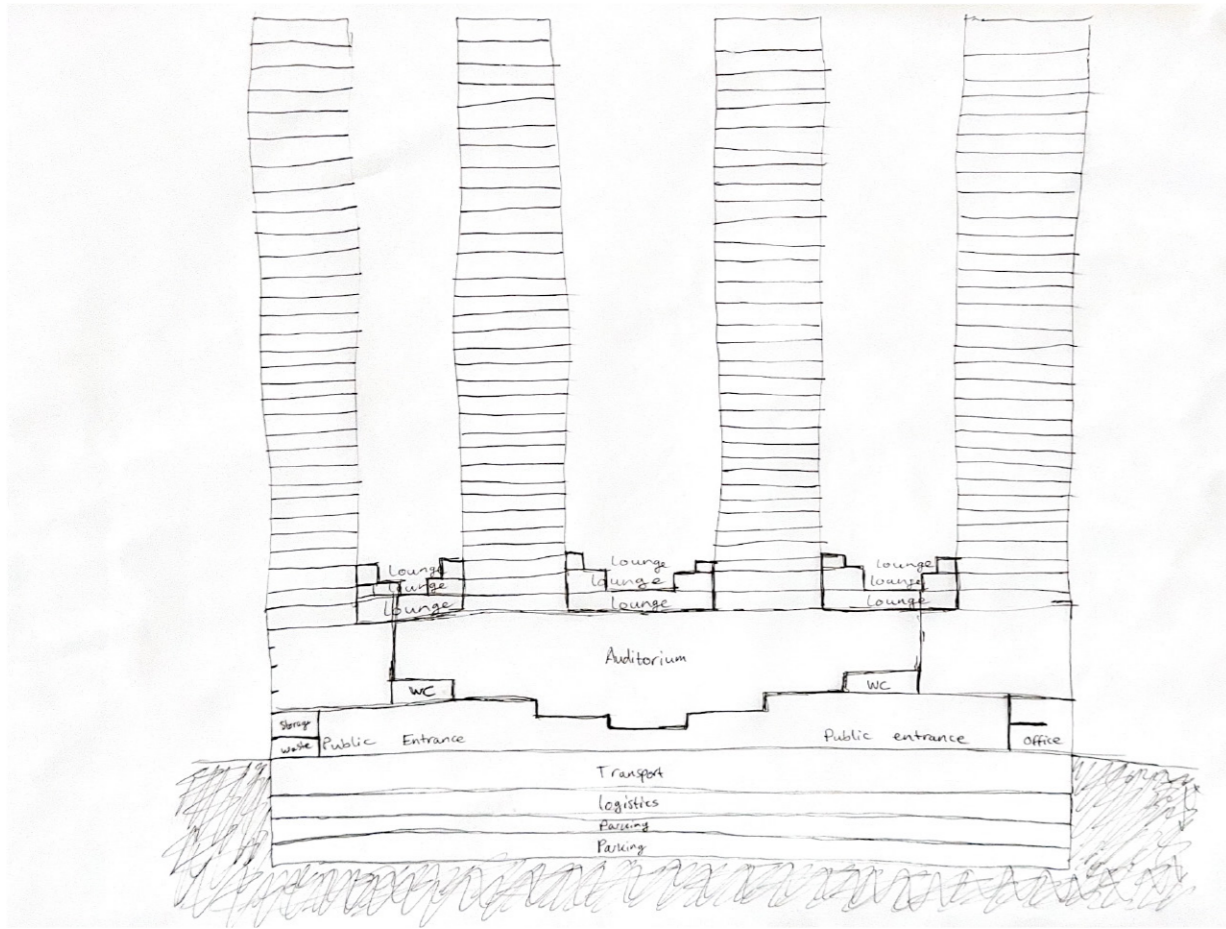


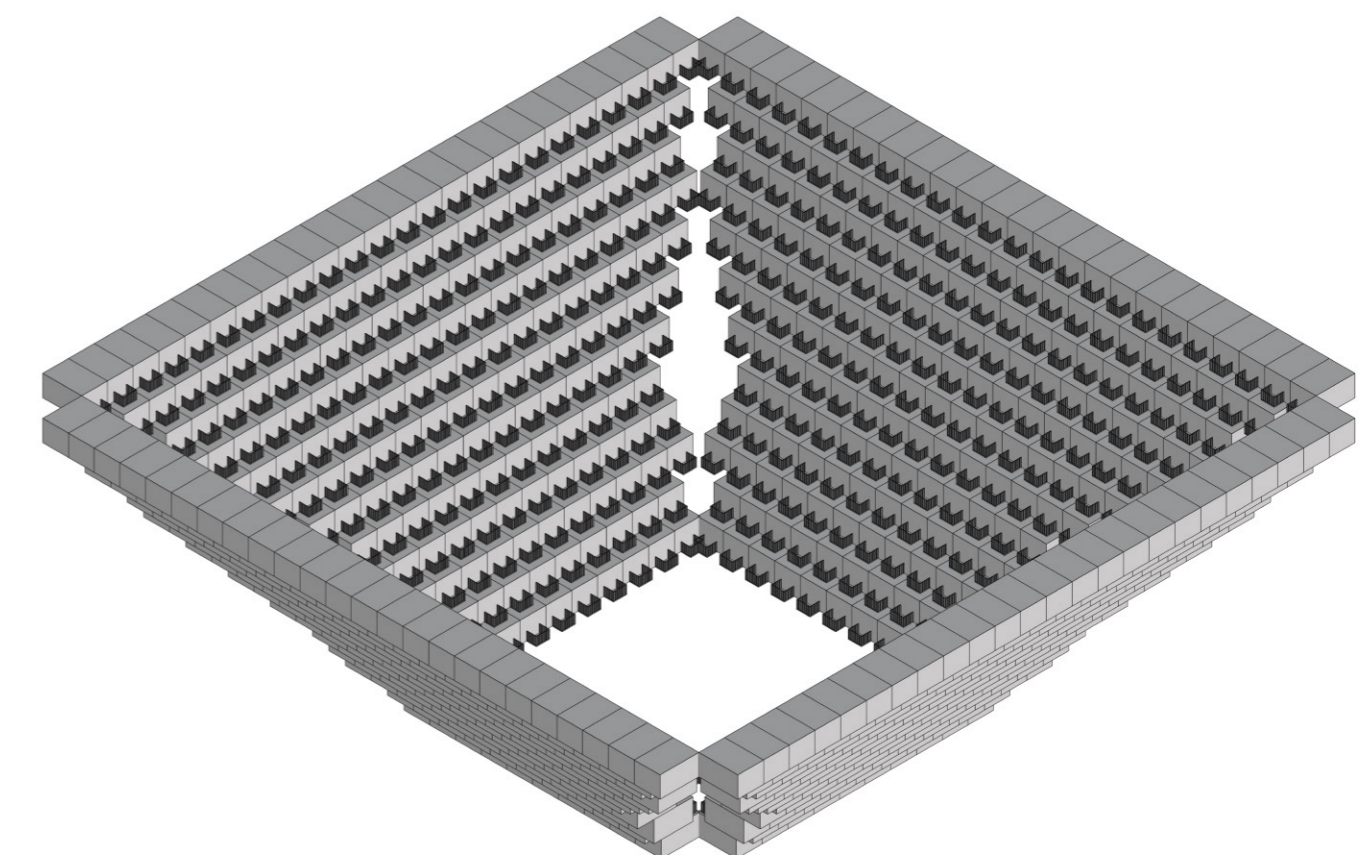
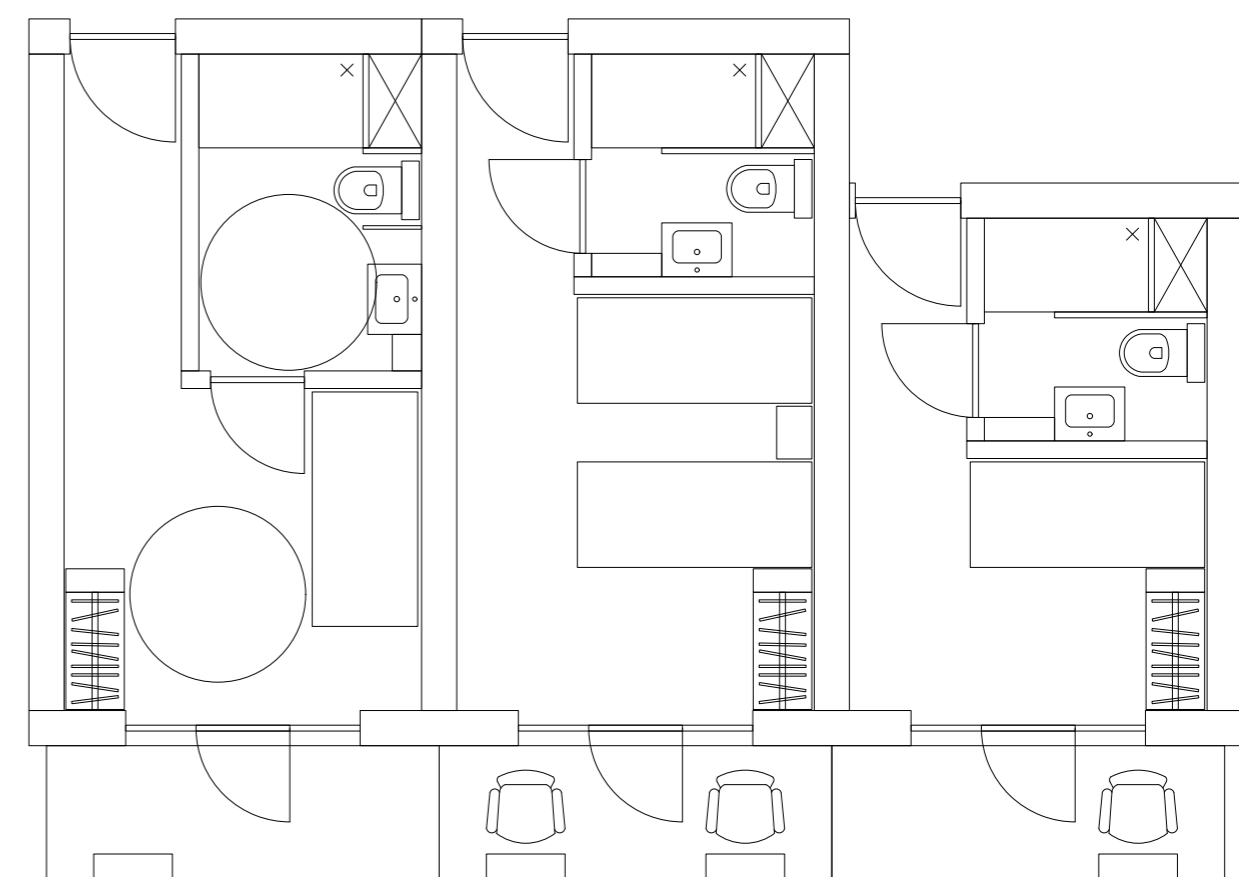
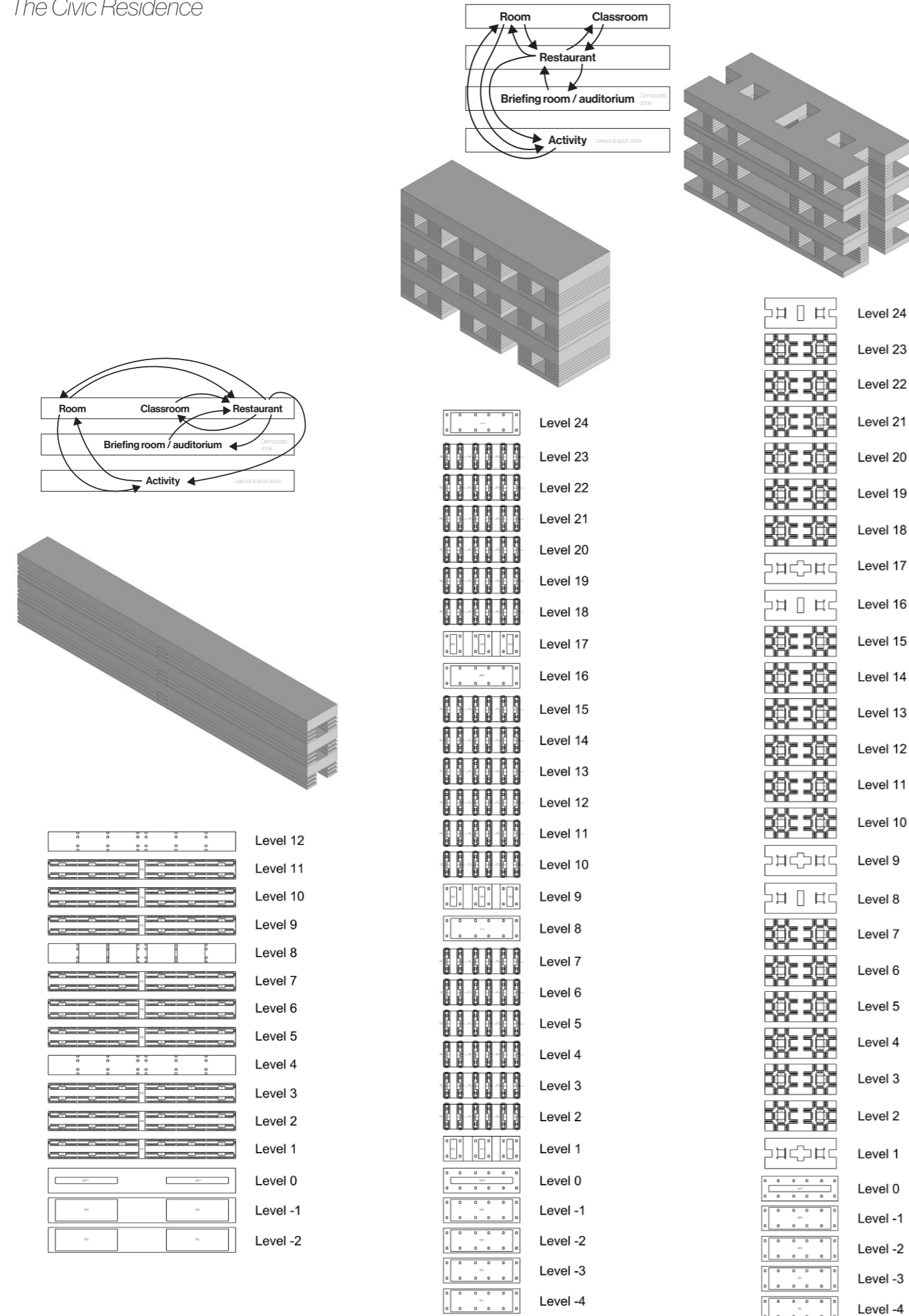
Look & feel collage

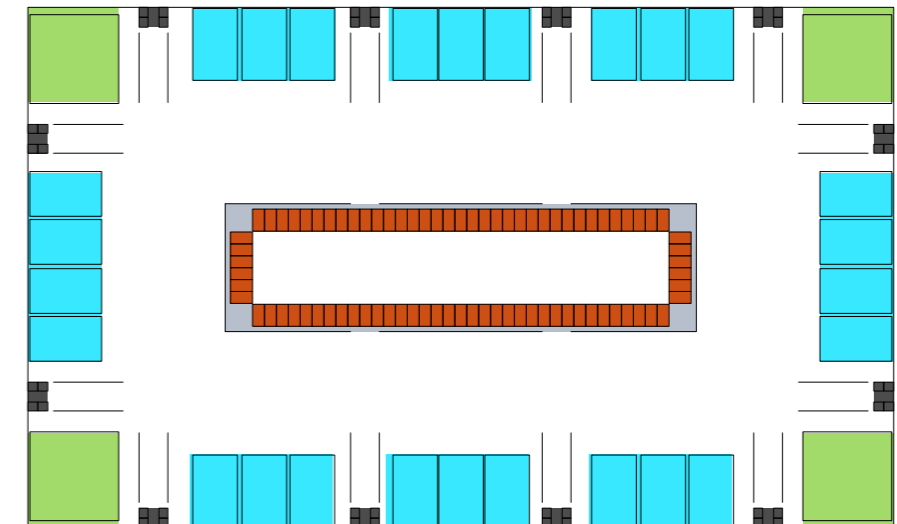
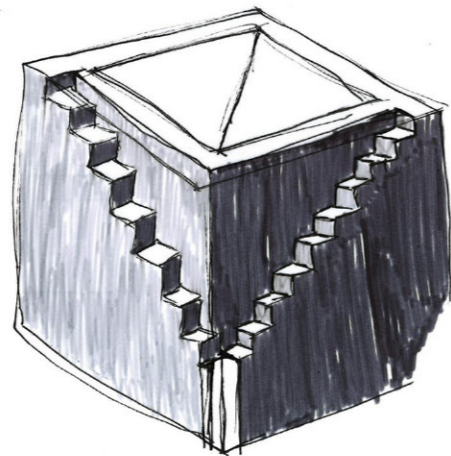
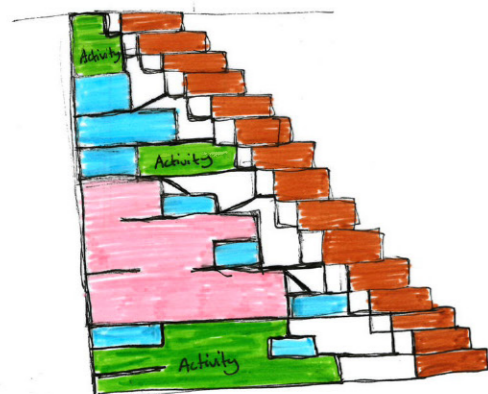
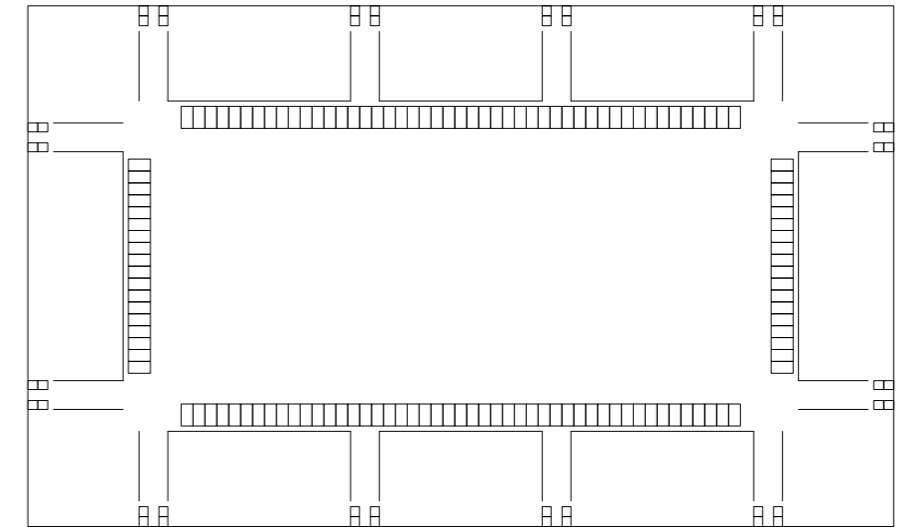
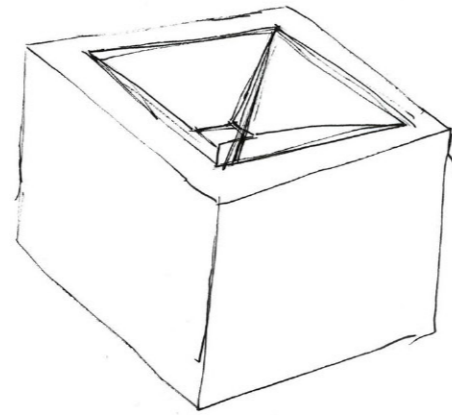
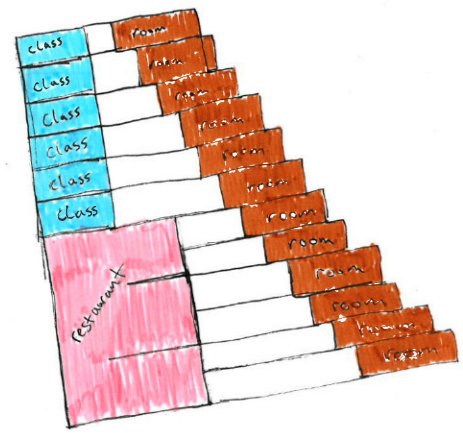
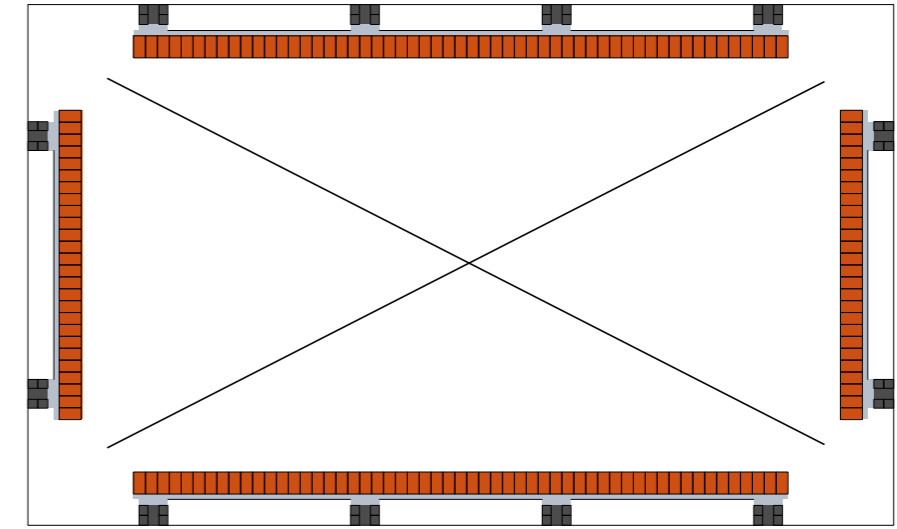
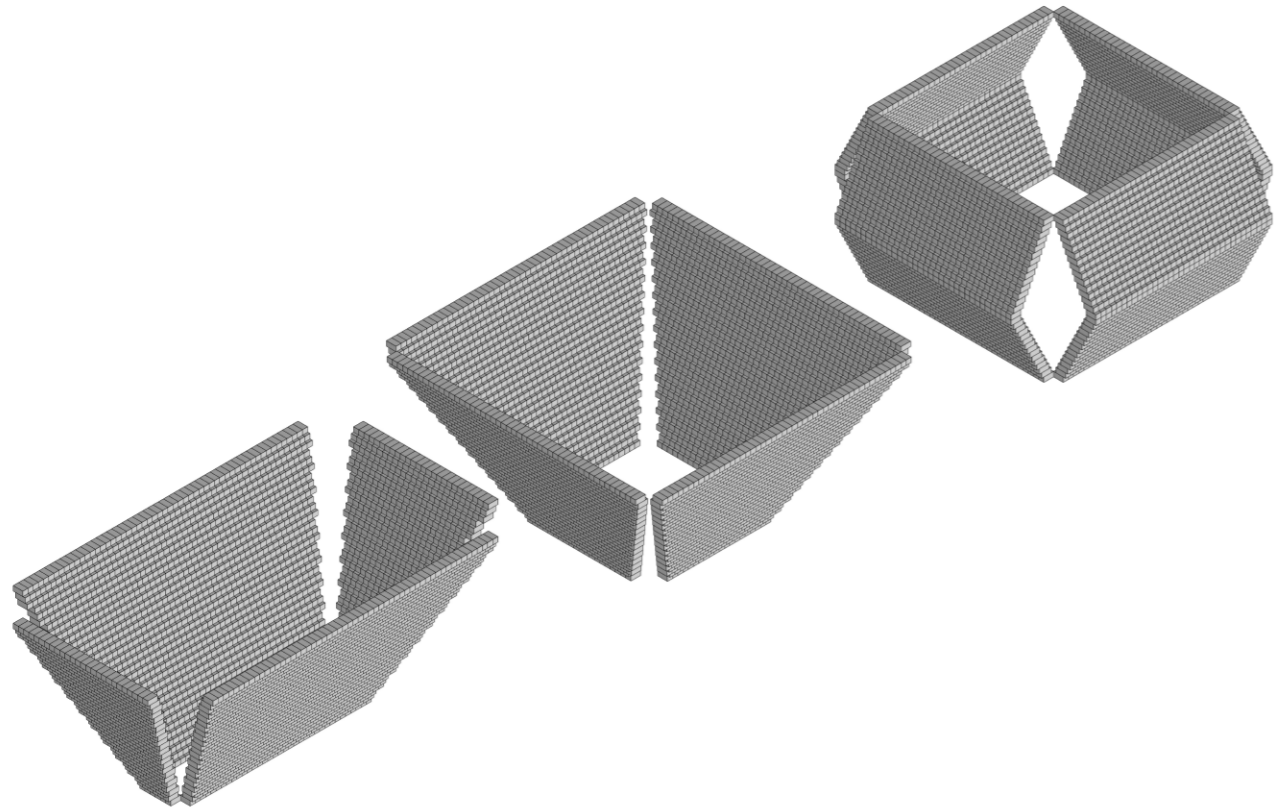
Appendix 4. The design process

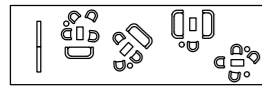




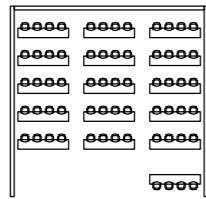




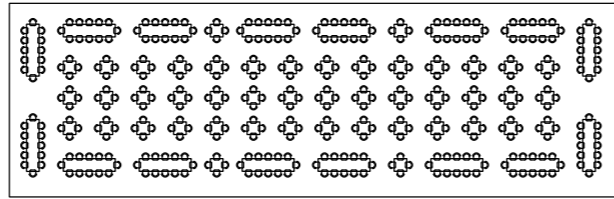




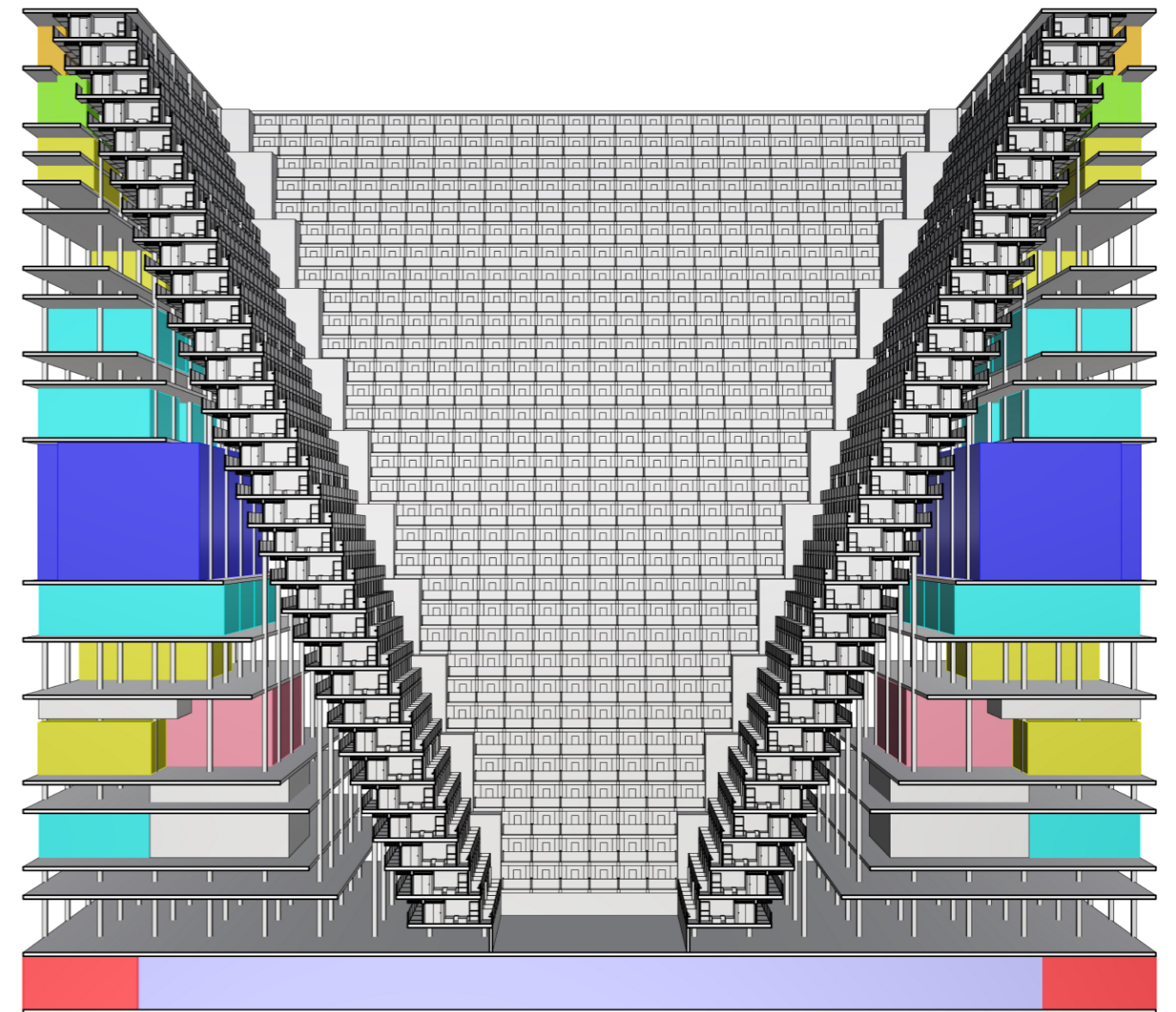
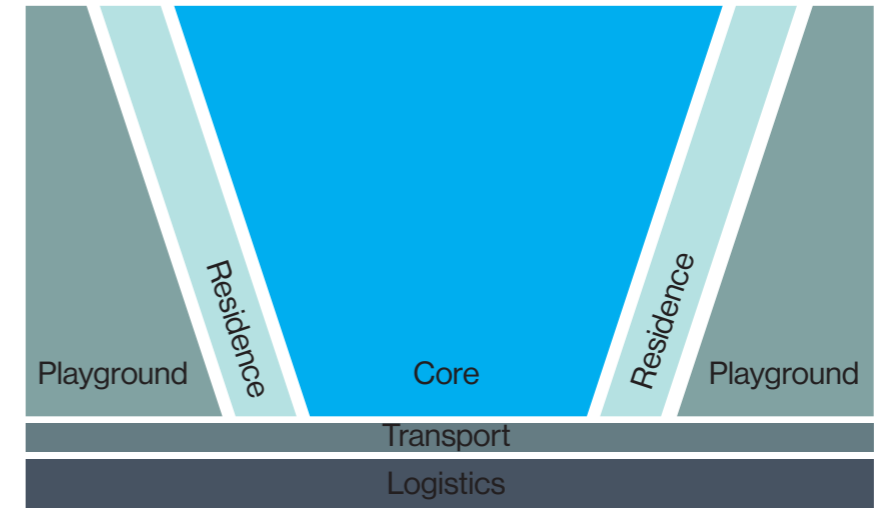
Communal room

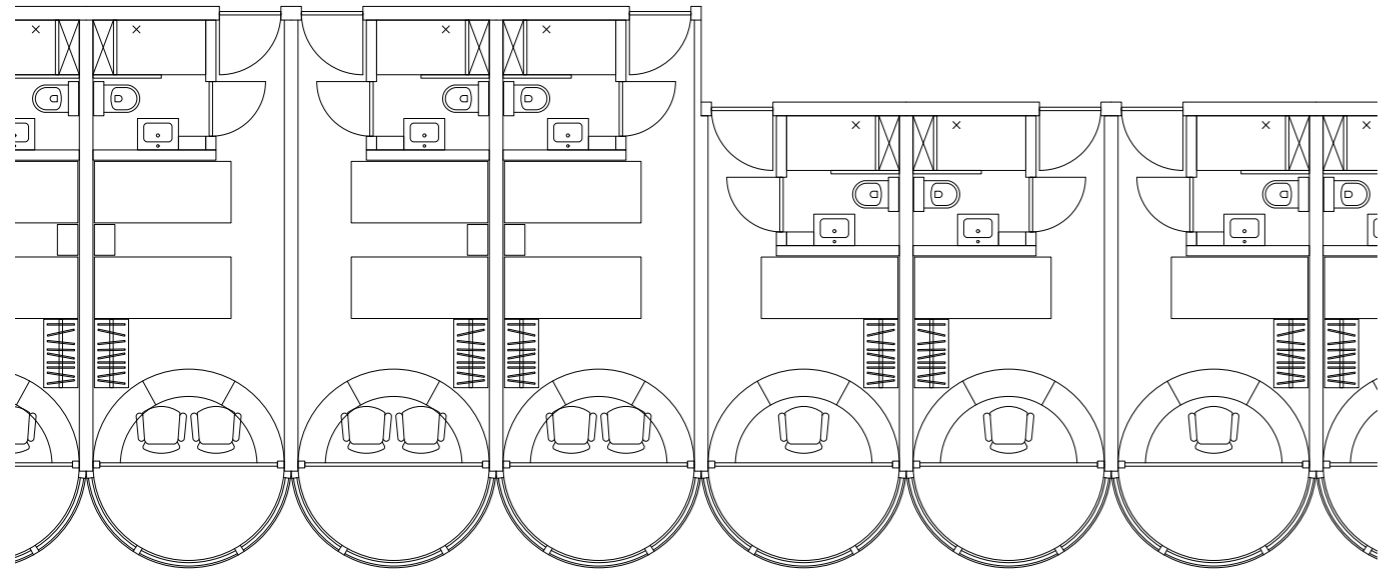


Classroom
60 seats



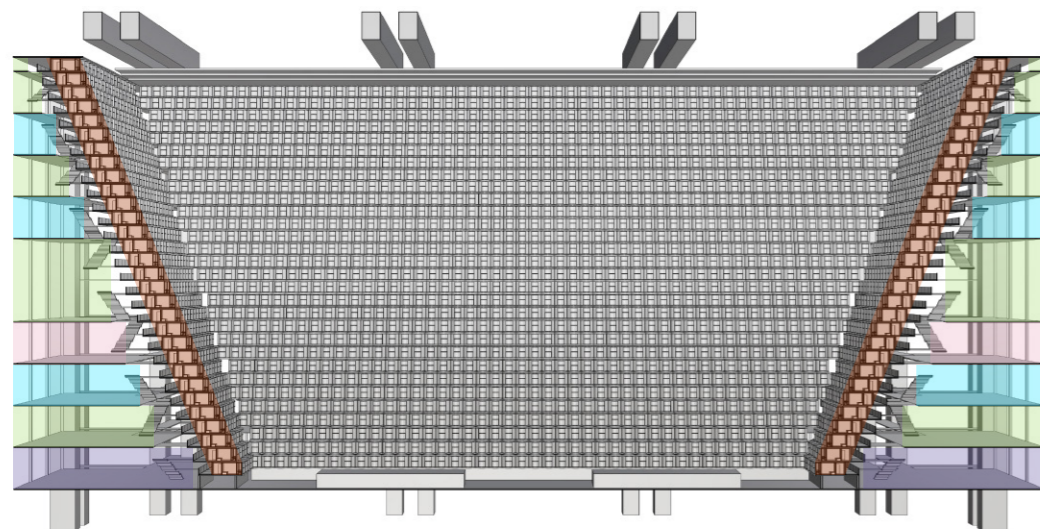
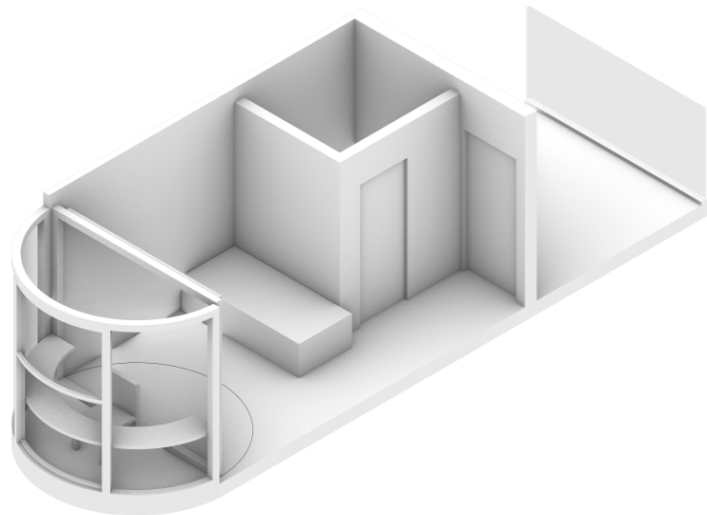
Restaurant
376 seats



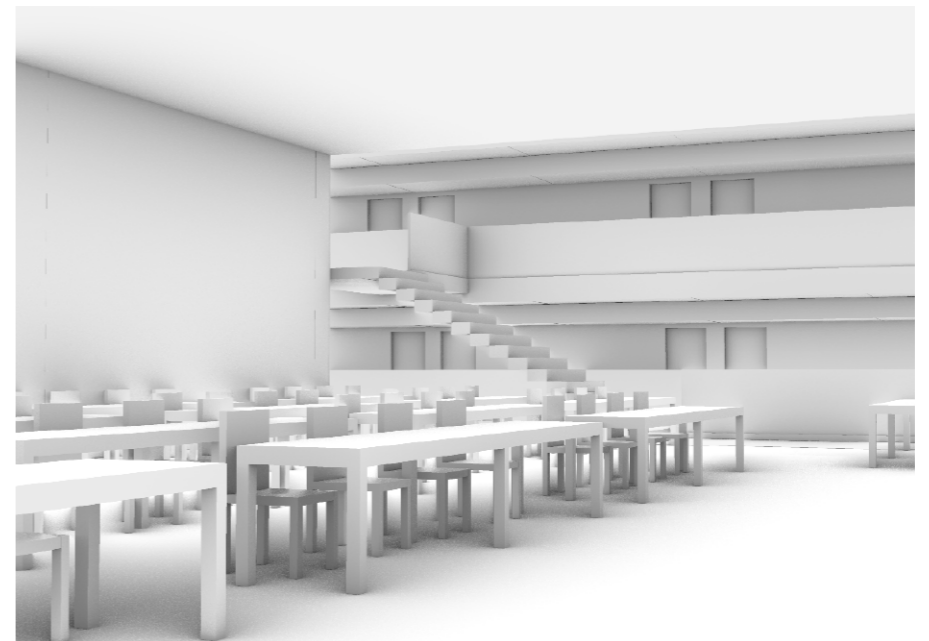
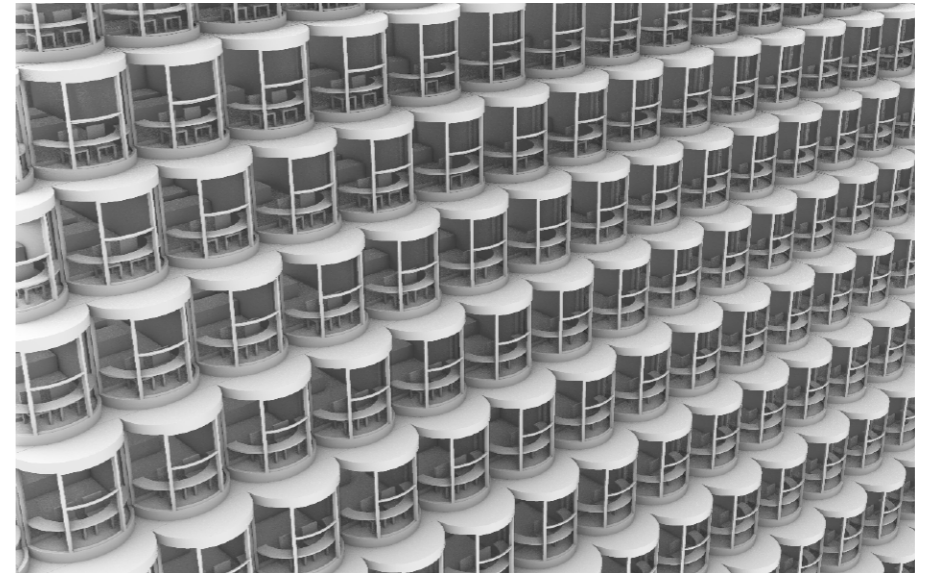


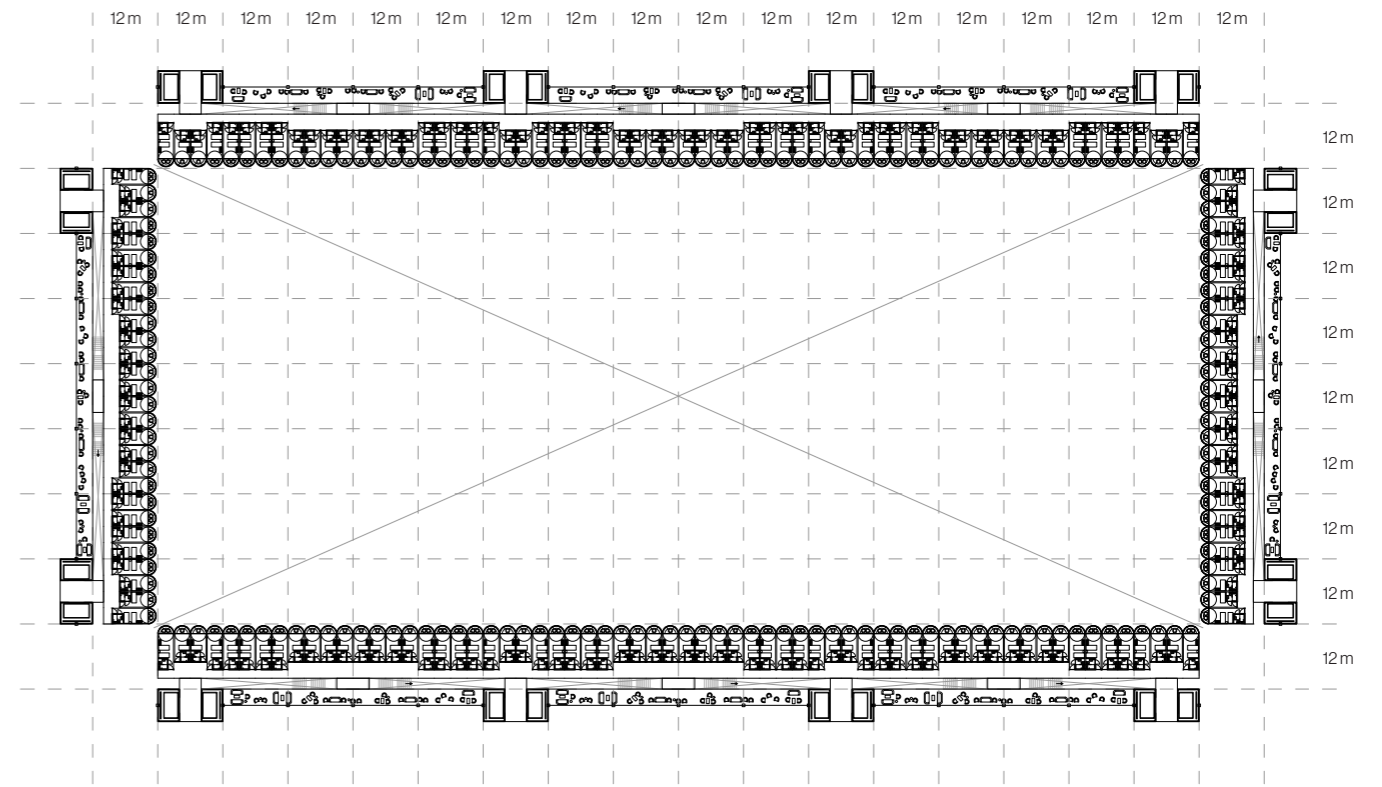
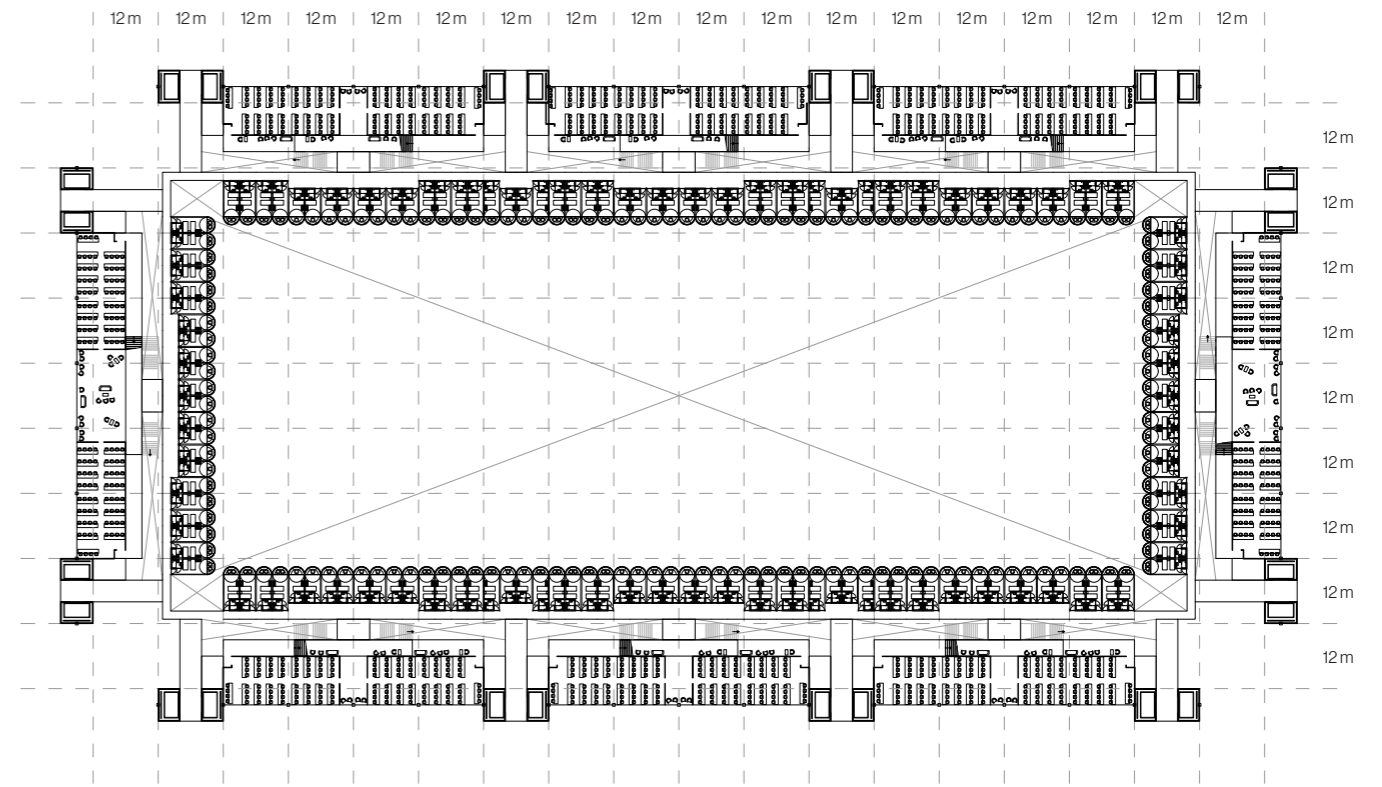
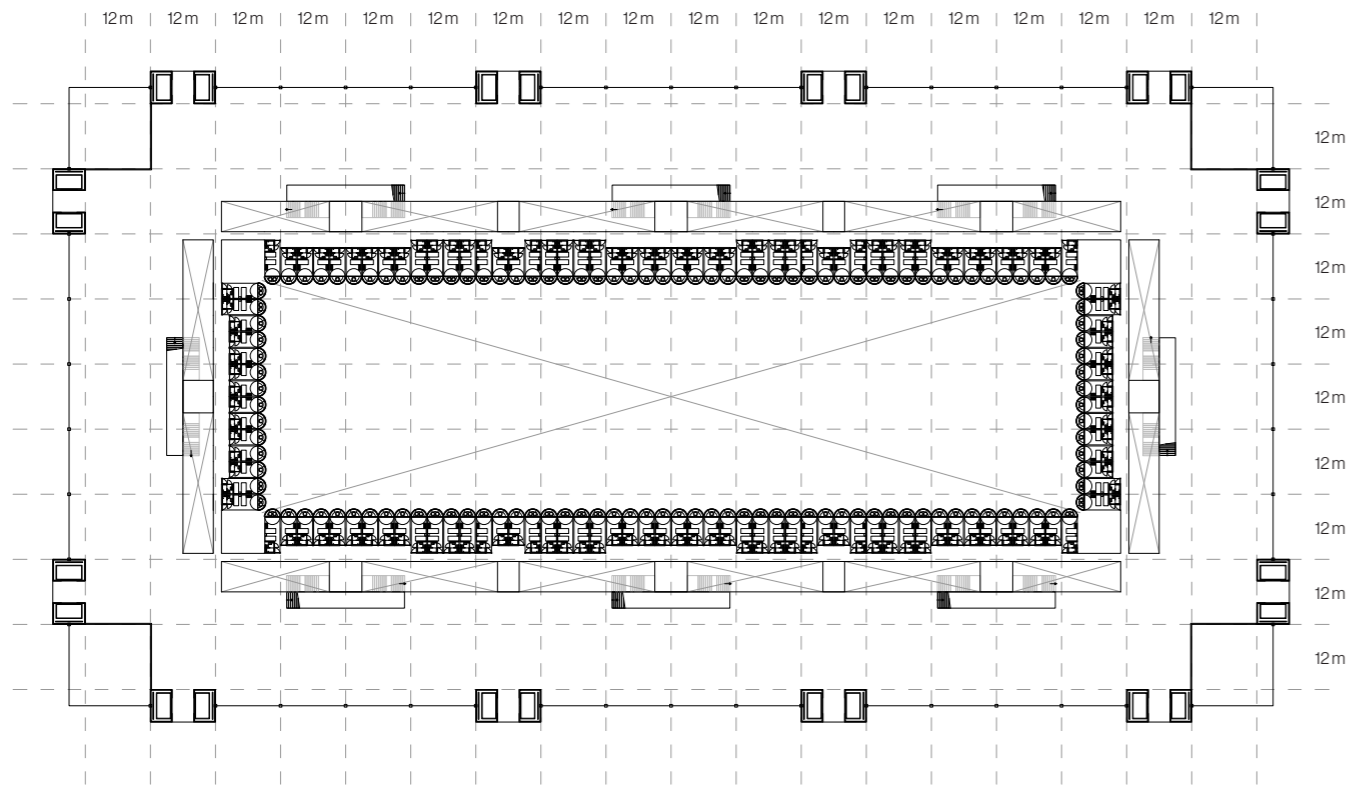
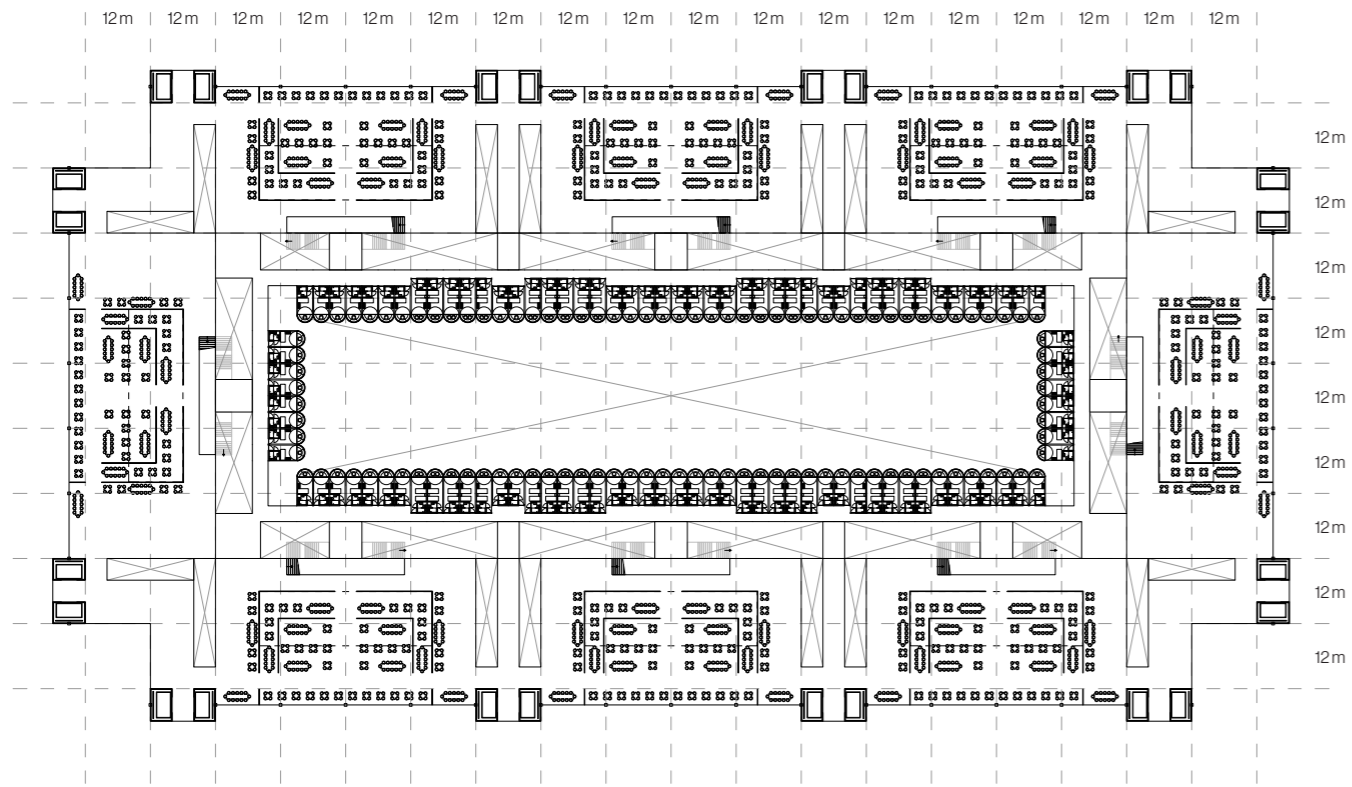
Double room
21 m²

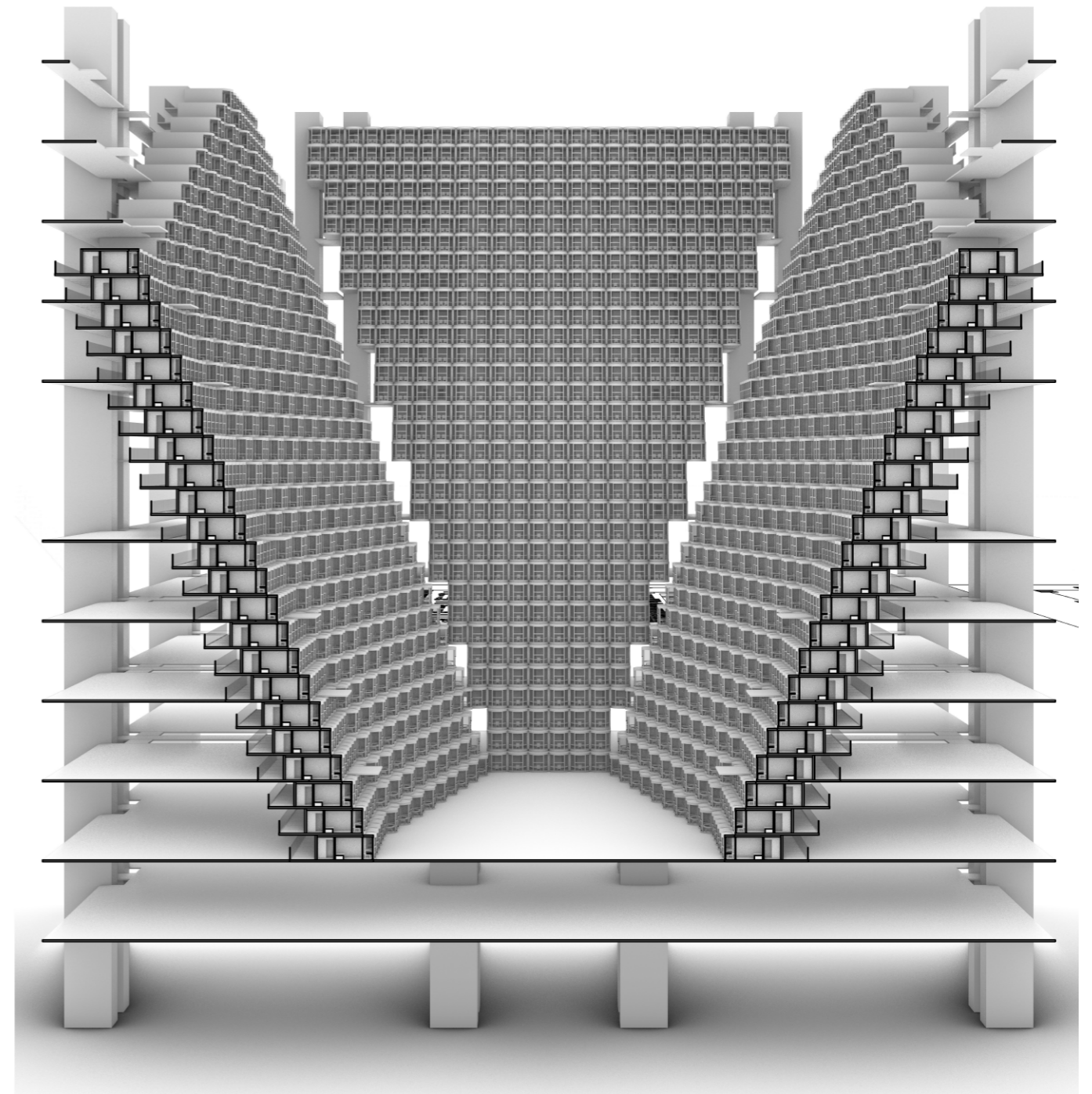
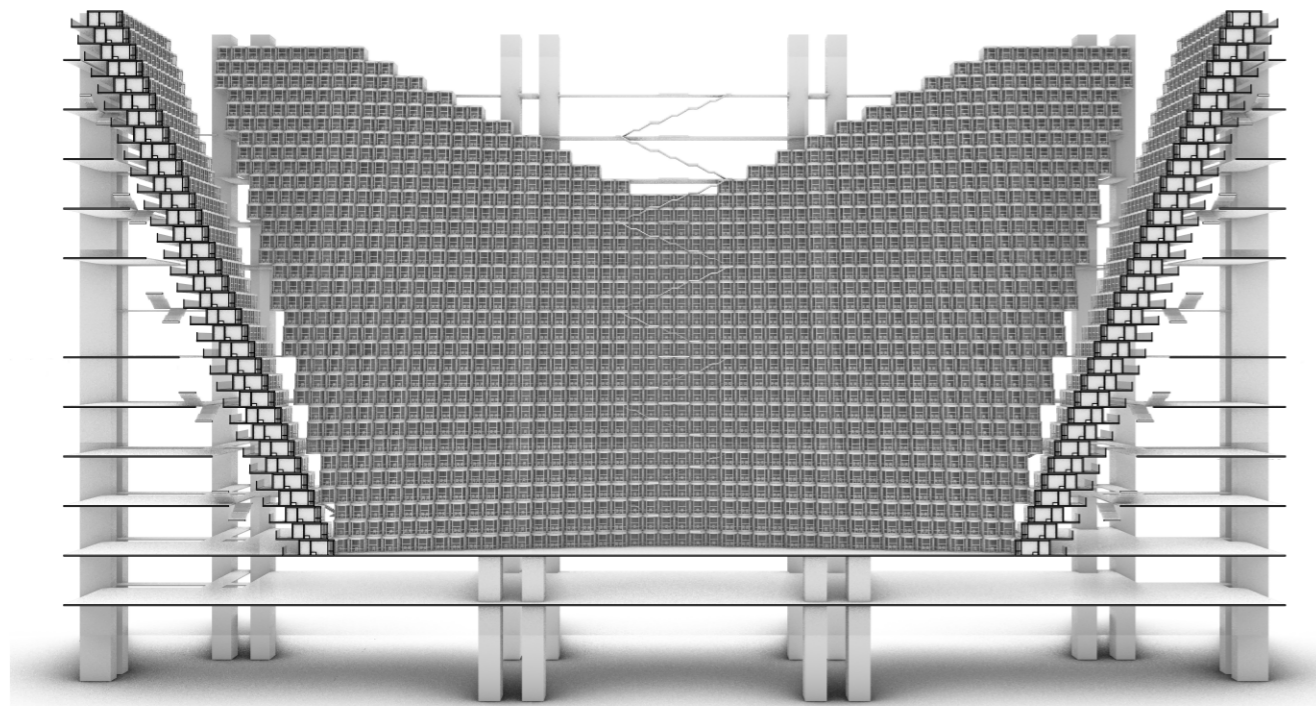
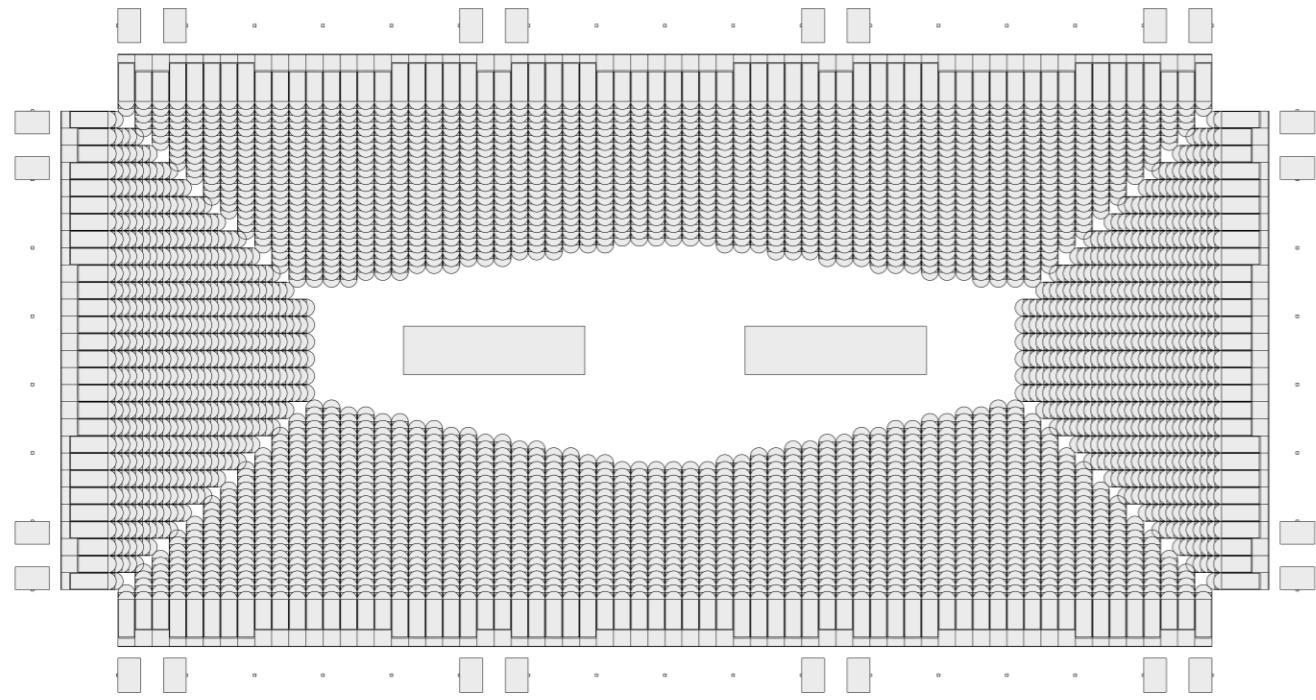
Single room
17 m²

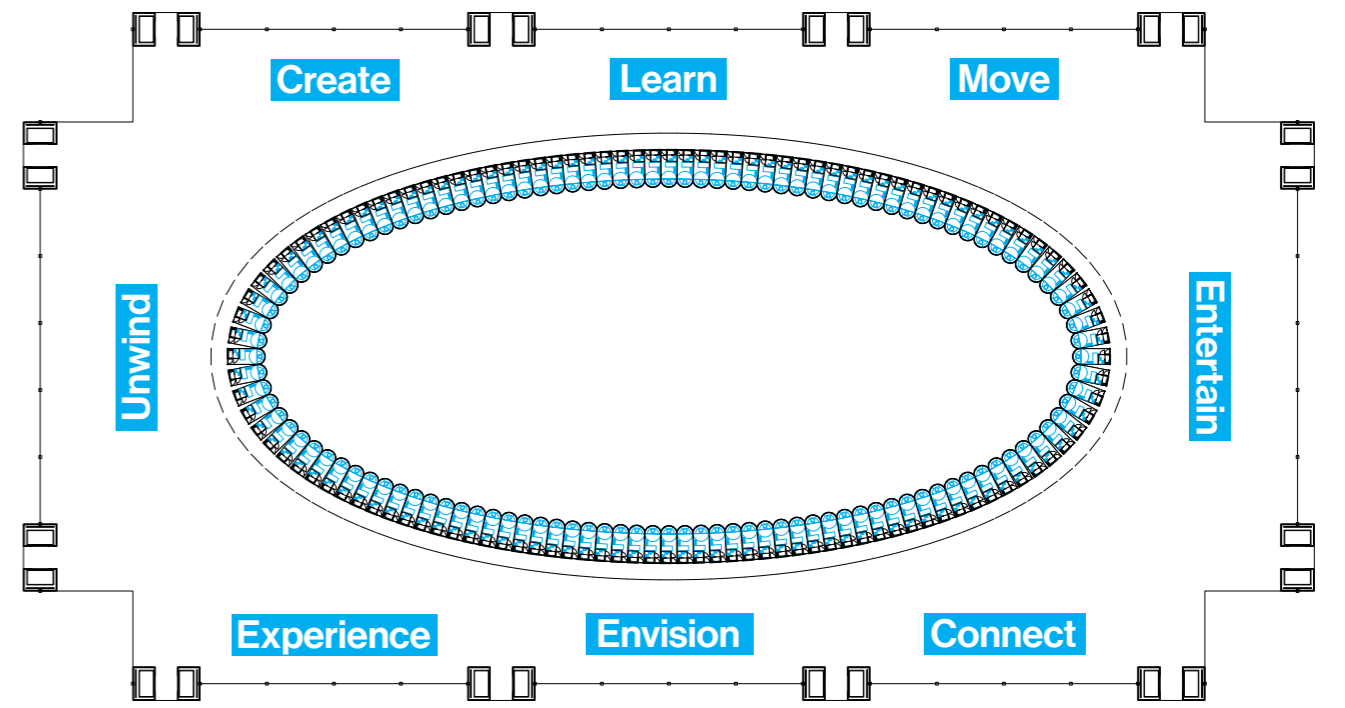
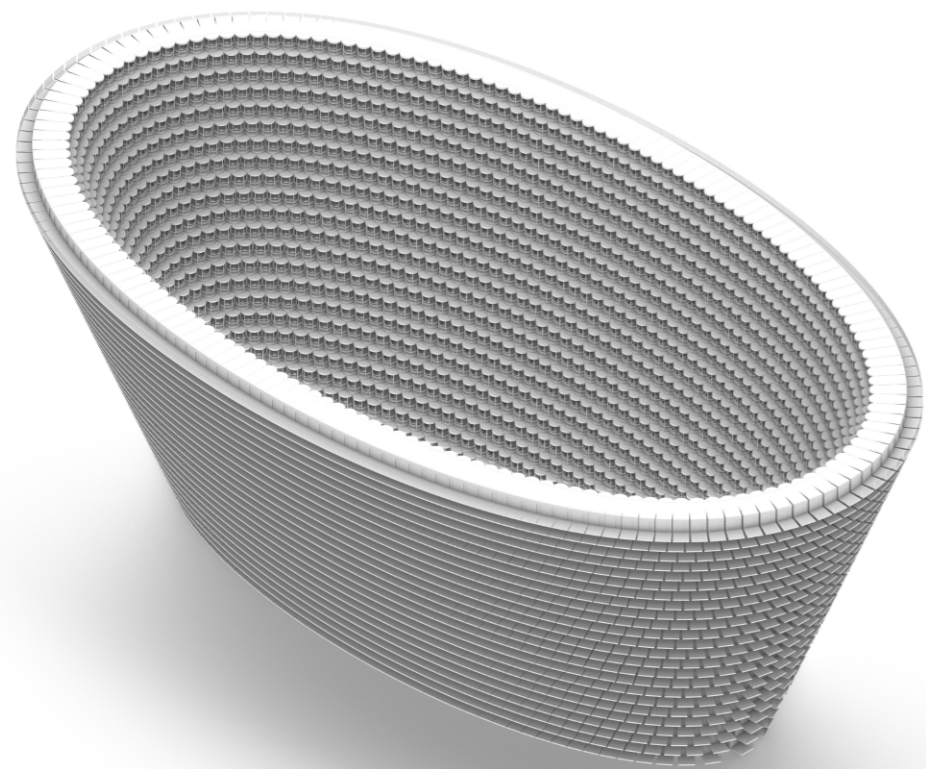
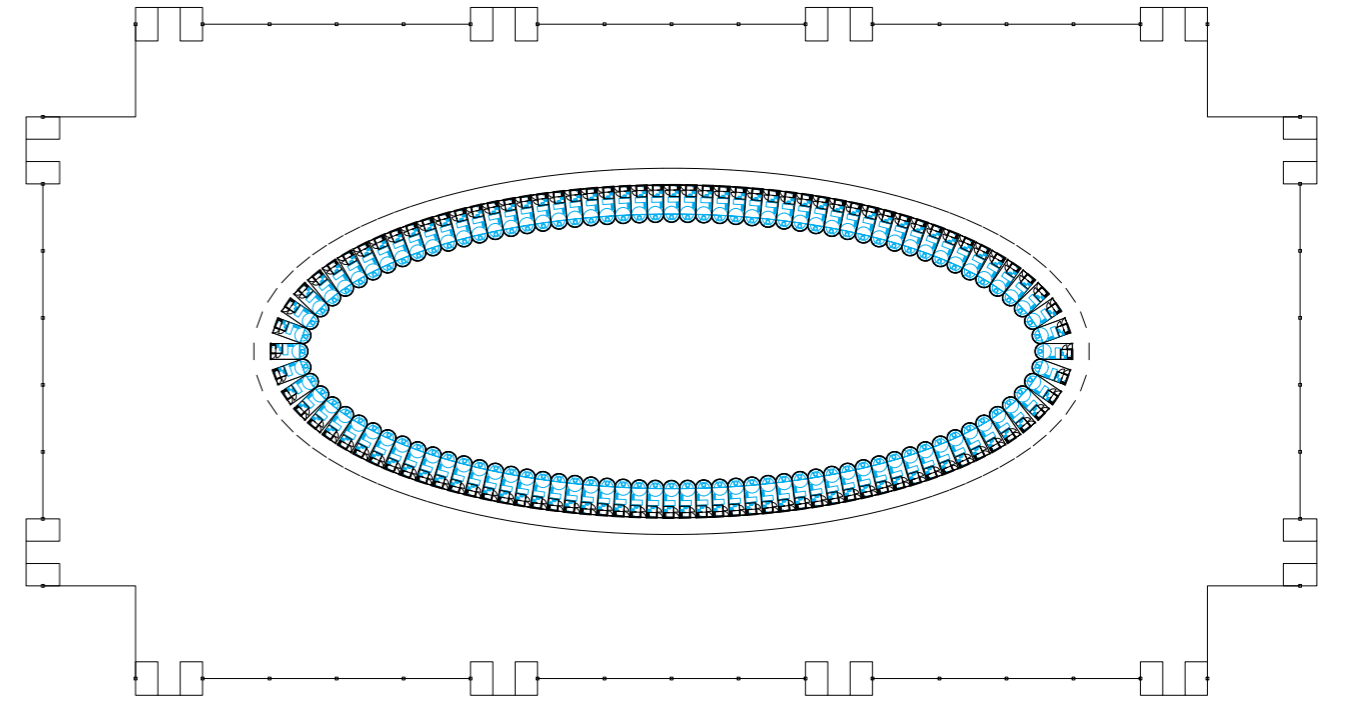
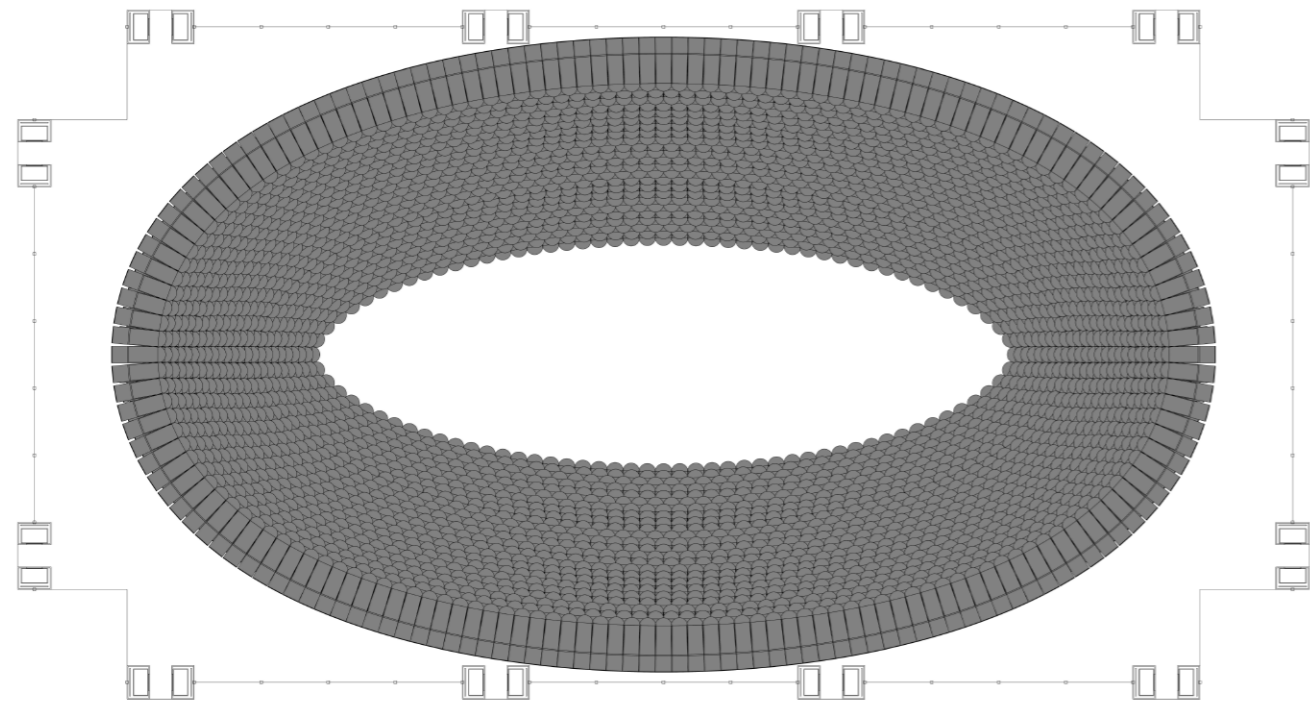


- Room ■
- Classroom ■
- Restaurant ■
- Activity ■
- Logistics ■

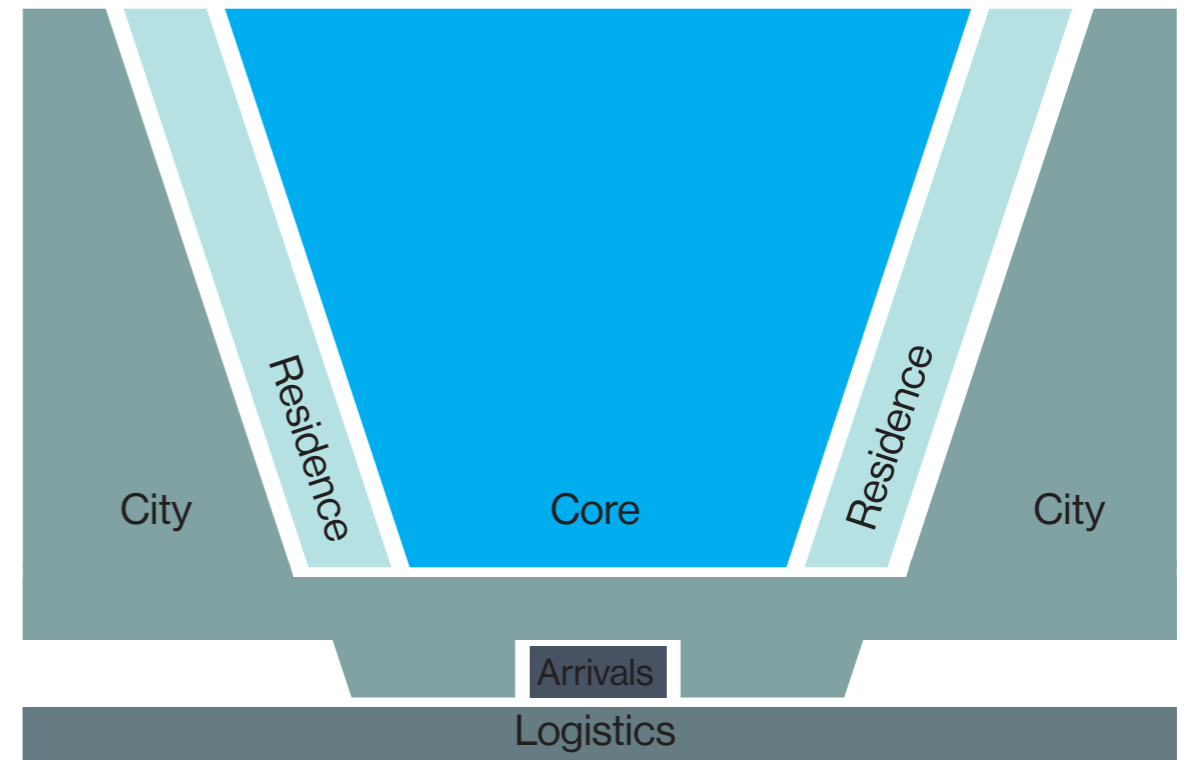
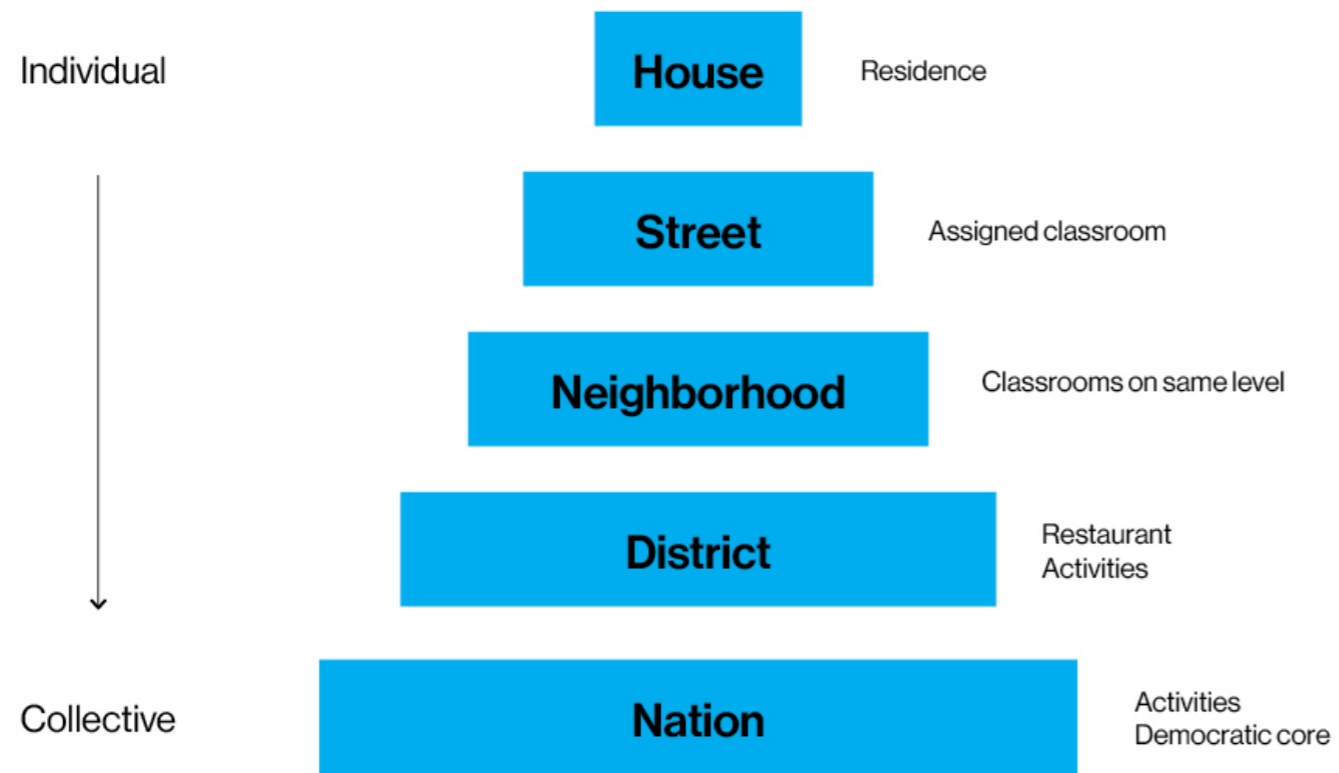








Appendix 5. The final design



Informal

Formal



City

Residence

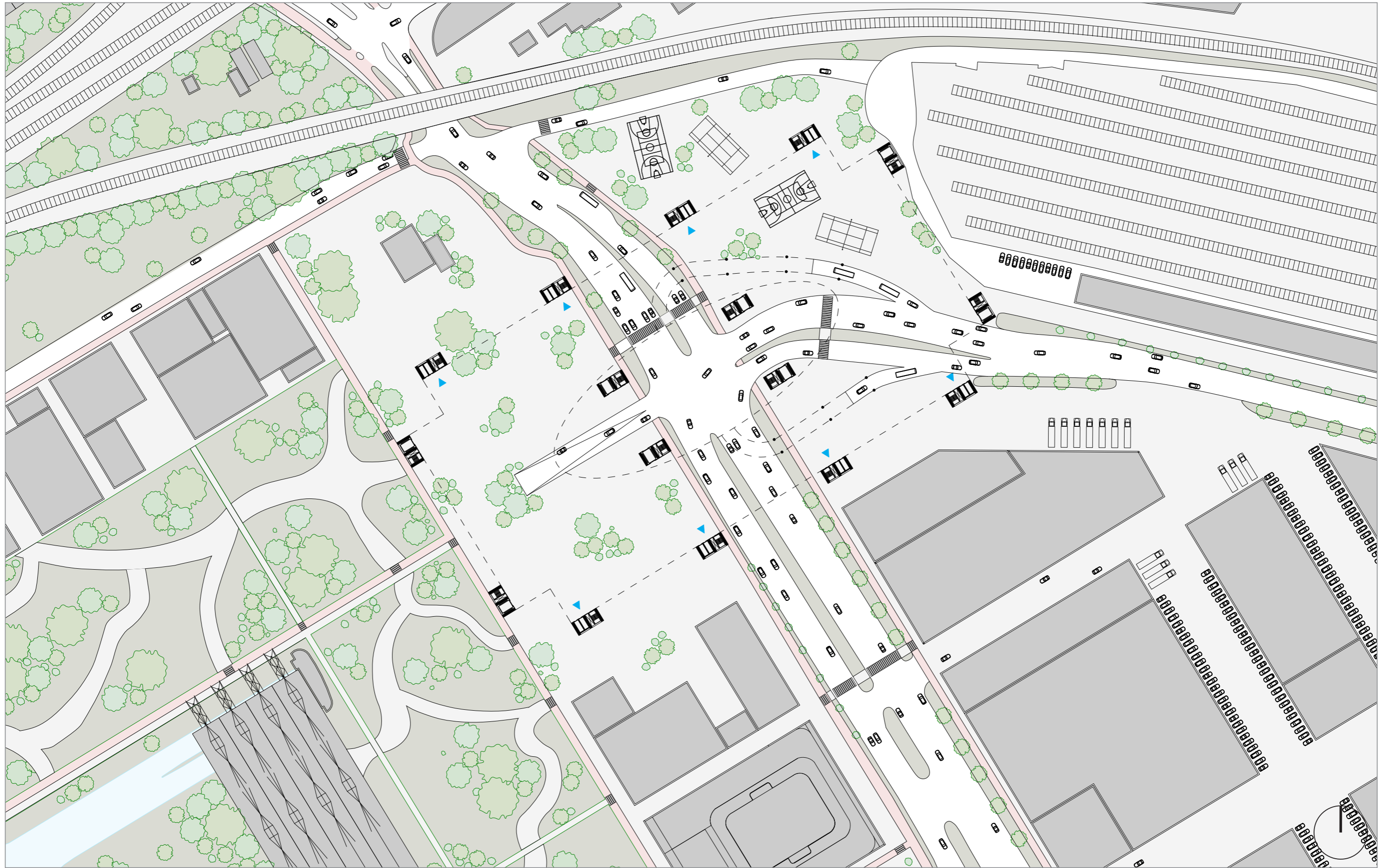
Core

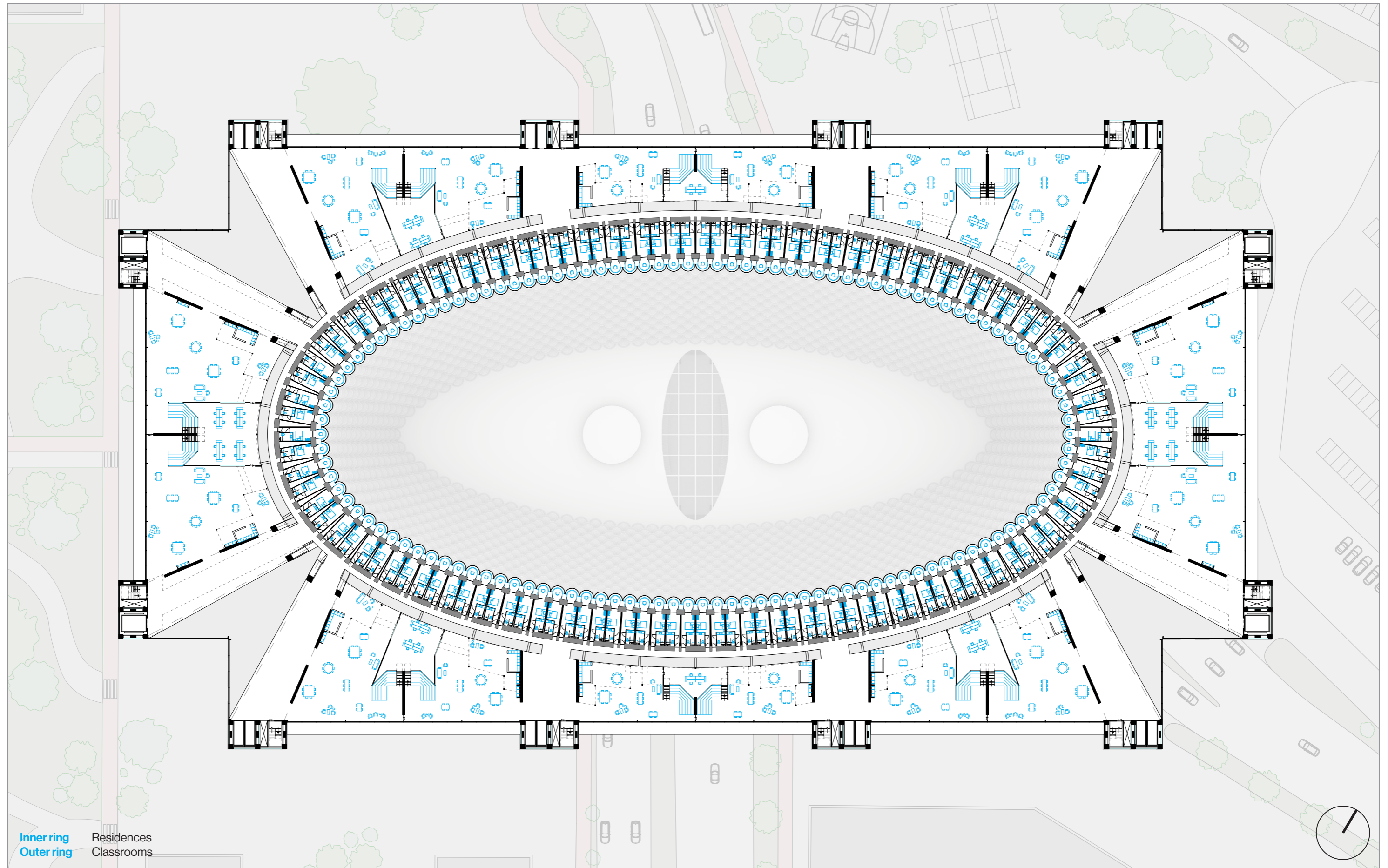
Street
Neighborhood
District

House

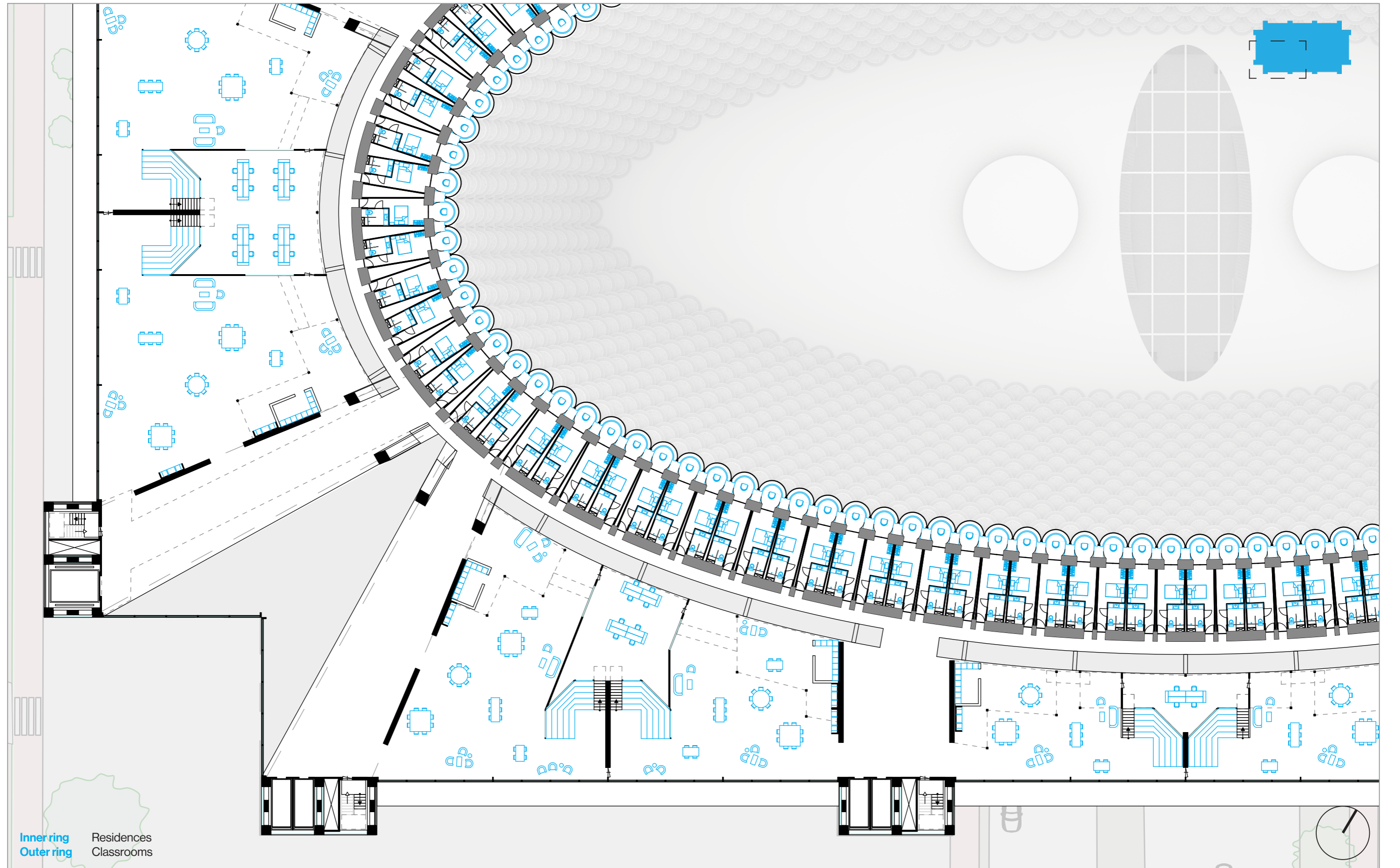
Nation

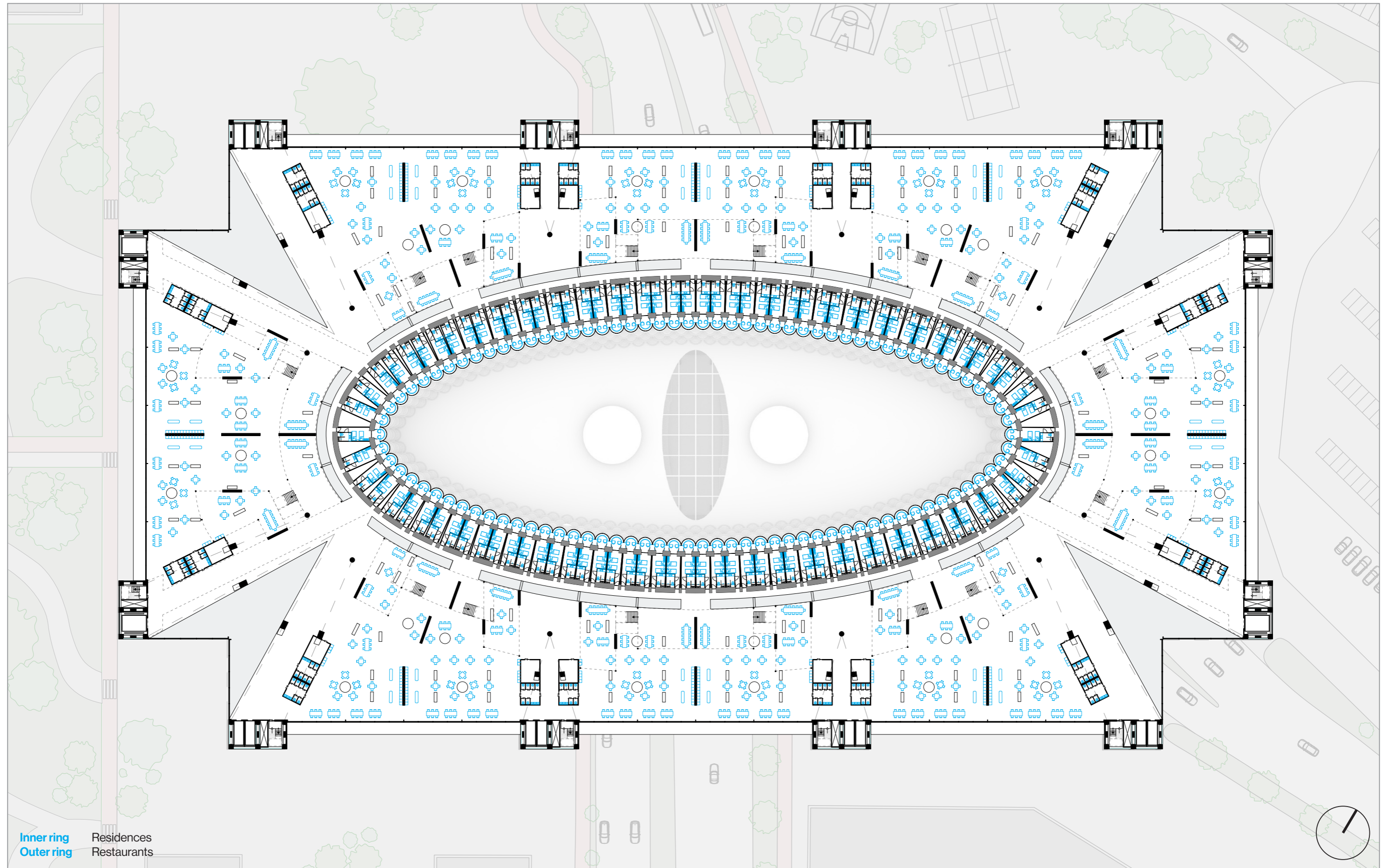


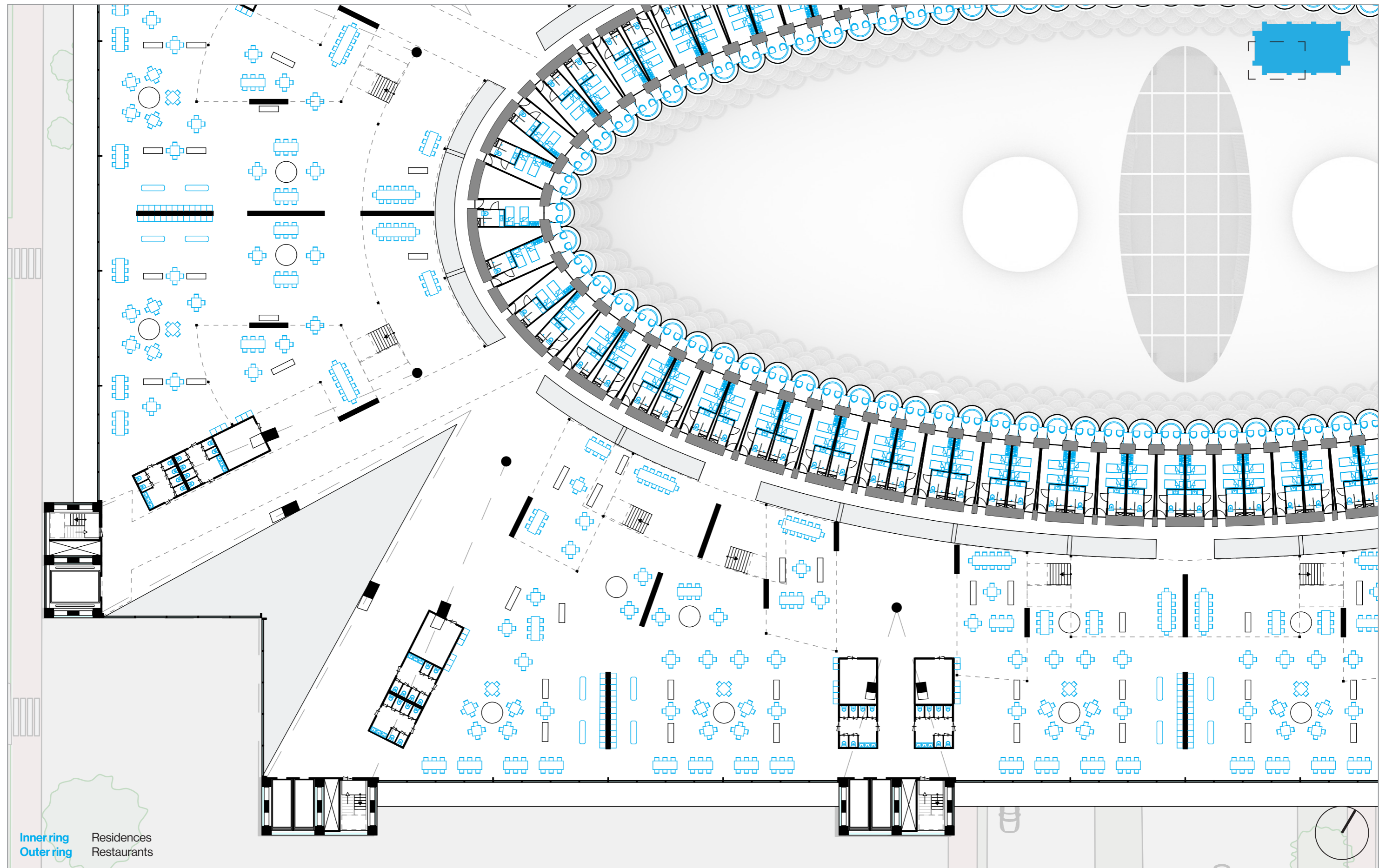


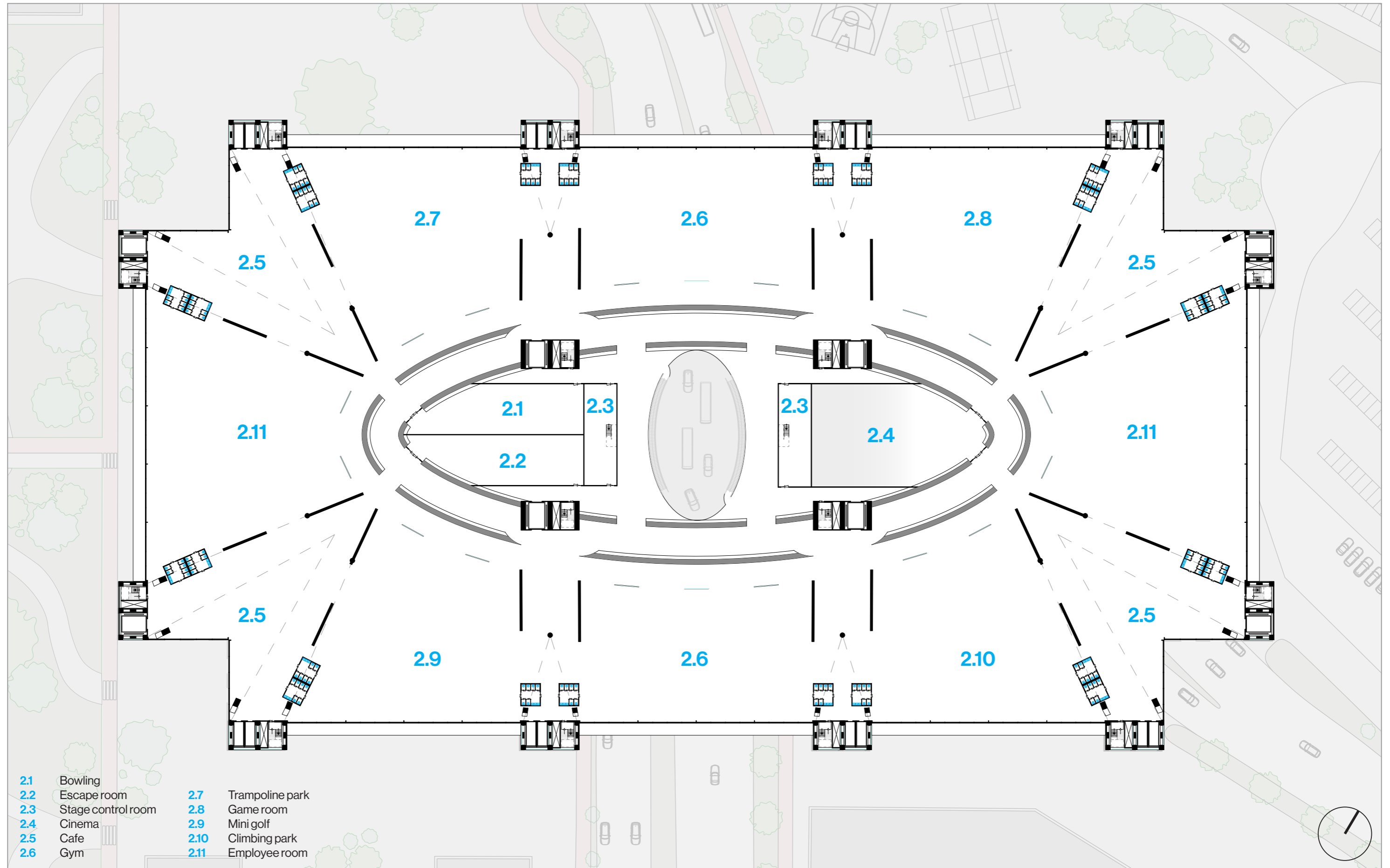


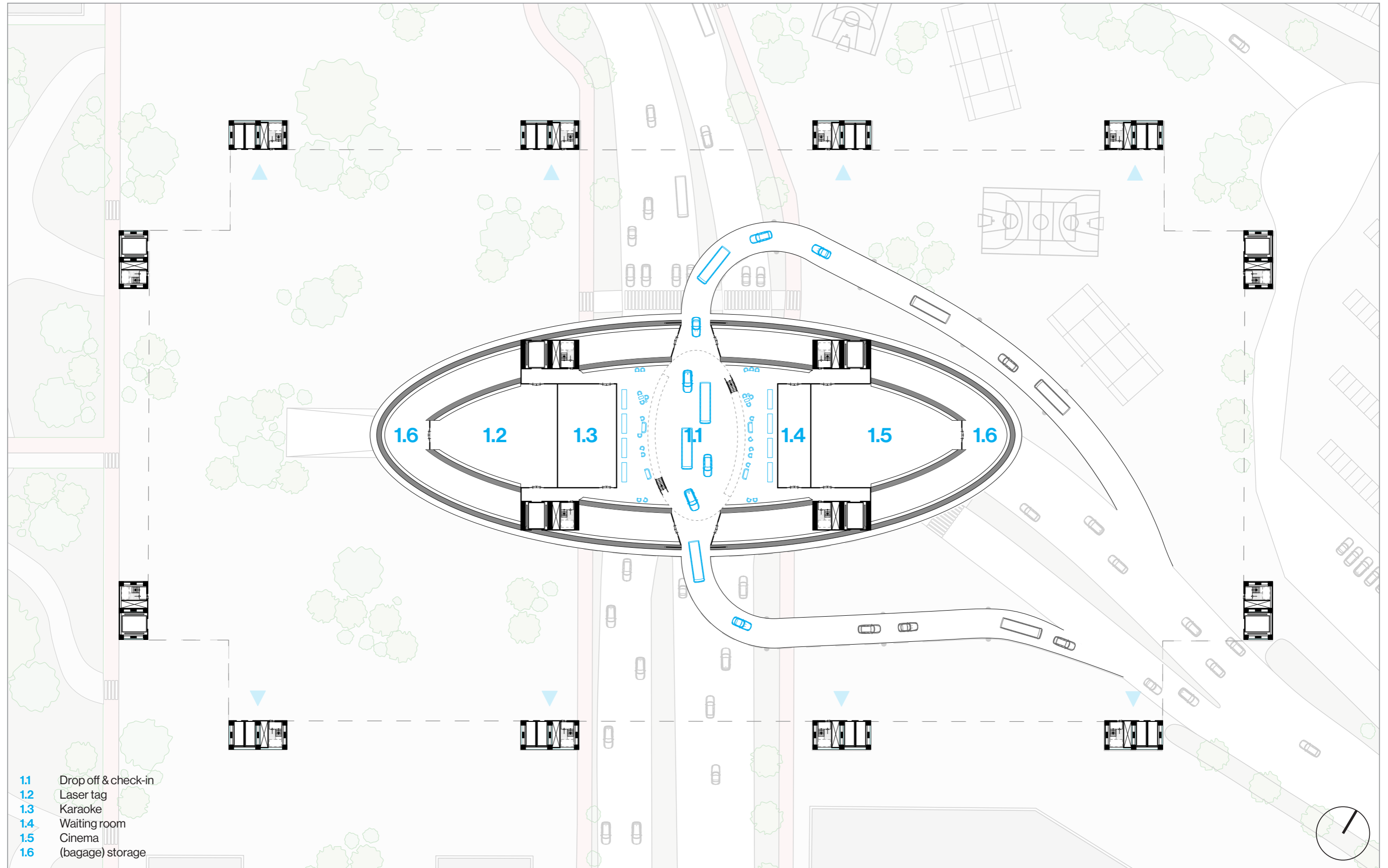
Inner ring Residences
Outer ring Classrooms

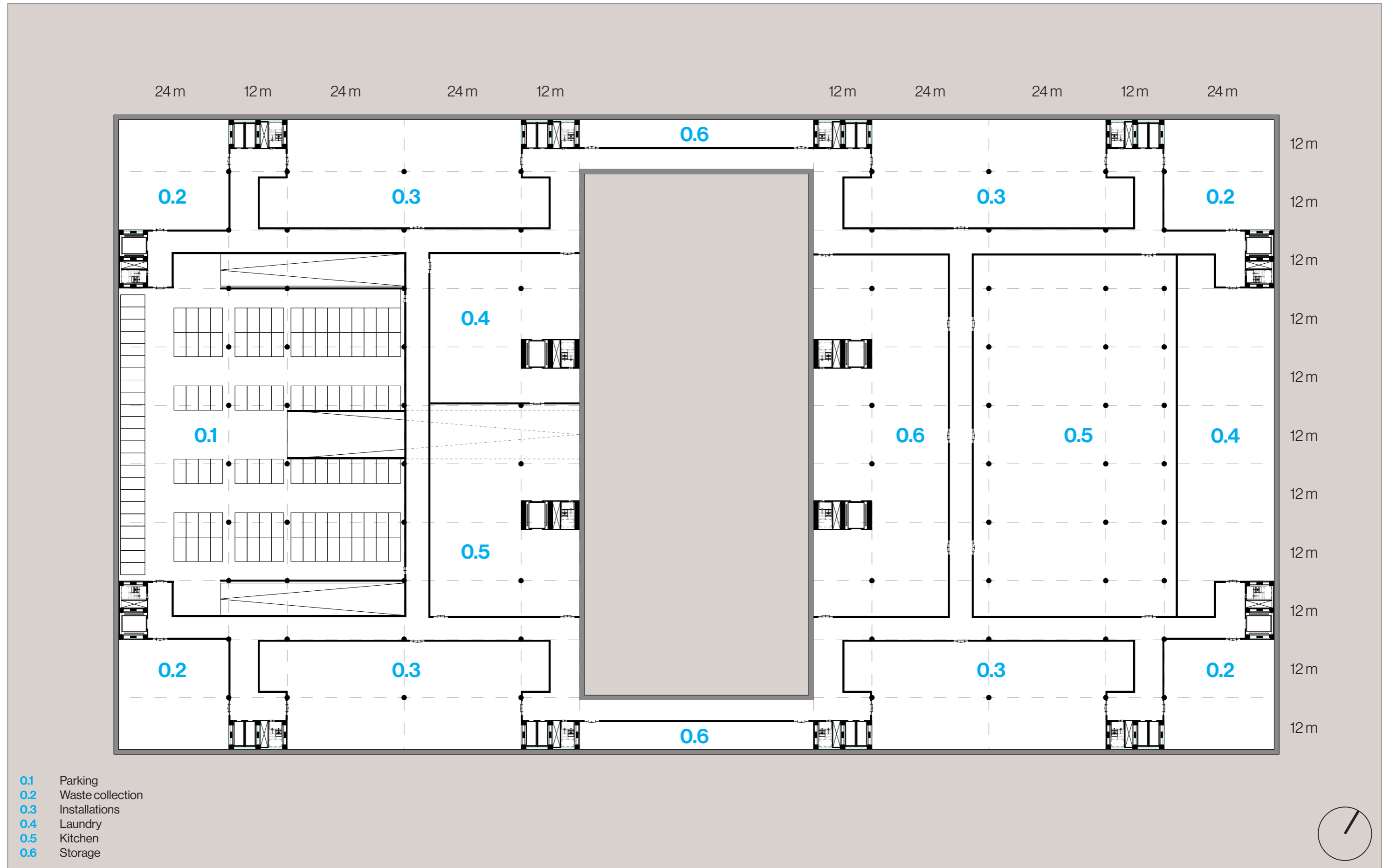


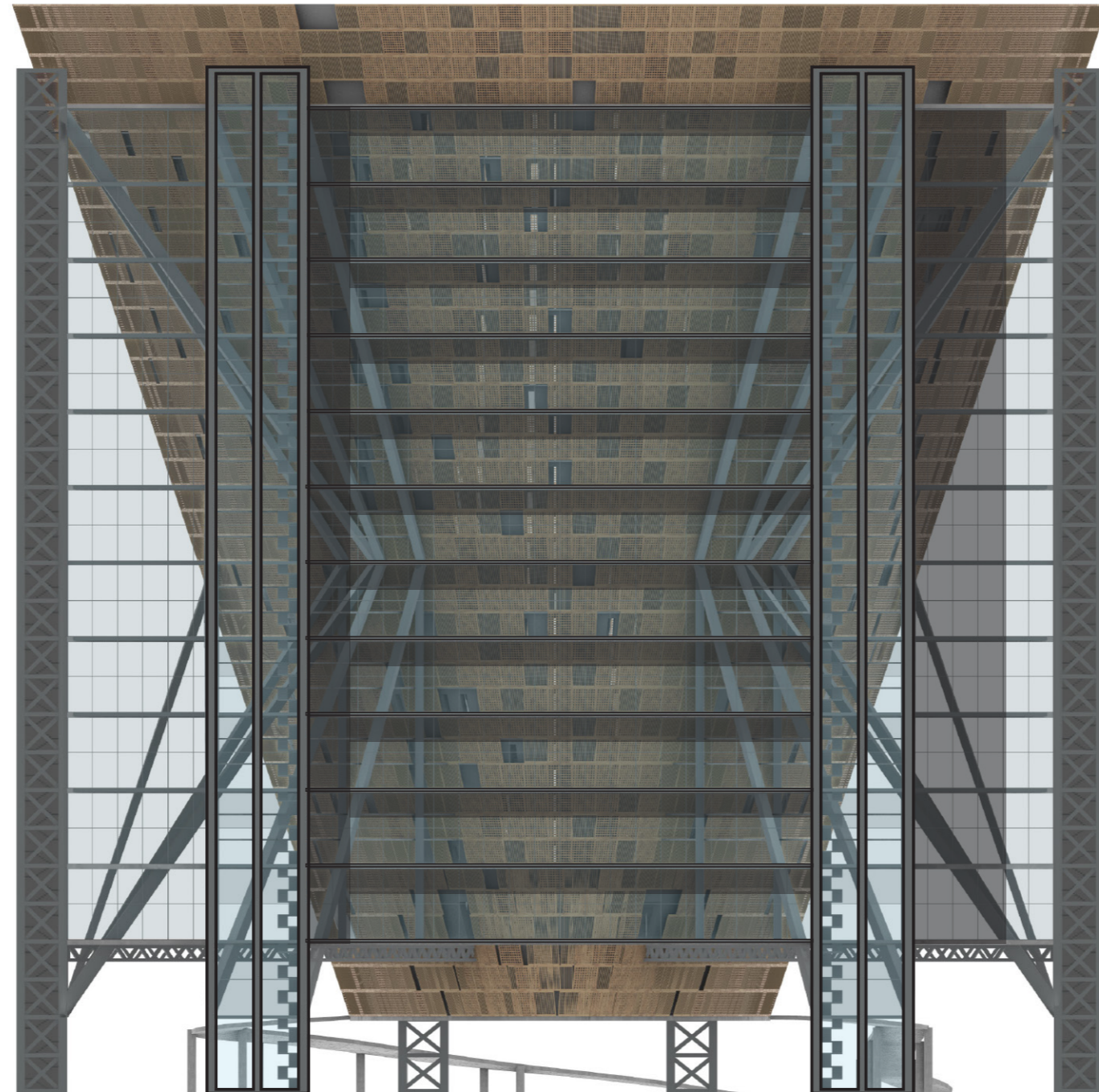


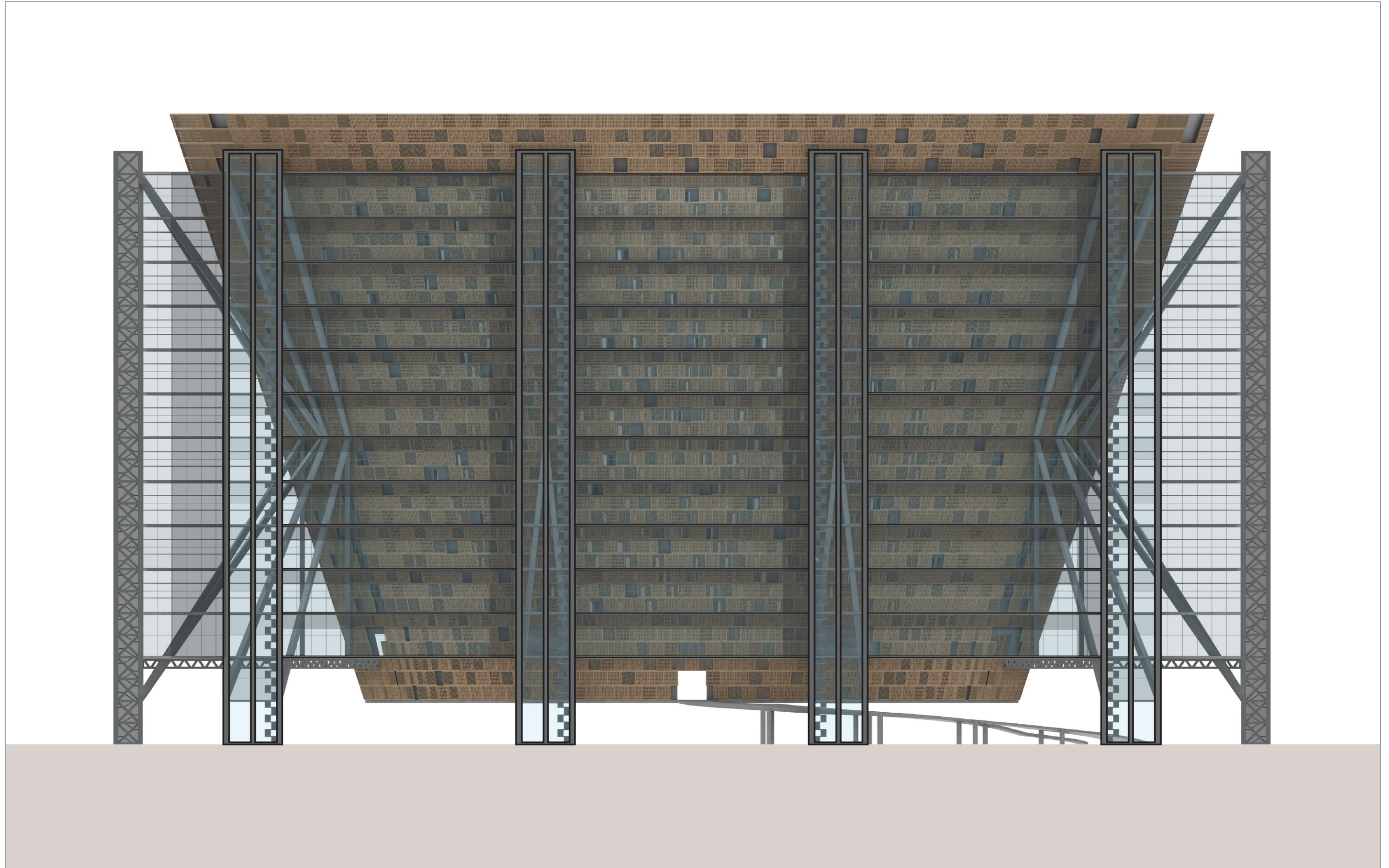


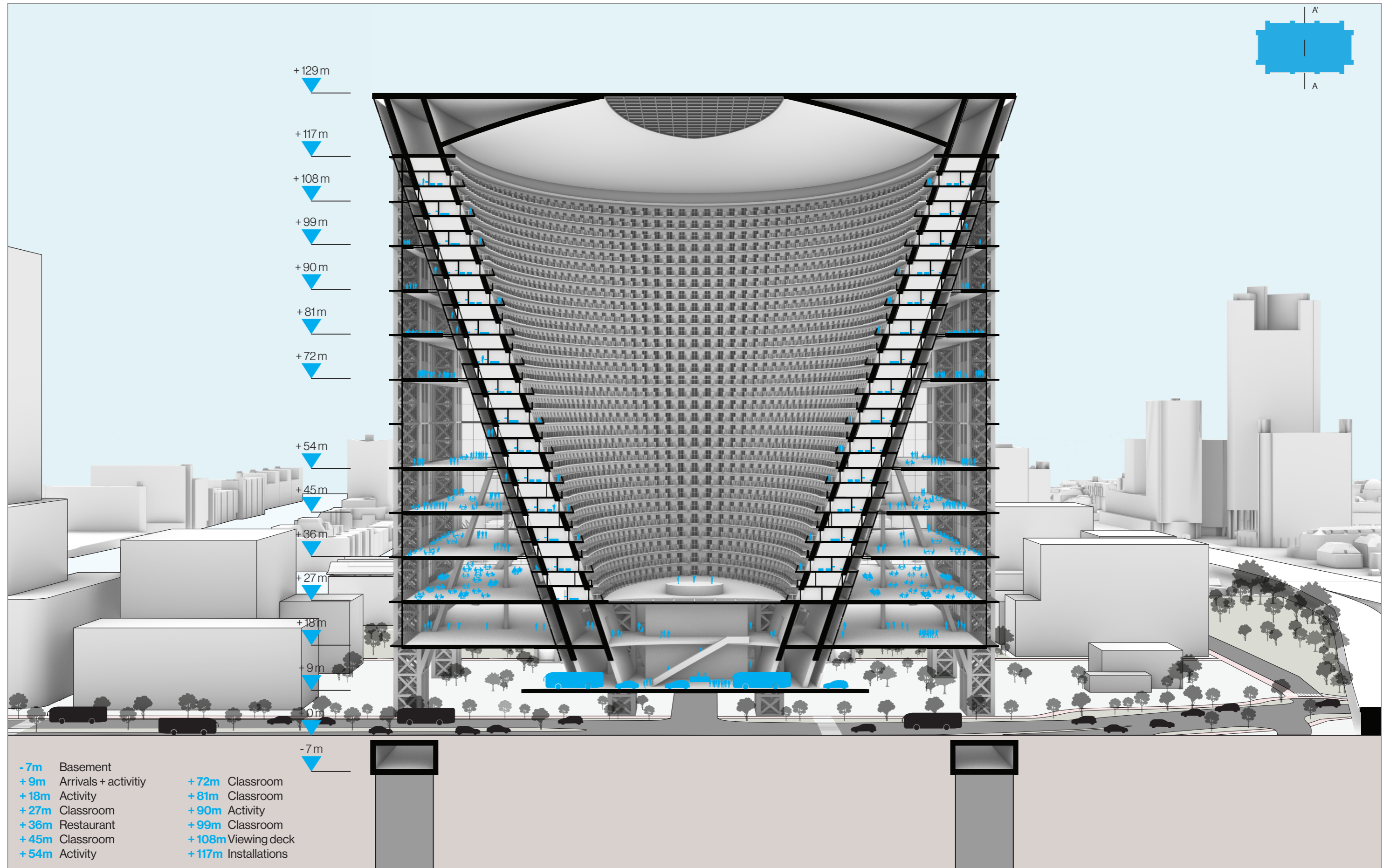


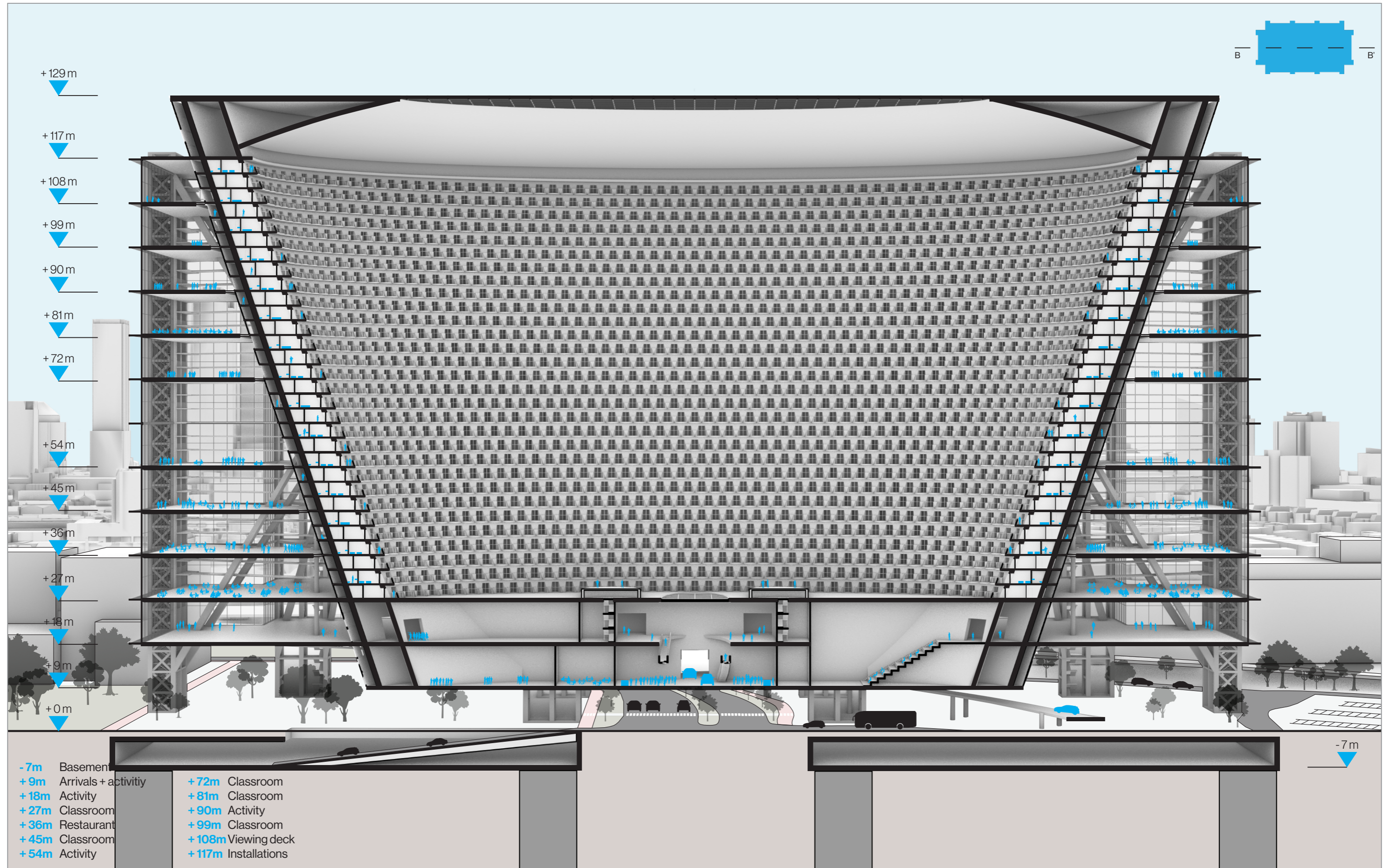


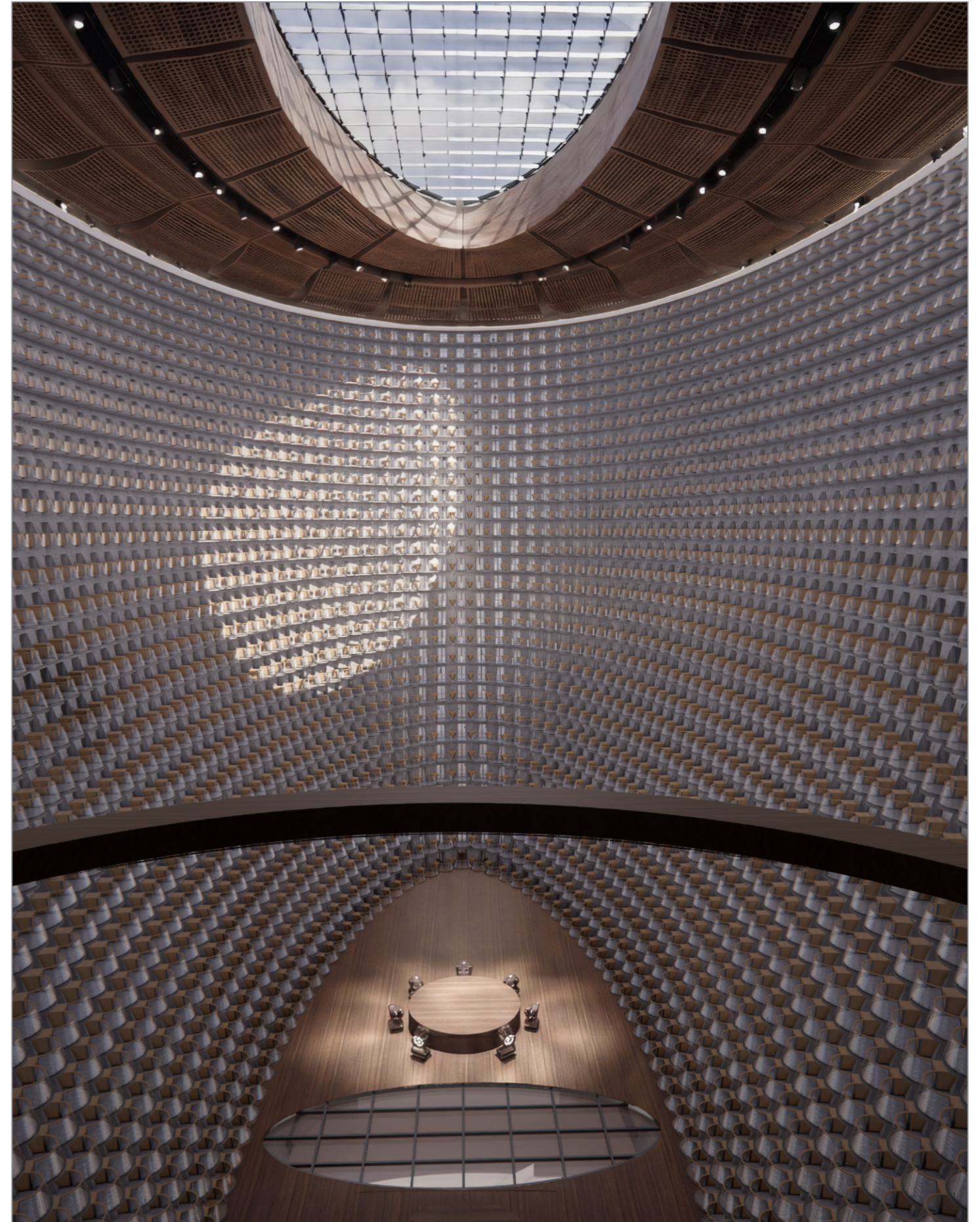


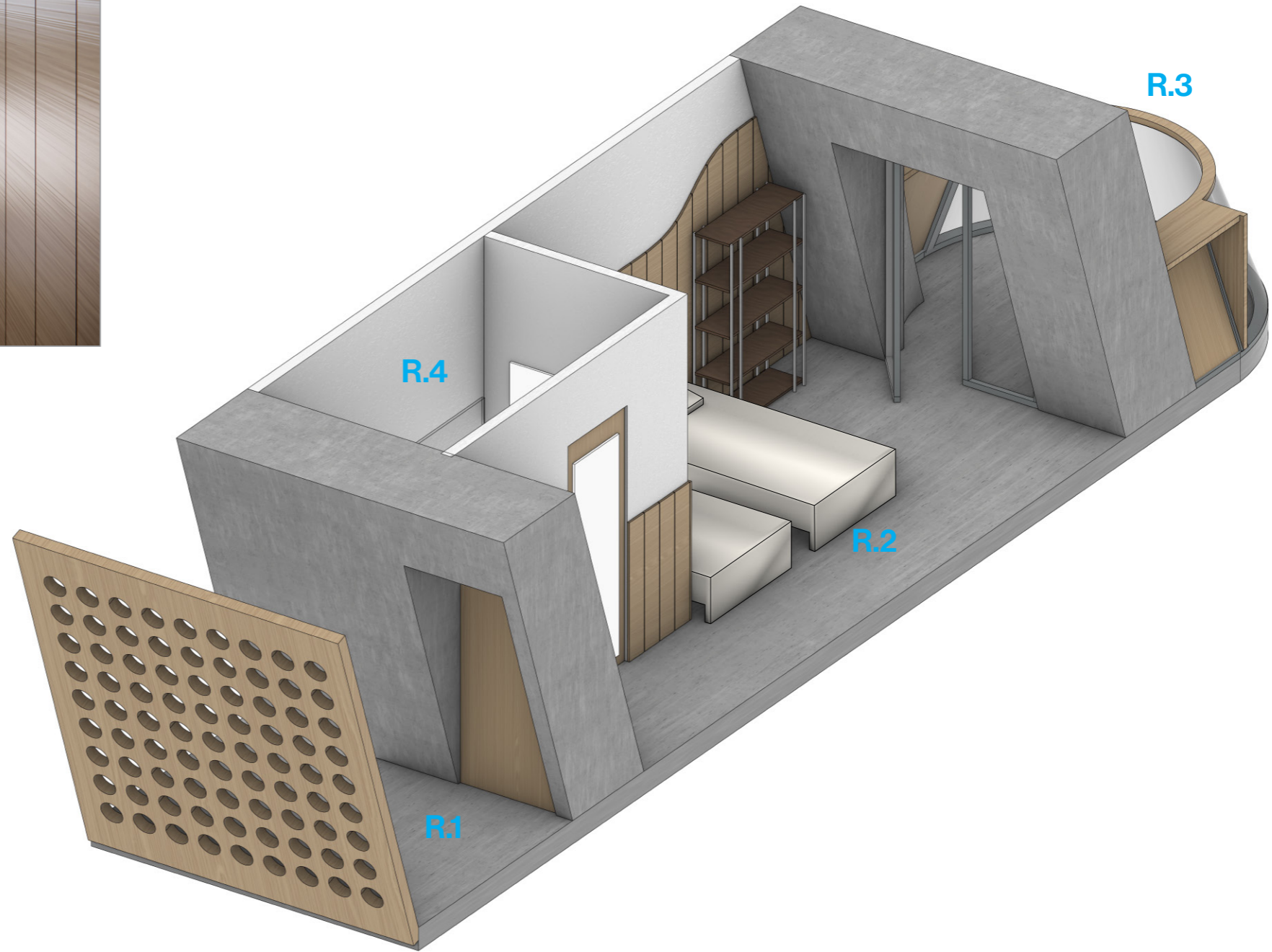








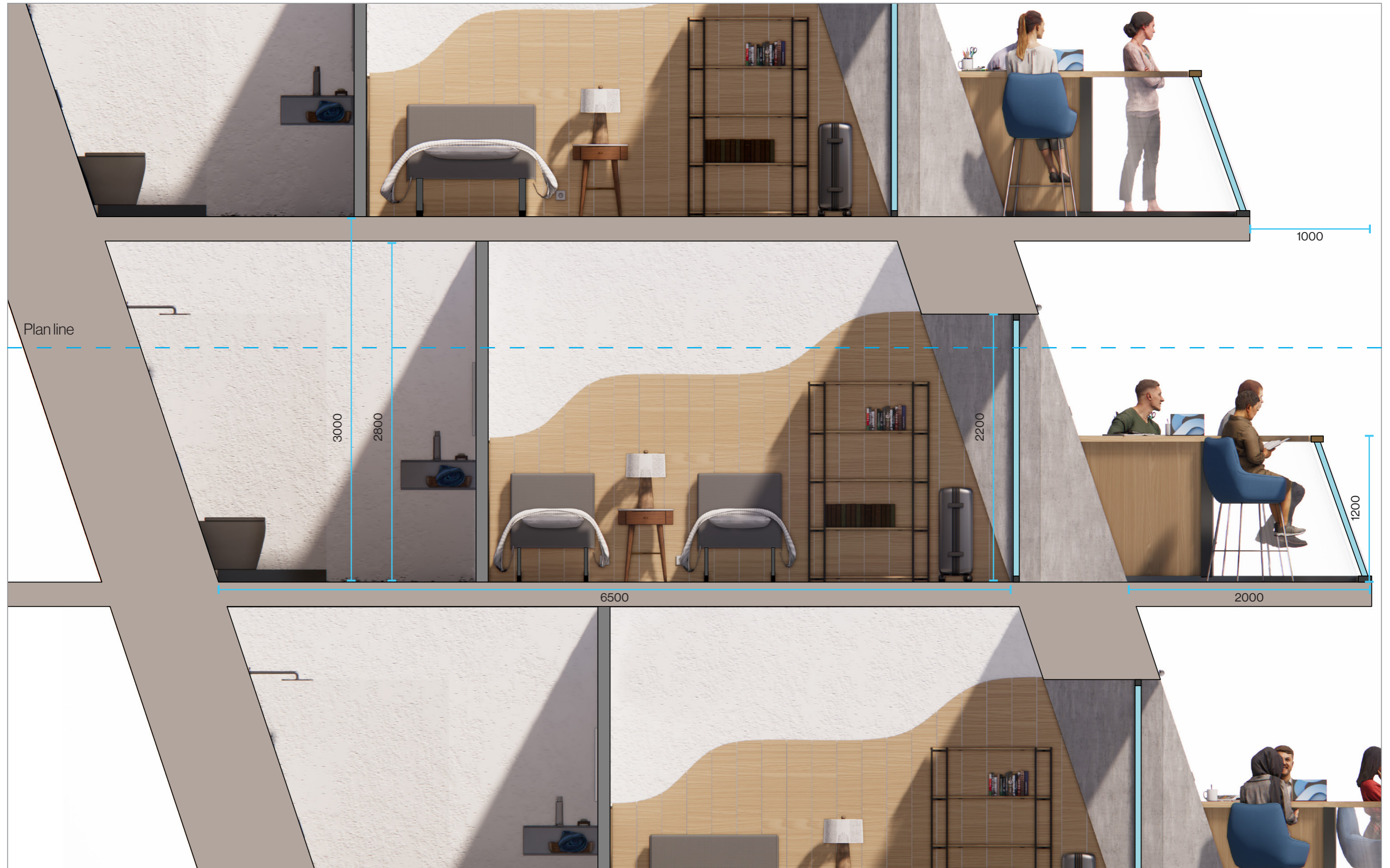




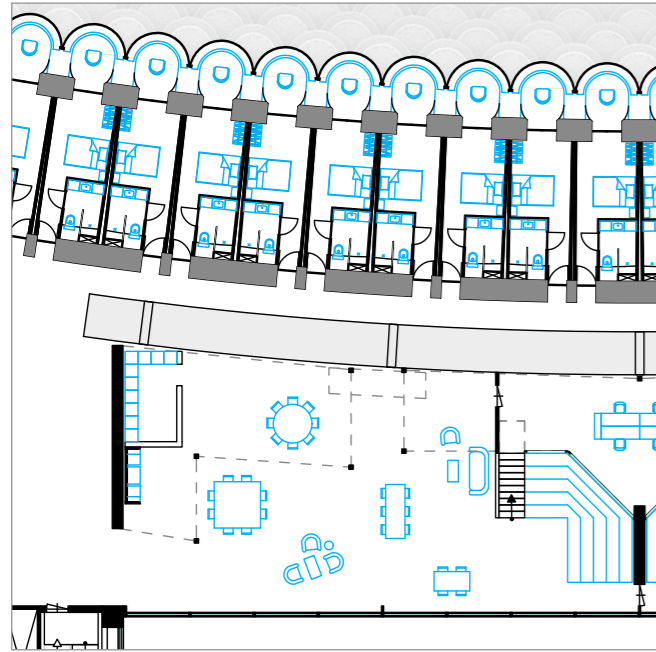
- R.1 Entry hallway
- R.2 Bedroom
- R.3 Democratic core balcony
- R.4 Bathroom

Maximum capacity 2 people
Scheduled activities Opening & closing ceremony, voting moment, central lectures & presentations
Amount in the building 4000



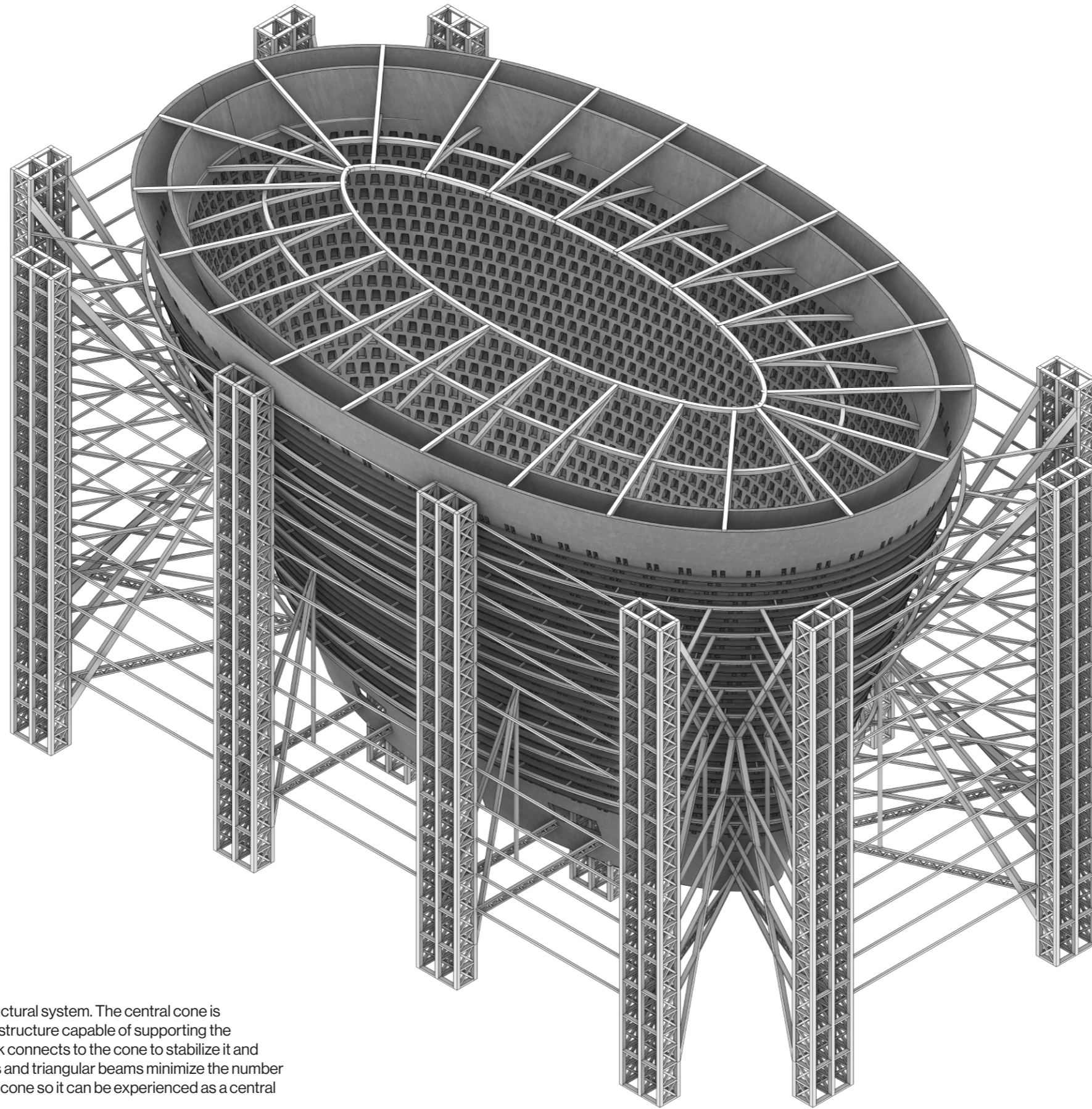




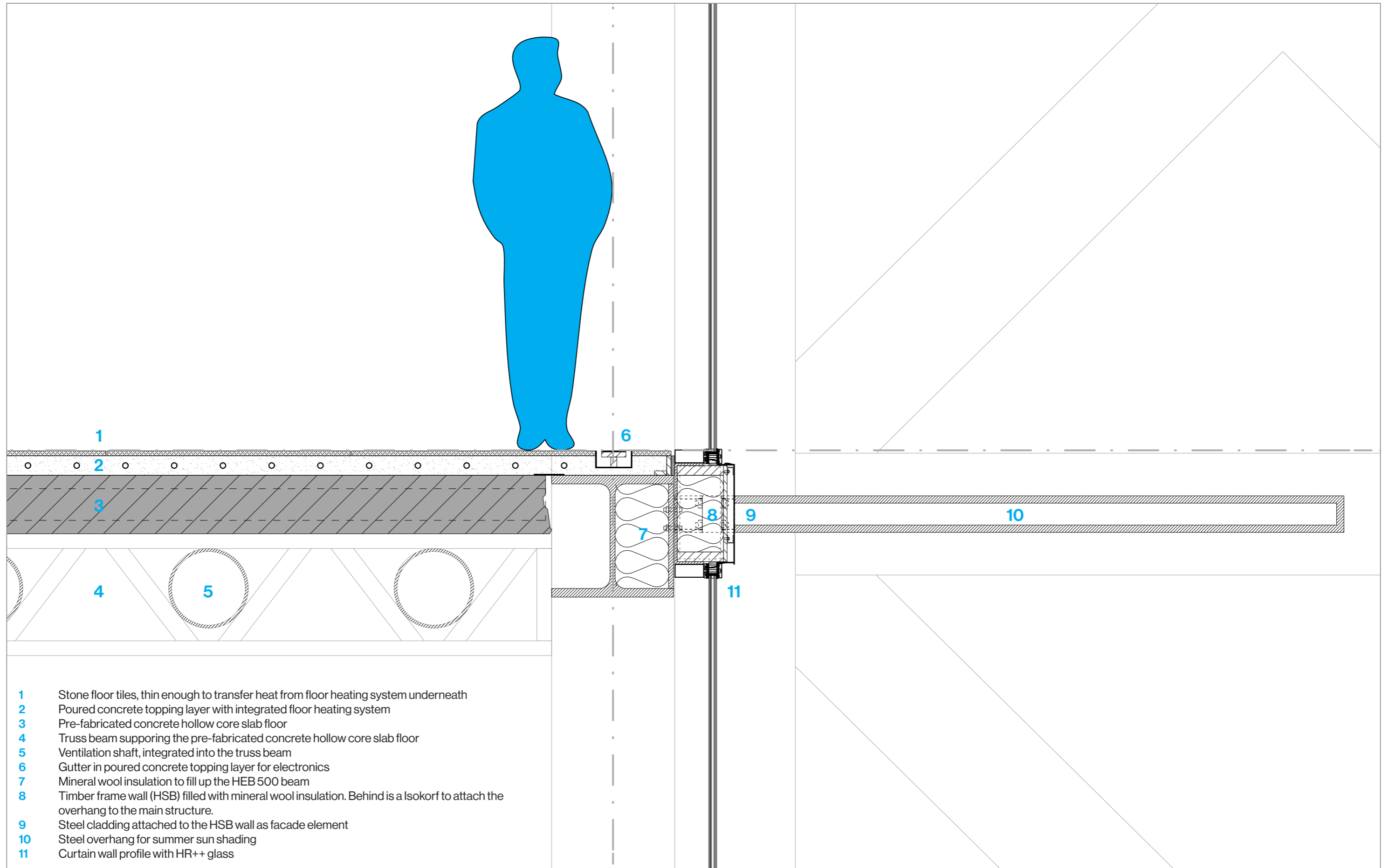


- C.1 Kitchenette
 - C.2 Tribune
 - C.3 Office for staff
 - C.4 Connecting walkway to residences
- Maximum capacity** 60 people
Scheduled activities Workshops, classes, group discussions
Amount in the building 100





The building floats above the ground through its structural system. The central cone is constructed in concrete to create a rigid yet flexible structure capable of supporting the alternating staggered residences. A steel framework connects to the cone to stabilize it and support the surrounding floors. Large truss columns and triangular beams minimize the number of interior columns, creating open space around the cone so it can be experienced as a central object within the building.



- 1 Stone floor tiles, thin enough to transfer heat from floor heating system underneath
- 2 Poured concrete topping layer with integrated floor heating system
- 3 Pre-fabricated concrete hollow core slab floor
- 4 Truss beam supporting the pre-fabricated concrete hollow core slab floor
- 5 Ventilation shaft, integrated into the truss beam
- 6 Gutter in poured concrete topping layer for electronics
- 7 Mineral wool insulation to fill up the HEB 500 beam
- 8 Timber frame wall (HSB) filled with mineral wool insulation. Behind is a Isokorf to attach the overhang to the main structure.
- 9 Steel cladding attached to the HSB wall as facade element
- 10 Steel overhang for summer sun shading
- 11 Curtain wall profile with HR++ glass