

Court Users,
Plaintiff,
and
Government Authorities,
Defendant.

TERRITORY ON TRIAL

REDESIGNING THE COURTHOUSE
TO FOSTER SPATIAL FREEDOM,
TRANSPARENCY AND EQUITABLE
POWER DYNAMICS



TERRITORY ON TRIAL

REDESIGNING SPACES OF JUSTICE

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2025

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THESIS TOPIC

This thesis explores the struggle for territorial control within the courthouse landscape, with a particular focus on the courtroom as a microcosm of these spatial dynamics. The courtroom, in its complexity and scale, serves as a concentrated reflection of the broader territorial tensions that exist throughout the courthouse building. Unlike other spaces, where specific actors are confined to particular roles or areas, the courtroom is unique in that all key players simultaneously present, each claiming and negotiating their spatial territory. Furthermore, the thesis will examine the inherent lack of freedom in these spatial arrangements, tying this to the broader question of what it means for a public building to be truly open, accessible, and democratic. As Mulcahy (2010) argues, “while it may be the case that much more dignity is accorded participants in the trial, over time we have not yet reached a state in which the courthouse can be described as genuinely open.” This statement highlights the ongoing tension between the ideals of public accessibility and the realities of courthouse design, which often prioritizes security and authority over openness. Drawing on various case studies and legal precedents, this research aims to explore how spatial design within courthouses, particularly the courtroom, can either reinforce or challenge these territorial struggles. By doing so, it aims to offer a new perspective on how public buildings can evolve to become truly open and accessible, and how architectural design can influence critical aspects of justice and civic engagement. In addressing the territorial complexities of the courthouse, this research aims to not only consider the architectural typology of the courthouse itself but also explore how spatial design can impact the broader social and civic functions of public buildings, influencing how we experience justice in our daily lives.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Historically, courthouses were not just places of legal proceedings, but open spaces that fostered civic engagement and dialogue. In ancient times, justice was often dispensed in public, with early courts held outdoors under trees or in open air assemblies. For instance, the Athenians and medieval European societies practiced law in public spaces where trees, symbolizing wisdom and stability, stood as natural sentinels to the law. These open-air courts embodied impartiality and a direct connection to the natural world, ensuring that justice was not hidden behind walls but accessible to all. The lack of physical and social barriers in these spaces also reflected a more communal, egalitarian approach to justice, where transparency allowed the public to actively observe, engage, and hold the system accountable. However, as the legal profession became more specialized, so too did the spaces in which it operated, with courts gradually moving indoors and taking on increasingly imposing forms. Hierarchical spaces such as court houses significantly impact behaviour, social interactions, and perceptions of power. The design and layout of a space such as the positioning of individuals, the size of their surroundings, and their proximity to authority reinforce social and power structures. For instance, in a courtroom, the judge’s elevated position signals authority, while defendants are placed lower, emphasizing their subordinate role. As the role of the courthouse expands, there is a pressing need to rethink how these environments can accommodate the principles of equity and justice while addressing the territorial dynamics at play. This thesis will explore how architectural and spatial design can effectively address dynamics of authority and hierarchical relations within courthouses, fostering a more equitable distribution of influence among all participants and uphold the foundational ideals of justice and equality for every actor involved.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for exploring how courthouse design influences power dynamics, interactions, and the experiences of individuals within legal settings. Each framework focuses on key elements, spatial arrangements, institutional structures, social justice, and human behaviour that together shape the architecture of a court house.

Spatial Theory suggests that physical spaces are not neutral but infused with social meaning, shaping interactions and reinforcing or challenging hierarchical relationships. In courthouses, the design of spaces can influence participants' sense of agency, authority, and equality.

- **Proxemics:** This concept examines how spatial arrangements impact the dynamics of personal relationships and interactions within the courtroom, determining how people navigate and engage with each other.
- **Place-making:** Focuses on how thoughtfully designed environments can foster community involvement, inclusivity, and a sense of shared responsibility, promoting democratic ideals in legal proceedings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Institutional Theory highlights how organisational structures influence behaviour and relationships between different actors. In the context of courthouses, this theory examines how architectural choices either reinforce or challenge established power structures and norms.

- **Institutional Critique:** Courthouse designs such as the elevated judge's bench signal authority and power. By redesigning spaces to reduce hierarchical physical distance, courthouses can create a more egalitarian and participatory legal process.

- **Adaptive Reuse:** Repurposing older courthouses to align with modern democratic values challenges outdated designs that reflect historical power imbalances, making legal spaces more relevant and inclusive.

Environmental Psychology explores how the physical environment influences human emotions, behaviours, and perceptions. In the context of the courthouse, it examines how spatial design impacts stress levels, perceptions of fairness, and overall participant experiences.

- **Reduced Psychological Distance:** Adjusting spatial configurations can help reduce intimidation and increase feelings of empowerment among participants. By fostering a more open, balanced atmosphere, this approach can lead to a more transparent and equitable legal process.

- **Increased Trust and Inclusivity:** Well designed, accessible spaces help break down territorial boundaries and make participants feel more connected to the legal process. This inclusivity reinforces the idea that the justice system is a space where all voices matter, especially those of marginalized groups.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Justice Framework focuses on fairness, equity, and inclusion within public spaces, particularly how courthouse design can reflect democratic values and ensure that all participants feel respected and empowered.

- **Access and Inclusion:** Evaluates how universal design principles can remove barriers to accessibility, ensuring that the courthouse is welcoming and navigable for all individuals, regardless of their role within the legal process.
- **Empowerment:** Explores how the spatial arrangement can enhance the sense of agency and participation for marginalised groups within the courtroom, ensuring that voices are heard and valued.

Territorial Dynamics focuses on how individuals or groups claim and control space, which in turn affects their interactions and sense of authority. Courthouse design plays a key role in either reinforcing or challenging these territorial dynamics.

- **Territorialisation:** The spatial allocation of judges, defendants, and the public often reflects and reinforces power imbalances. Redesigning these spaces to be more fluid and integrated can reduce territorial claims and encourage more equal participation.

Hierarchical Relations addresses the established power structures within a courthouse, such as the roles of judges, lawyers, and defendants, and how these spatial hierarchies influence interactions and various processes.

- **Hierarchical Relations:** Through re-organisation of courtrooms for example by lowering the judge's bench or altering seating arrangements physical hierarchies can be minimised, creating a more egalitarian environment that fosters mutual respect among all parties involved.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework aims to provide the starting point for exploring how courthouse design can address territorial dynamics and hierarchical relations and how architectural choices can:

- **Define** how the architecture of courthouses shapes interactions, power dynamics, and participants' sense of agency.
- **Establish** a coherent structure for understanding how spatial configurations can either reinforce or challenge institutional hierarchies.
- **Provide** sub-questions (see the examples below) to guide research, with the aim to contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable courthouse designs that reflect democratic ideals and promote fair legal proceedings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- **How** has the law been conceived and how is it being conceived in current times? How have courthouses been recognized throughout the times and across cultures?
- **What** actors, objects, processes & requirements (and their portrayal) make up the current hierarchical courthouse landscape?
- **How** do these characteristics enforce or break-down hierarchical aspects within courthouses?
- **How** open can we design courthouses to still maintain authority while instilling more equal dignity on all participants involved?
- **To what extent** do spatial changes and modifications undermine the right to the presumption of innocence?
- **What** part can architecture play in undermining the alienating tendencies of the modern trial?
- **Is** it necessary for the judge to sit on an elevated podium?
- **How** does this spatial arrangement influence perceptions of authority and equality in the courtroom?

THEORETICAL ARGUMENTATION

By the 20th century, modernist movements and postcolonial independence reshaped courthouse architecture once again, favouring functionality over grandeur. Today, contemporary designs have increasingly shifted toward closed and segregated environments as a result of a combination of factors such as security, authority and efficiency as well as evolving legal processes, this change often obscures the principle of justice as a transparent and communal process. The elevation of the judge's bench as previously mentioned, symbolizes authority and order while physical barriers between participants reinforce these roles. This shift towards more isolated and controlled elements and spaces has, in many ways undermined the ideals of accessibility and public engagement, making the courthouse a more intimidating and less democratic environment. Similar spatial and behavioural aspects can be found in other institutional settings like churches, offices, and schools. In each of these environments, the physical design reinforces power dynamics, social roles, and emotional responses from the individuals within them. In workplaces, executives in large corner offices are visually distinguished from employees in smaller or open-plan spaces. In churches, the elevated altar and pulpit position clergy act as authority figures, creating a physical distance between them and the congregation. In schools, the layout of classrooms with teachers at the front and students facing them positions the teacher as the central authority figure, while students are placed in passive, subordinate roles. These spatial cues influence how people interact, with subordinates often feeling marginalized or voiceless, while authority figures may feel more empowered. Overall, hierarchical spaces shape not only how individuals perceive their own status but also how they engage with others, either fostering formality and distance or encouraging collaboration and equality.

THEORETICAL ARGUMENTATION

Hierarchical spaces, such as those found in courtrooms, profoundly influence behaviour, emotions, and perceptions of justice. The design and layout of these spaces are not just functional—they play a role in legitimizing legal proceedings and shaping the experiences of those within them. While grand courthouses can instil a sense of dignity and formality for some, for others, particularly defendants, they may amplify feelings of vulnerability or humiliation. The physical separation between participants, such as the isolation of defendants from their legal counsel or the public, can hinder communication and exacerbate feelings of disempowerment. Furthermore, the public's role in trials, though intended to promote transparency, is often curtailed by spatial practices that control access and movement within the courtroom. These designs reflect a distrust of the public and, at times, undermine the principle of open justice. In extreme cases, such as when defendants are placed behind screens or elevated in the dock, the courtroom layout can further strip away the presumption of innocence, reinforcing their status as outsiders or criminals. Overall, hierarchical space in the courtroom not only shapes the formal process of justice but deeply impacts the emotional and psychological experiences of those involved, highlighting the tension between dignity, authority, and control.

RESEARCH METHODS | PROGRAMME

Literature Review: Reviewing existing literature on courthouse design, territorial dynamics, and hierarchical relations. Provide a foundation of knowledge on the evolution of courthouse design, territorial dynamics in public spaces, and the relationship between architecture, justice, and public engagement.

Case Study Analysis: Analysing existing courthouses, legal cases and legal systems and the resulting spatial implications.

Spatial Analysis: Examining of existing courthouse layout to understand how space is allocated to different actors. Identifying areas designated for public access versus restricted areas, and how this affects perceptions of power and hierarchy.

Power Mapping: Creating interactive maps that show the flow of people, the designation of spaces, and the physical barriers within the courthouse. Thereby subtle forms of power, such as who gets access to what spaces, and how this aligns with social hierarchies, dignity, and agency within the judicial system can be explored.

Comparative Analysis: Comparing of findings across different case studies to identify common themes and variations.

RESEARCH METHODS | CLIENT

Stakeholder Interviews: Conducting interviews with judges, lawyers, jury, and members of the public to understand how spatial design influences their behaviour, comfort, and participation in legal proceedings. Questions will include how the design of the courtroom affects their sense of dignity, accessibility, and engagement with the legal process.

Actor Analysis: Analysing the various actors act in a courthouse setting, how these interact and the relational dynamics involved and the various spatial implications.

Behavioural Observations: Observing how different actors navigate the courthouse and interact in various spaces.

RESEARCH METHODS | SITE

Site Analysis: Conducting an in-depth analysis of selected courthouse sites through site visits and observations. Taking detailed notes on space usage, circulation patterns, and the territorial separation between different actors within the building. Furthermore sensory experiences of sound, light, texture and temperature creating sensory maps that highlight how these sensory aspects contribute to perceptions of power, hierarchy, and comfort within the courthouse.

Mapping Relationships: Creating spatial maps to illustrate the relationships within the courthouse. Analysing how the design facilitates or hinders access for different actors through user centric spatial mapping, visual connectivity analysis, comfort assessment etc.

Contextual Analysis: Analysing how the design interacts with existing territorial boundaries and weather it reinforces or disrupts hierarchical relations among different actor groups.

BODIES & BUILDINGS | MILAN STUDIO



The **Complex Projects Graduation Studio** focuses on the Building, not simply as a structure, but as a spatial, functional, and experiential entity. It provides light, shelter, and purpose, accommodating human activities and responding to physical, temporal, and contextual demands. To investigate this complexity, each student selects and designs **'One of...'** a singular, function-specific large building (e.g. airport, hospital, stadium, parliament). These buildings are **unique presences** in the urban fabric, often one-offs in their context.

Three specific lenses have been chosen through which the studio work will be approached. These lenses will guide the group research, inform a shared strategic approach, and establish a common foundation for the individual projects. They provide a thematic perspective through which Milan is analysed and understood, ultimately shaping the group's conceptual and design strategy.

Within this collective framework, each student will develop an **individual** project a unique synthesis of one thematic lens and a selected building typology.

TRAIN STATION



UNIVERSITY



AIRPORT



LIBRARY



HOSPITAL



OPERA



COURTHOUSE



MUSEUM



MATERIALITY

HEALTH

CULTURE

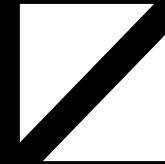
COURTHOUSE



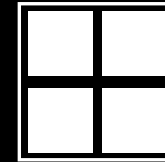
MATERIALITY

HEALTH

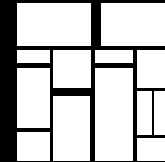
CULTURE



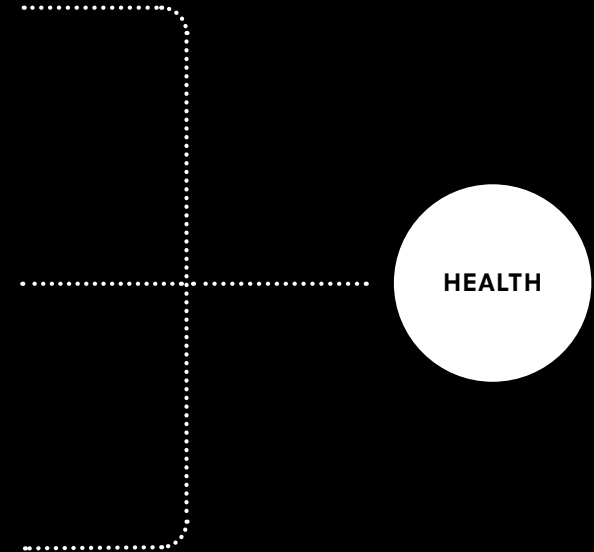
PASSAGE



PIAZZA



PATIOS



Lense Integration

Applying a health lens to urban design involves integrating spaces that promote both mental and physical well-being. This is achieved through three key spatial elements: **a passage, a piazza, and patios**. Passages create accessible corridors that facilitate smooth movement. Piazzas serve as open social hubs, featuring greenery and seating that promote relaxation and community interaction, enhancing emotional well-being. Patios provide intimate spaces for solitude and connection to nature, supporting both physical movement and mental rejuvenation.

Together, these elements create public spaces that not only enhance social interaction but also improve overall health. By integrating these areas, urban environments can promote a **balanced, healthy lifestyle**, benefiting both individuals and the wider community.



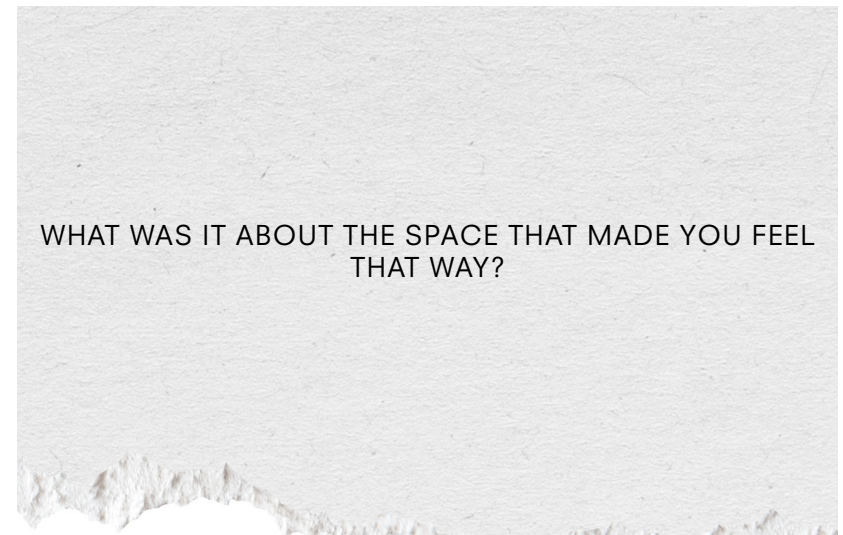
OPENING STATEMENT

Judgement of Solomon

The Judgment of Solomon is more than a biblical parable it stands as an enduring metaphor for the values that underpin a just legal system. In the story, King Solomon is faced with an impossible dispute: two women claiming to be the mother of the same child. Without evidence, he turns to a deeper form of reasoning one that draws out truth through human behaviour rather than mere testimony. His wisdom lies not in following rigid rules, but in revealing what cannot be seen by logic alone: compassion, intention, and moral character.

For the justice system, the story emphasizes that true judgment requires more than procedure it demands discernment, empathy, and the ability to see beyond surface-level claims. Solomon's decision reflects a justice that is not only fair but anchored in humanity. It reminds us that laws must be interpreted with insight, and that outcomes must serve truth, not just formality.

**HAVE YOU EVER WALKED INTO A
ROOM AND IMMEDIATELY FELT LIKE
YOU WERE EITHER IN CONTROL OR
POWERLESS?**



Evidence Log

Date: _____ Submitted by: _____

Case #: 013751-01 Item #: Podium

Condition: _____ Sealed by: _____

Evidence Description: often elevated and imposing, symbolizes authority and power, central position directs focus to the speaker, reinforcing their elevated status, the design and materials convey strength and control.

Offense/Incident: elevating the speaker, physically positioning them as the center of attention and reinforcing their authority, while also creating a clear boundary between them and the audience, solidifying power dynamics
Suspect(s): _____

Victim(s): _____

Witness(es): _____

Collected by: _____

Location: _____

Signed for: _____



Evidence Log

Date: _____ Submitted by: _____

Case #: 013751-02 Item #: Spotlight

Condition: _____ Sealed by: _____

Evidence Description: focused light source, designed to illuminate a specific area or individual, drawing attention and reinforcing the perceived importance of the subject within the space.

Offense/Incident: directing attention to a specific individual or idea, reinforcing their authority and presence while shifting the focus and power dynamics within a space.

Suspect(s): _____

Victim(s): _____

Witness(es): _____

Collected by: _____

Location: _____

Signed for: _____



Evidence Log

Date: _____ Submitted by: _____

Case #: 013751-02 Item #: clothing

Condition: _____ Sealed by: _____

Evidence Description: signifies authority and status, design, quality, and fit communicate power and hierarchy reinforcing the wearer's position e.g. robes, suits

Offense/Incident: serving as a visible marker of an individual's role, shaping perceptions of their influence and commanding attention within a given context.

Suspect(s): _____

Victim(s): _____

Witness(es): _____

Collected by: _____

Location: _____

Signed for: _____



Evidence Log

Date: _____ Submitted by: _____

Case #: 013751-03 Item #: Whiteboard

Condition: _____ Sealed by: _____

Evidence Description: commonly used in both educational and professional settings to display information, powerful tool for shaping the direction of a conversation, influencing how information is presented, and reinforcing the authority of the individual controlling it.

Offense/Incident: able to can reinforce authority, shift power dynamics, and influence the direction of discussions, allowing those who control it to shape perceptions and define narratives.

Suspect(s): _____

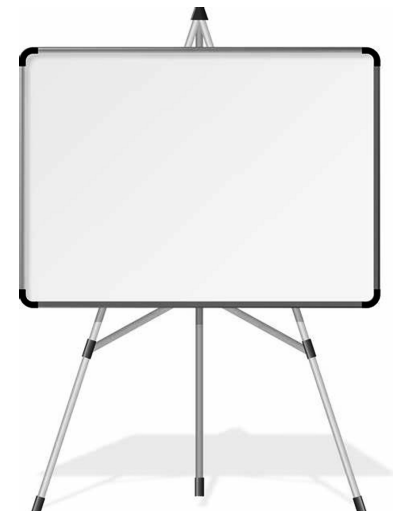
Victim(s): _____

Witness(es): _____

Collected by: _____

Location: _____

Signed for: _____



Evidence Log

Date: _____ Submitted by: _____

Case #: 013751-04 Item #: Chair

Condition: _____ Sealed by: _____

Evidence Description: often larger and more elevated than others, constructed from high-quality materials such as polished wood or leather, signifying authority, arrangement of chairs can create a visible hierarchy reflecting the power structure.

Offense/Incident: positioning and design of the chair can symbolise power, with elevated or isolated seating reinforcing authority

Suspect(s): _____

Victim(s): _____

Witness(es): _____

Collected by: _____

Location: _____

Signed for: _____



Spatial Elements as Environmental Enhancers

Architecture communicates not only through walls and rooms, but through subtle **spatial elements** that shape how we perceive **power, hierarchy, and authority**. A single chair, raised on a podium and framed by light, becomes more than furniture it becomes a **symbol**. The shift in scale, elevation, or material can turn everyday objects into **spatial tools** that **command attention, assert control, or invite respect**.

The quality of light whether harsh and direct or diffuse and ambient can isolate a figure or unite a room. Even the distance between people, the height of a ceiling, or the orientation of a corridor can define who speaks, who listens, and who holds power. These spatial choices are not neutral. They **influence behaviour, shape interaction**, and define how spaces are **used and understood**.

COURTHOUSE



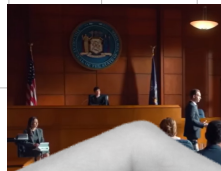
Theatre | Temple | Forum

A courthouse is more than a building it is a **stage** where the rituals of justice unfold, a **sanctuary** of collective values, and a **civic platform** for dialogue and accountability. To fully serve its purpose, it must simultaneously act as **theatre, temple, and forum**.

As a **theatre**, the courthouse sets the scene for carefully choreographed proceedings. Spatial arrangement, movement, and visibility are deliberate from the raised bench to the gallery seating reinforcing roles, hierarchy, and the public performance of law. As a **temple**, it embodies the moral and symbolic weight of the law. It is a space where society reaffirms its collective values not through worship, but through the enactment of responsibility, truth, and judgment. As a **forum**, the courthouse opens itself to the public as a place of access, debate, and civic participation. It is where grievances are heard, rights are defended, and voices especially those often unheard are given space.

Balancing these roles, the courthouse must **inspire authority** without intimidation, invite participation without chaos, and stage justice without spectacle.

PERCEPTION



**EXPECTATIONS ARE GIVEN, AND
ACCEPTED THROUGH SERIES,
MOVIES AND PRE GIVEN NORMS
AND CUSTOMS.**

COURTHOUSES ON THE INSIDE HAVE NOT BEEN RE-THOUGHT FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS.

The Unchanging Interior of Courthouses

Despite evolving legal practices and societal values, the interiors of courthouses have remained surprisingly static for hundreds of years. Traditional courtroom layouts with raised judges' benches, fixed seating for plaintiffs and defendants, segregated jury boxes, and rigid circulation paths continue to dominate, echoing design conventions from centuries past. This resistance to change often overlooks how shifting ideas about justice, accessibility, and technology call for new spatial thinking. Courthouses were originally designed for formal, hierarchical, and often adversarial proceedings. Today's demands for transparency, inclusivity, privacy, and digital integration challenge these old models.

However, many courthouses still prioritise symbolism over user experience, preserving power dynamics through spatial hierarchy rather than fostering engagement or healing. There is a growing recognition that rethinking courthouses is essential not just to improve functionality, but to reflect contemporary values of fairness, dignity, and community connection.

In this way, the courthouse represents both a legacy and an opportunity: to transform spaces of judgment into environments that better serve justice in the 21st century.

RESEARCH QUESTION

**HOW CAN COURTHOUSE DESIGN
ADDRESS TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS
AND HIERARCHICAL RELATIONS
AMONG KEY ACTORS?**

IS IT NECESSARY FOR THE JUDGE TO SIT ON
AN ELEVATED PODIUM?





HIERARCHY | AUTHORITY

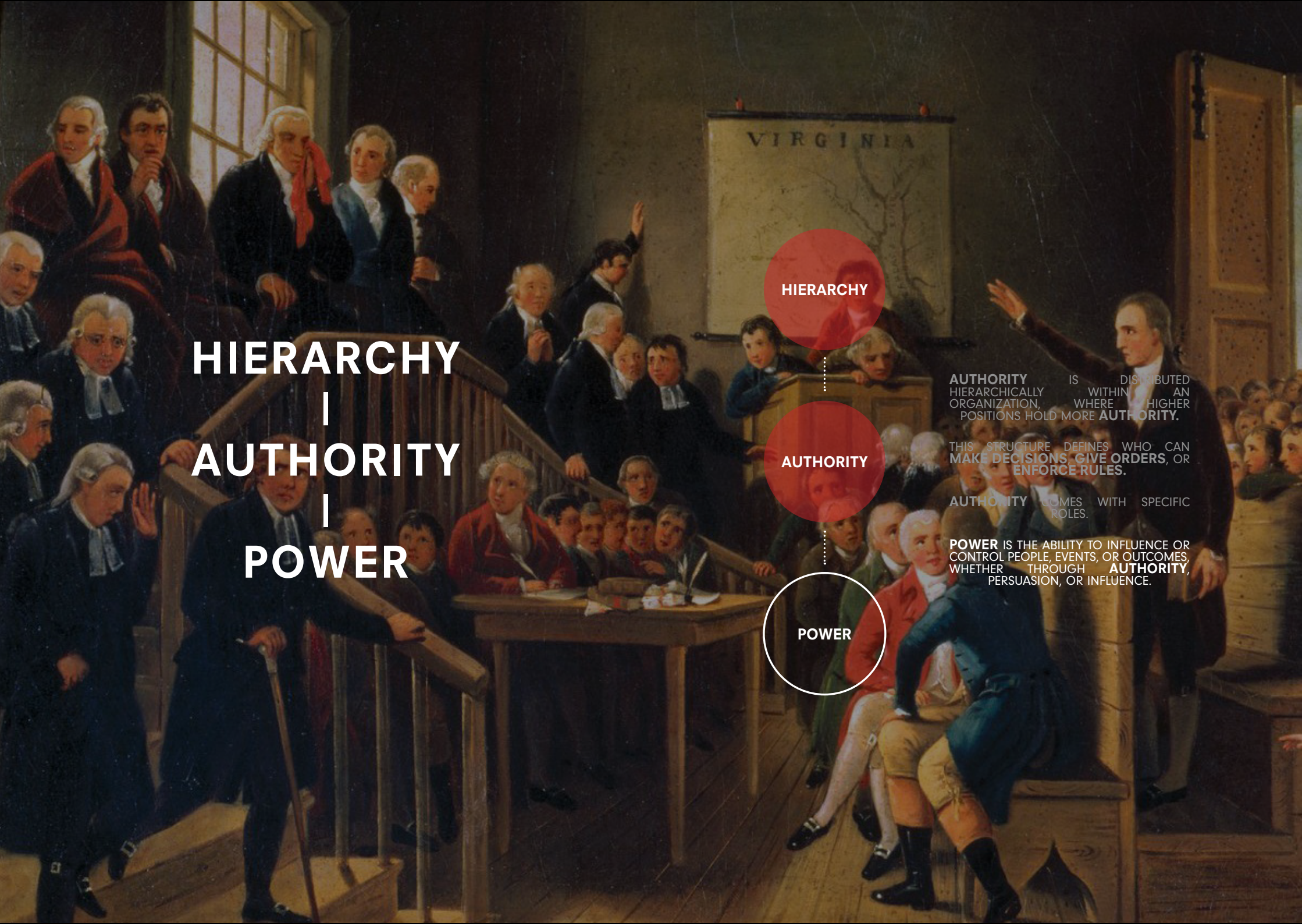
HIERARCHY

AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY IS DISTRIBUTED
HIERARCHICALLY WITHIN AN
ORGANIZATION, WHERE HIGHER
POSITIONS HOLD MORE **AUTHORITY**.

THIS STRUCTURE DEFINES WHO CAN
**MAKE DECISIONS, GIVE ORDERS, OR
ENFORCE RULES.**

AUTHORITY COMES WITH SPECIFIC
ROLES.



HIERARCHY | AUTHORITY | POWER

HIERARCHY

AUTHORITY

POWER

AUTHORITY IS DISTRIBUTED HIERARCHICALLY WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION, WHERE HIGHER POSITIONS HOLD MORE **AUTHORITY**.

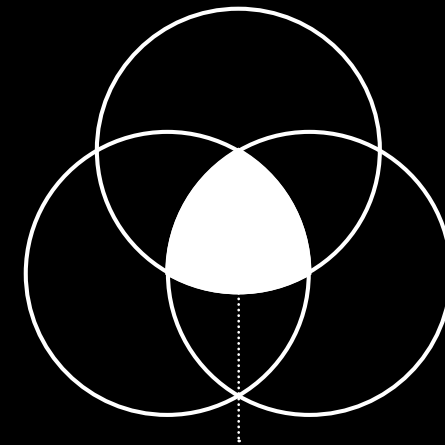
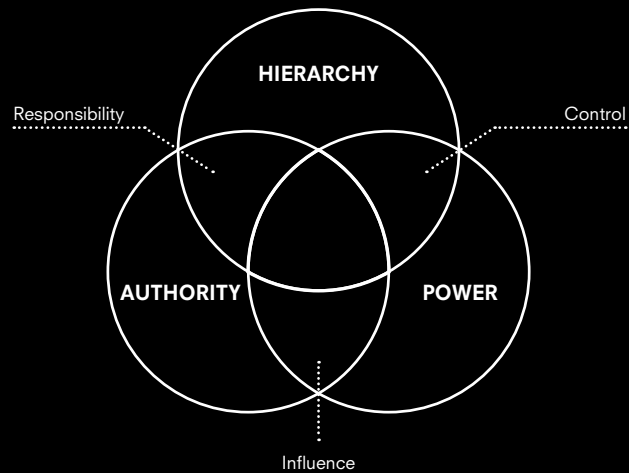
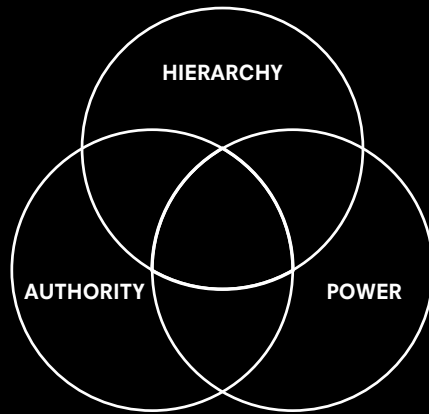
THIS STRUCTURE DEFINES WHO CAN MAKE DECISIONS, GIVE ORDERS, OR ENFORCE RULES.

AUTHORITY COMES WITH SPECIFIC ROLES.

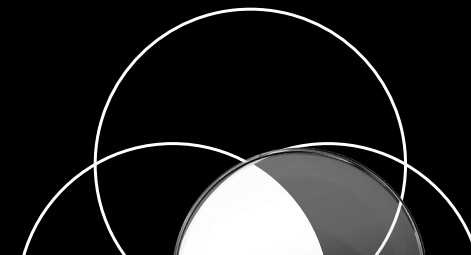
POWER IS THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE OR CONTROL PEOPLE, EVENTS, OR OUTCOMES, WHETHER THROUGH **AUTHORITY**, PERSUASION, OR INFLUENCE.

Opening Statement

THE TRANSITION SPACE



THE TRANSITION SPACE

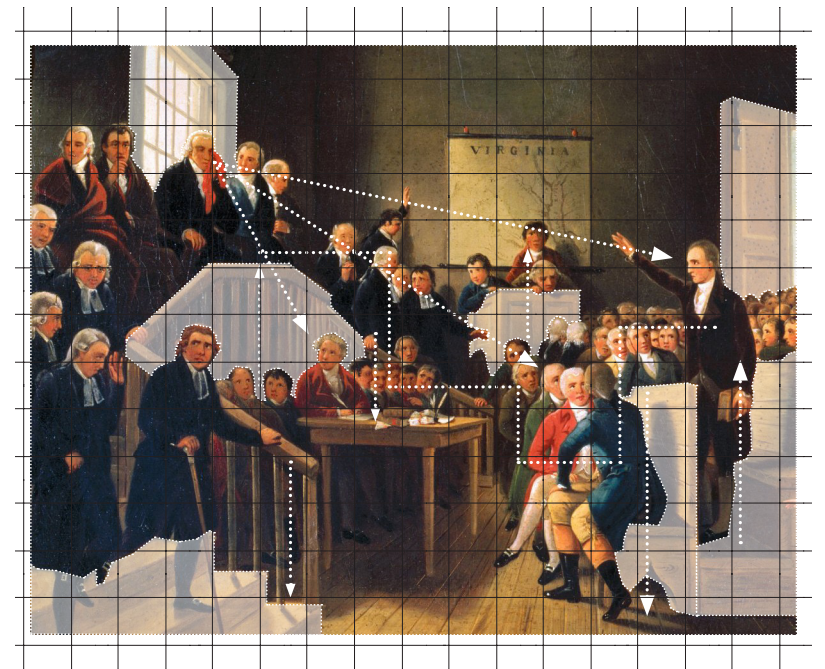
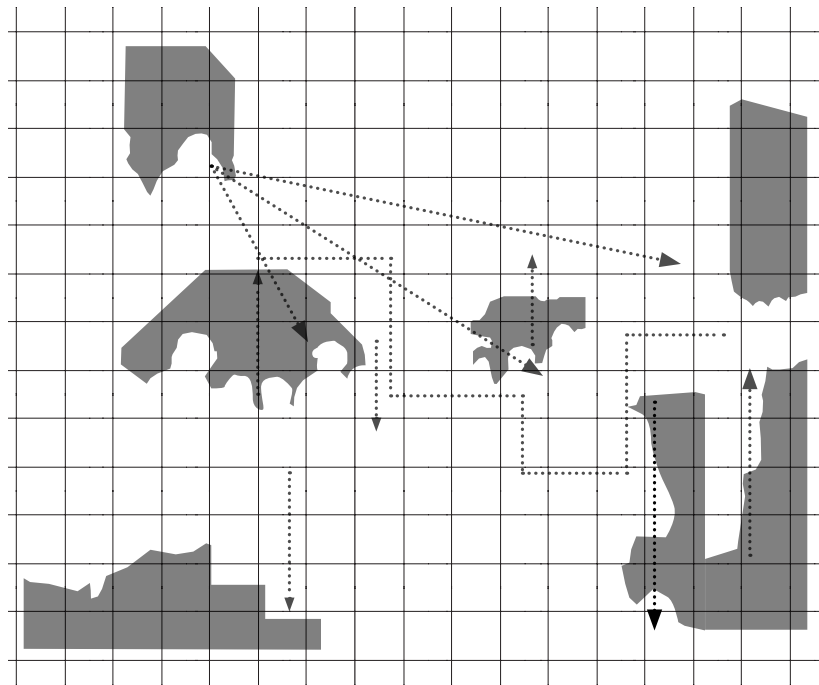


Hierarchy, authority, and power are closely intertwined concepts that find clear expression in architectural space. In built environments such as courthouses, these elements overlap and reinforce one another. A raised bench not only marks a hierarchical position but also asserts authority and exerts power over those below.

Together, these spatial cues shape how individuals experience and negotiate their roles defining who commands, who complies, and who observes. Understanding their overlap helps reveal how architecture actively constructs social order and influences the dynamics of justice and governance.

SPATIAL MANIFESTATION

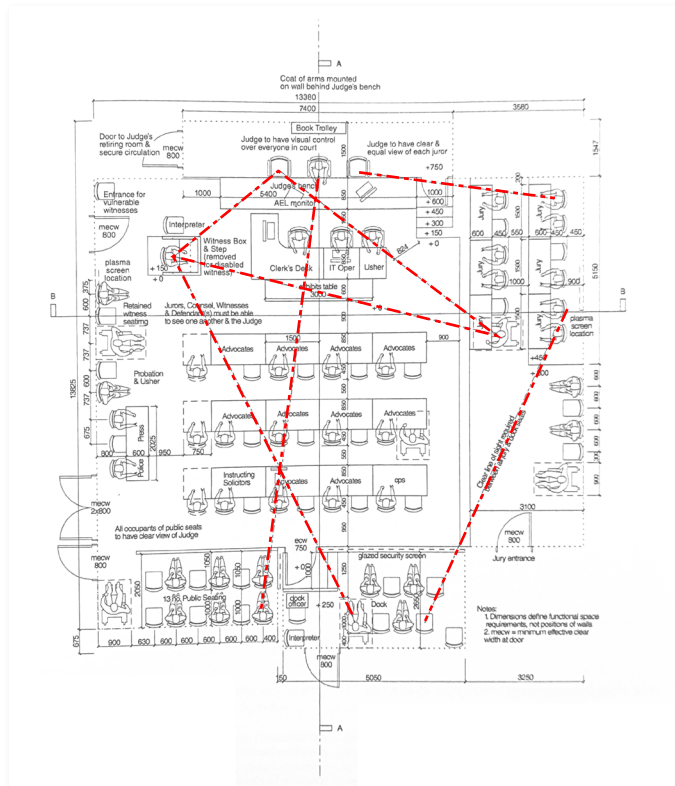
[illegible]A blank sheet of white graph paper featuring a uniform grid of thin black horizontal and vertical lines. The grid consists of 20 columns and 20 rows, creating a series of small squares across the entire page. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.



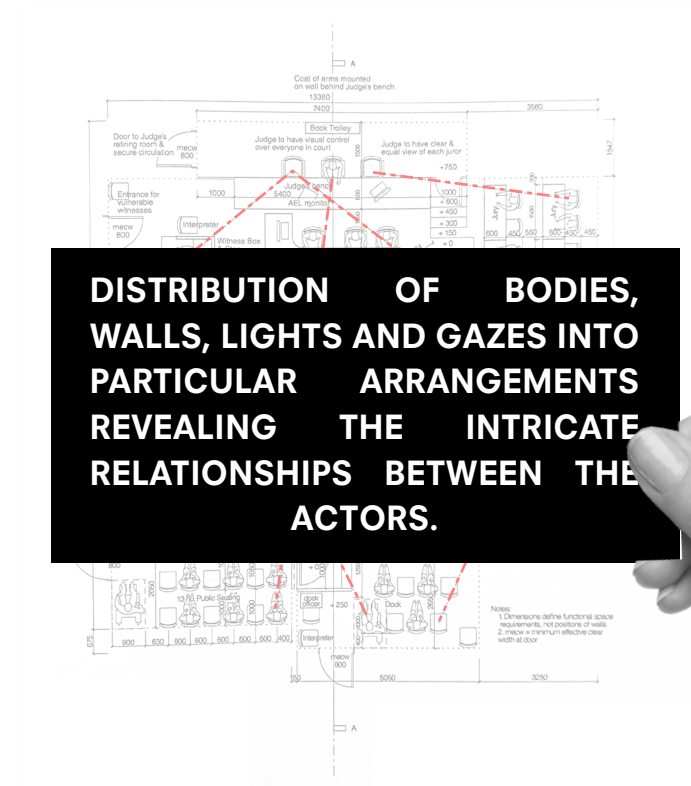
"Parson's Cause" | George Cooke's, 1834

SPATIAL MANIFESTATION WITHIN THE COURTROOM

APPLICATION



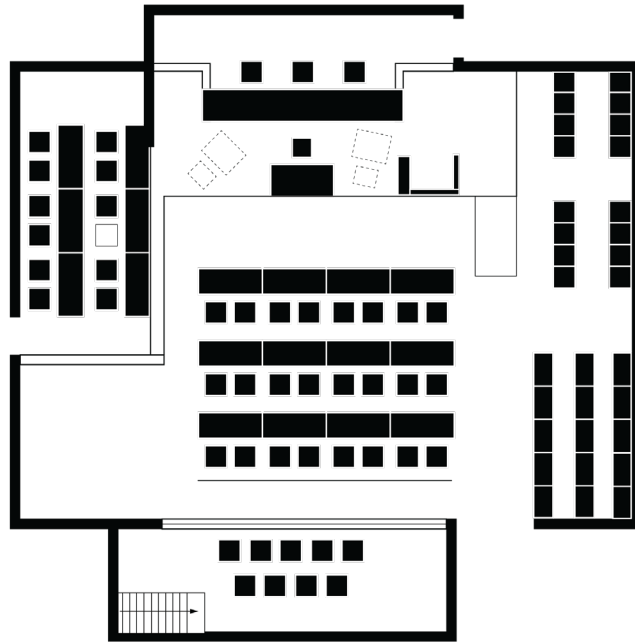
CROWN COURT MANUAL



In a courtroom, the arrangement of bodies, walls, lighting, and lines of sight establishes a clear hierarchy of authority and power. Walls separate roles, lighting highlights figures like the judge, and seating directs attention, shaping the flow of authority. These spatial decisions rigidly structure the courtroom, enforcing strict boundaries between participants and limiting flexibility. This controlled environment not only dictates how justice is delivered but also how it is perceived, often prioritizing order and control over openness or dialogue.

Opening Statement

THE COURTROOM



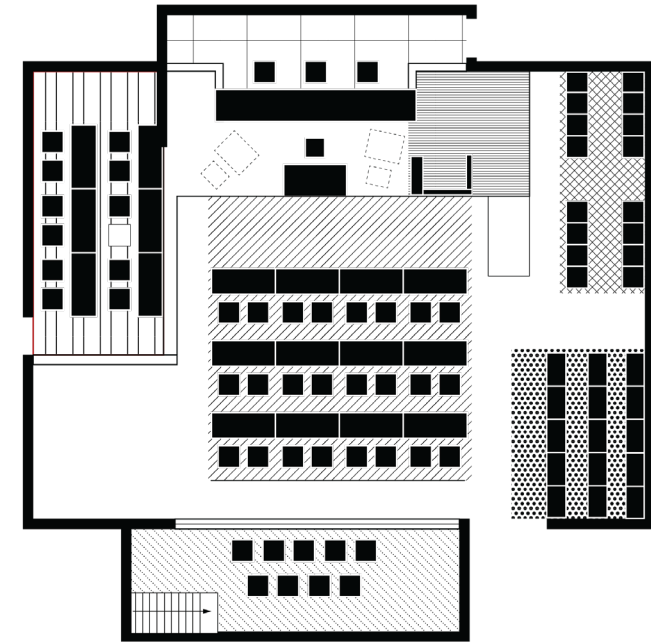
Designed to feel **formal** and **imposing**, suggesting the **authority**.

Physical barriers signify actors positions as **observers** or **active participants** in the **power dynamic**.

Movement in the courtroom is **highly controlled** and structured, with participants generally moving in a **prescribed manner**.

Opening Statement

THE ACTORS SPACES

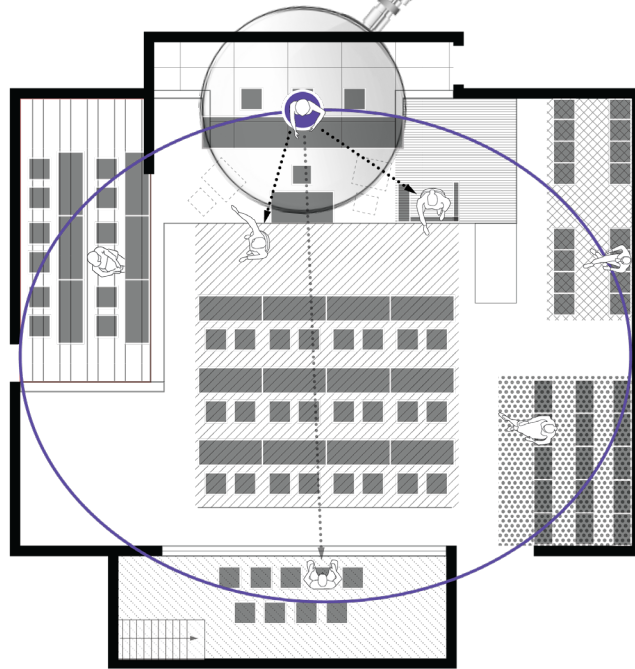


Actor arrangements create a **visual hierarchy** and communicate the **power structure** within the courtroom.

Each actor's spatial position in the courtroom emphasizes their **function in the trial**, establishing **clear distinctions** in **authority, responsibility,** and **participation**.

Opening Statement

THE JUDGE



Typically **elevated** on a bench, **signifying authority**.

Positioned **centrally** at the front of the courtroom to **oversee** the entire process.

Surrounded by the bench, gavel, and sometimes a court seal, **reinforcing power and control**.

Arrow of Influence▶

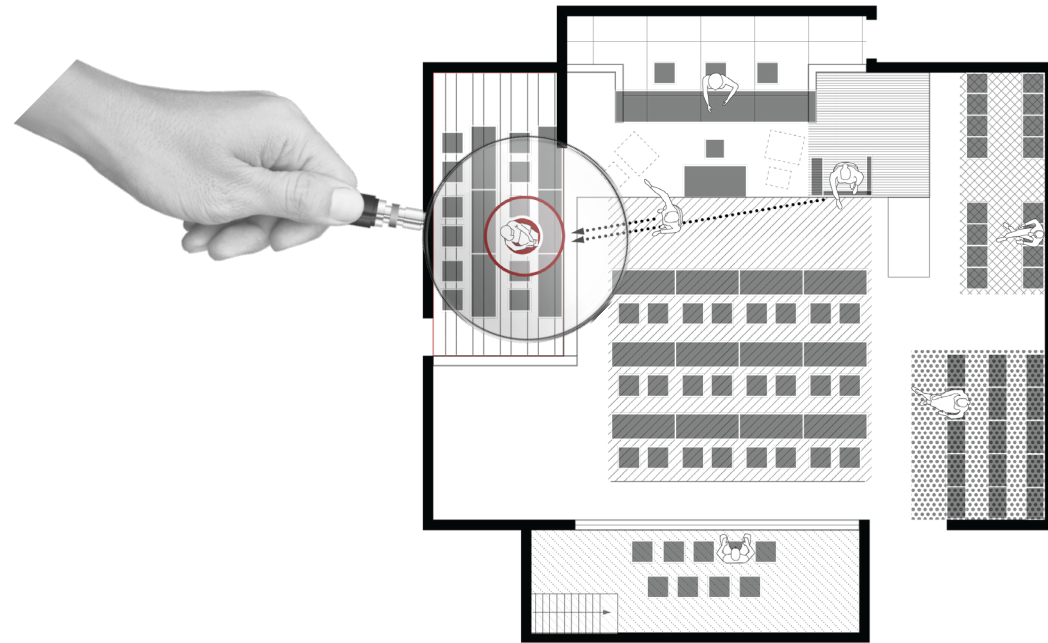
[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

Opening Statement

THE JURY



Typically seated in a distinct section of the courtroom, often in a box or **behind a railing**, creating a sense of **separation and neutrality**.

Their space is **isolated** from the rest of the actors, emphasizing their role as **impartial decision-makers** who must **observe** the trial without becoming **influenced** by the **active participants**.

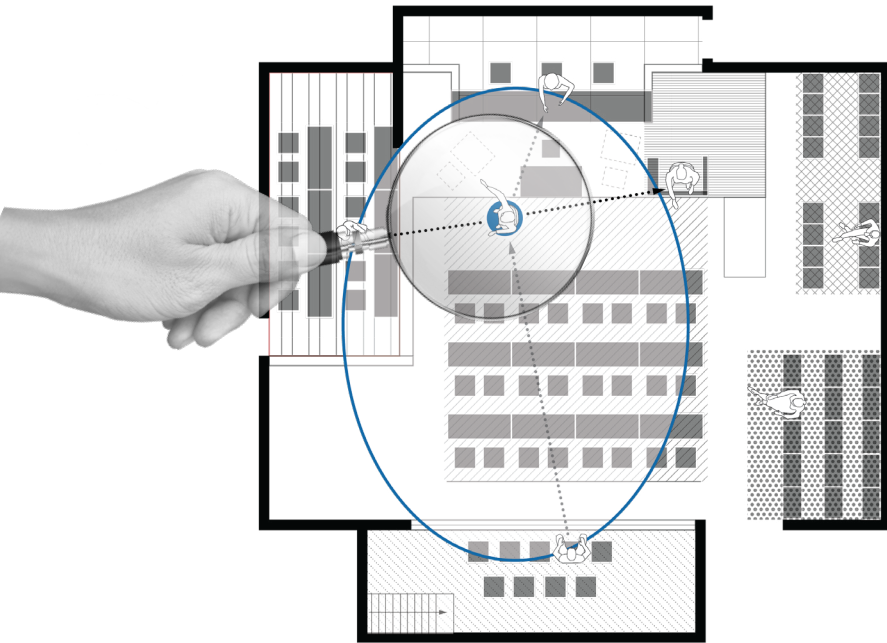
Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

THE LAWYER



Positioned near the judge but at **lower levels**, reflecting their role in **presenting arguments, not making final decisions**.

Spaces are usually adjacent to one another, but **physically separated**, symbolizing their **opposing roles** in the case.

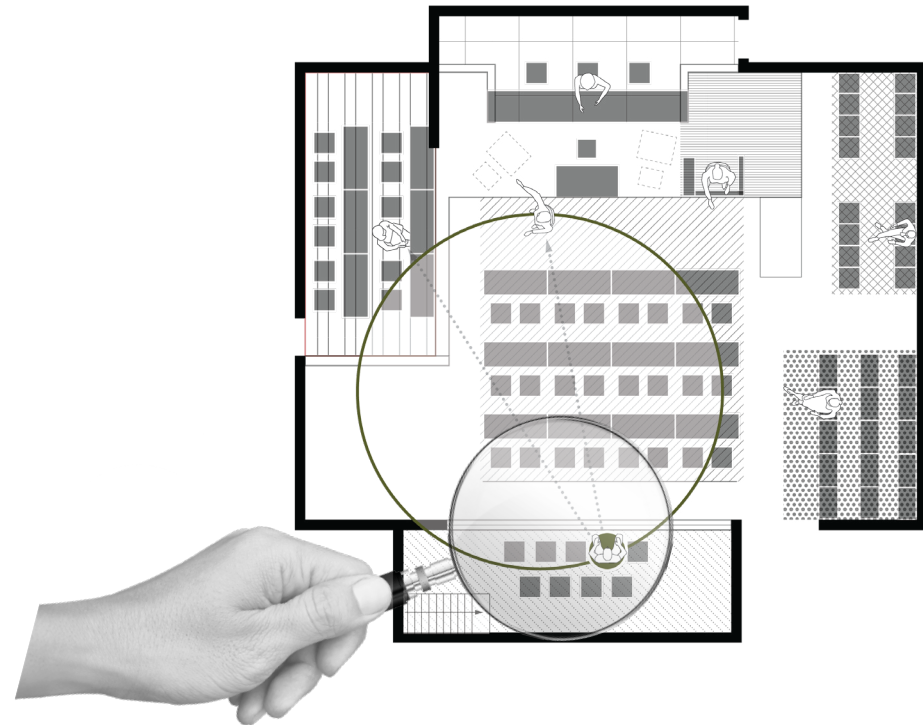
Arrow of Influence ►

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

THE DEFENDANT



Typically seated in a dock or **behind a physical barrier**, indicating their **status as someone on trial**.

May be seated in a **confined space**, often **visually separate** from the other participants, emphasizing their **subordinate role** in the courtroom.

Arrow of Influence ►

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

THE PRESS



Physically separated from the participants to maintain a **boundary** between the **active proceedings** and those **documenting** it.

Access to **additional resources**, distinguishing them from the general public.

Sense of power, as their reports can **shape public opinion**.

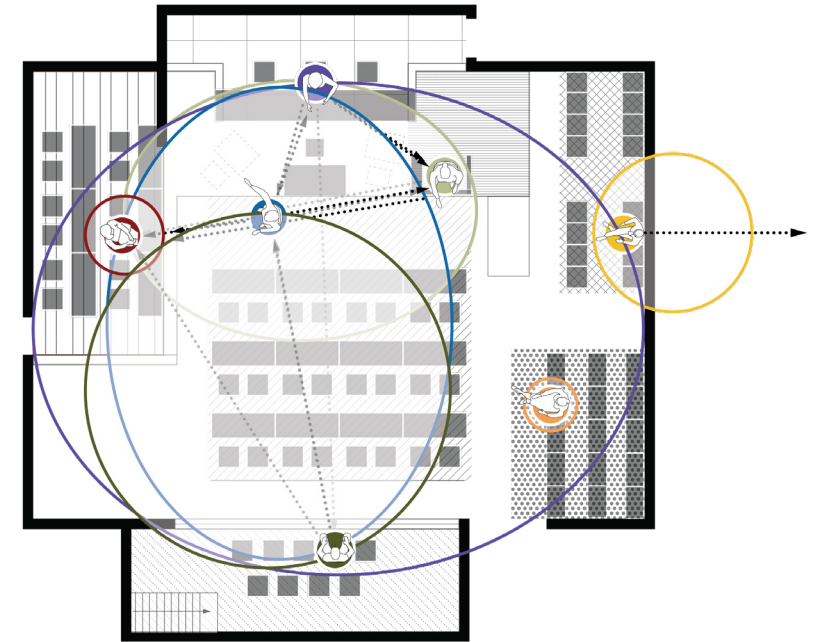
Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

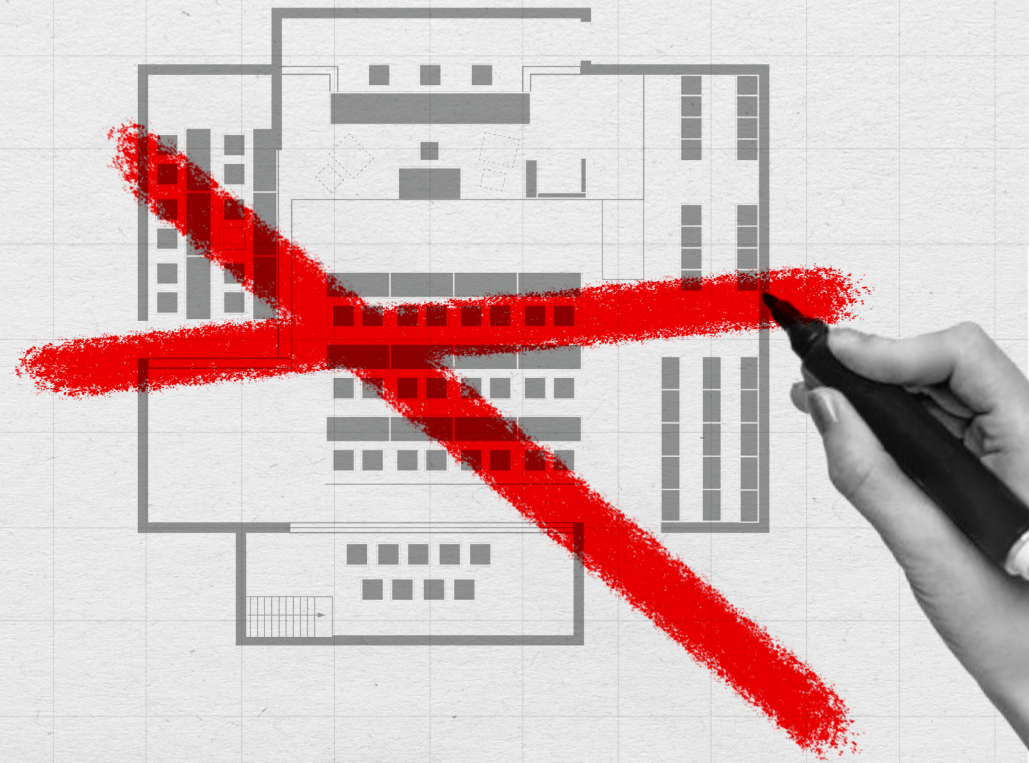
DYNAMICS

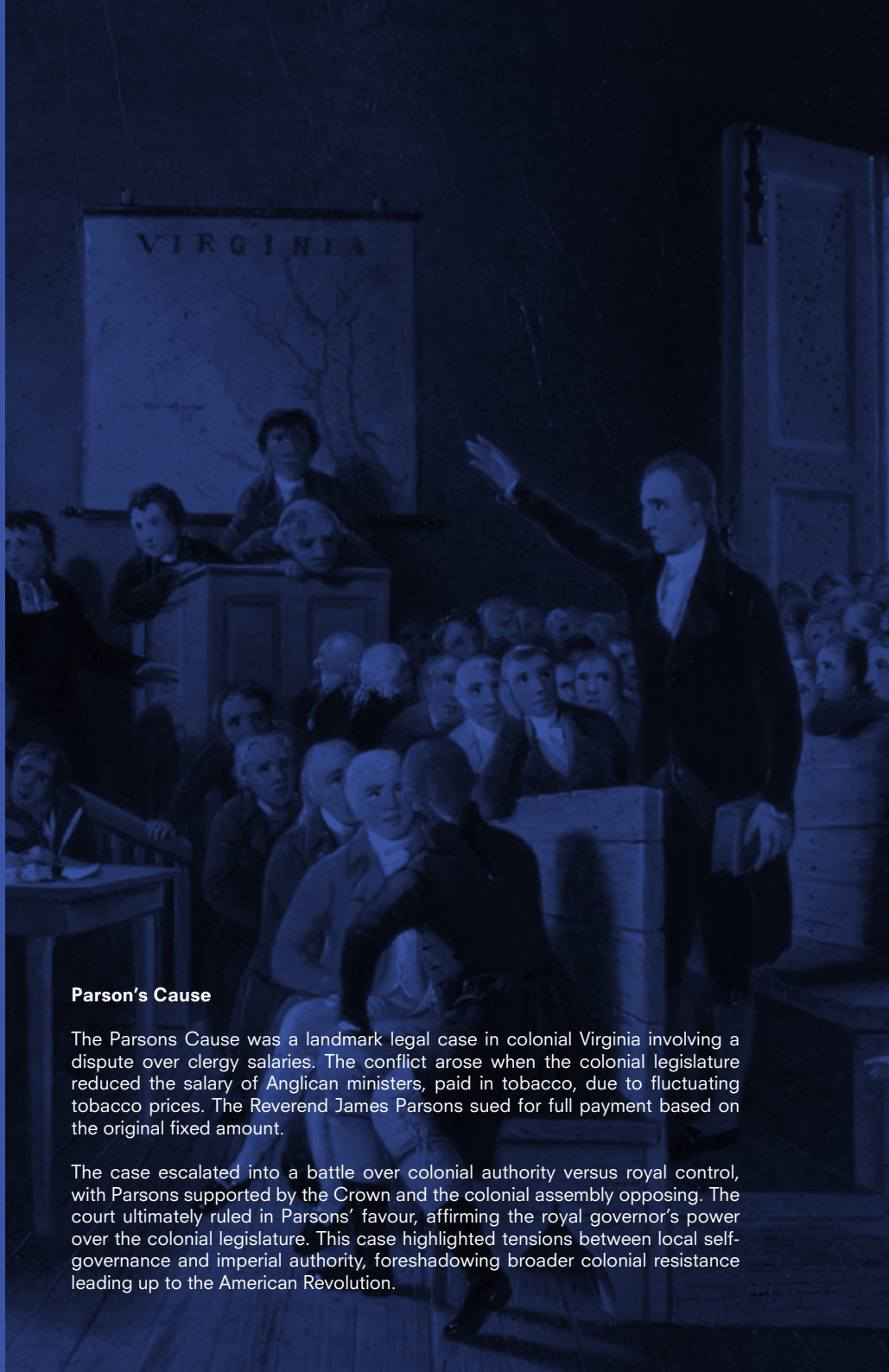


Courtroom roles are deeply fragmented, each actor operating within clearly defined, often isolated functions. The judge wields authority from a detached position, while lawyers actively drive the narrative on opposing sides. The jury observes and deliberates but remains separate from direct interaction. The plaintiff and defendant are positioned apart, often powerless spectators to the process controlled by others. The press and public occupy peripheral roles, watching but rarely engaging. This division fragments the courtroom into distinct zones of activity and observation, reinforcing hierarchies and limiting fluid interaction between participants, underscoring the rigid and compartmentalized nature of justice as performed within these walls.

SOME OBJECTS, PRACTICES, AND
SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THIS
COURTROOM HAVE PERSISTED
FOR CENTURIES, NOT OUT OF
NECESSITY.

BUT TRADITION AND RITUALS, RATHER
THAN MODERN NEEDS!





PRESENTATION OF EVIDENCE

Parson's Cause

The Parsons Cause was a landmark legal case in colonial Virginia involving a dispute over clergy salaries. The conflict arose when the colonial legislature reduced the salary of Anglican ministers, paid in tobacco, due to fluctuating tobacco prices. The Reverend James Parsons sued for full payment based on the original fixed amount.

The case escalated into a battle over colonial authority versus royal control, with Parsons supported by the Crown and the colonial assembly opposing. The court ultimately ruled in Parsons' favour, affirming the royal governor's power over the colonial legislature. This case highlighted tensions between local self-governance and imperial authority, foreshadowing broader colonial resistance leading up to the American Revolution.

STARE DECISIS

From Casetext: Smarter Legal Research

Walker v. Butterworth

PETTINE, District Judge.

This appeal of a dismissal of a petition for a writ of habeas corpus, 28 U.S.C. § 2254, requires the Court to inspect the constitutional validity of evidentiary and procedural rules traditionally practiced at criminal trials in Massachusetts.

At the state court trial, the defendant, Terrell Walker, was convicted of armed robbery and first degree murder; he was found to have successfully organized, with two others, the robbery of the Suffolk Loan Company, during the course of which he shot and killed a policeman stationed therein. The government's evidence pictured Walker as the leader by showing that he dictated which store was to be robbed, supplied one partner with a weapon and instructed him in its use, arranged for the other partner to drive the getaway car, directed which jewelry display cases to open, arranged the eventual escape and admonished them not to flee prematurely.

Walker did not deny any of this. Instead, he pleaded insanity and introduced evidence both expert and lay, as to his mental condition at the time of the crime. Two doctors testified that examinations of Walker revealed a paranoid character disorder and that on the date of the homicide he was not able to conform his conduct to the law and unable to appreciate the wrongfulness of his act.

The government did not contradict the defendant's medical testimony. Instead, to prove his sanity circumstantially, it relied on the lay evidence showing Walker's calculated organization of the robbery. In addition it leaned heavily upon the "presumption of sanity", a judicially created presumption that carries evidentiary weight in Massachusetts.

Walker appealed his conviction to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court; the court rejected his numerous assignments of error. *Commonwealth v. Walker*, 370 Mass. 548, 350 N.E.2d 678 (1976). Walker then renewed his objections in this habeas corpus petition to the federal district court. Chief Judge Caffrey agreed with much of the reasoning of the Supreme Judicial Court and denied the petition. It is this denial that is now before this court.¹

¹ The petitioner renewed all his present claims at each appellate stage. Both sides agree that exhaustion is not an issue in this case.

USAGE OF THE DOCK
was said to be prejudicial and violated the defendants rights to a fair trial.

STARE DECISIS

V v United Kingdom, Merits and just satisfaction, App no 24888/94, ECHR 1999-IX, (2000) 30 EHRR 121, [1999] ECHR 171, IHRL 2817 (ECHR 1999), 16th December 1999, European Court of Human Rights [ECHR]; Grand Chamber [ECHR]

Date: 16 December 1999

Content type: International court decisions

Jurisdiction: European Court of Human Rights [ECHR]; Grand Chamber [ECHR]

Citation(s): App no 24888/94 (Application No)

ECHR 1999-IX (Official Citation)

(2000) 30 EHRR 121 (Other Reference)

[1999] ECHR 171 (Other Reference)

IHRL 2817 (ECHR 1999) (OUP reference)

Product: Oxford Reports on International Law [ORIL]

Module: International Human Rights Law [IHRL]

Whether it was contrary to Article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms ('European Convention on Human Rights', 'ECHR') to impose criminal responsibility at the age of 10 years.

Whether the trial of a juvenile in public in an adult court constituted inhuman and degrading treatment contrary to Article 3.

Whether the fixing of the tariff for the applicant's detention by the executive—represented by the Home Secretary in this case—rather than a tribunal was contrary to Article 5(4) of the ECHR.

Whether the involvement of the Home Secretary in the determination of the sentence following a conviction satisfied the 'independent and impartial' tribunal requirement of Article 6.

Whether in view of the accused's young age there was a breach of the right to participate effectively in the trial, contrary to Article 6(1) of the ECHR.

ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

through the physical layout of the courtroom thereby denying the possibility of a fair trial.

STARE DECISIS

Estelle v. Williams, 425 U.S. 501 (1976)

The actual impact of a particular practice on the judgment of jurors cannot always be fully determined. But this Court has left no doubt that the probability of deleterious effects on fundamental rights calls for close judicial scrutiny. *Estes v. Texas*, 381 U. S. 532 (1965); *In re Murchison*, 349 U. S. 133 (1955). Courts must do the best they can to evaluate the likely effects of a particular procedure, based on reason, principle, and common human experience.

The potential effects of presenting an accused before the jury in prison attire need not, however, be measured in the abstract. Courts have, with few exceptions, [Footnote 1] determined that a accused should not be compelled to go to trial in prison or jail clothing because of the possible impairment of the presumption so basic to the adversary system. *Gaito v. Brierley*, 485 F.2d 86 (CA3 1973); *Hernandez v. Beto*, *supra*; *Brooks v. Texas*, 381 F.2d 619 (CA5 1967); *Commonwealth v. Keeler*, 216 Pa.Super.193, 264 A.2d 407 (1970); *Miller v. State*, 249 Ark. 3, 457 S.W.2d 848 (1970); *People v. Shaw*, 381 Mich. 467, 164 N.W.2d 7 (1969); *People v. Zapata*, 220 Cal. App. 2d 903, 34 Cal. Rptr. 171 (1963), *cert. denied*, 377 U. S. 406 (1964); *Eaddy v. People*, 115 Colo. 488, 174 P.2d 717 (1946). The American Bar Association's Standards for Criminal Justice also disapprove the practice. ABA Project on Standards for Criminal Justice, Trial by Jury § 4.1(b), p. 91 (App.Draft 1968). This is a recognition that the constant reminder of the accused's condition implicit in such distinctive, identifiable

Page 425 U. S. 505

attire may affect a juror's judgment. The defendant's clothing is so likely to be a continuing influence throughout the trial that, not unlike placing a jury in the custody of deputy sheriffs who were also witnesses for the prosecution, an unacceptable risk is presented of impermissible factors coming into play. *Turner v.*

PRISON CLOTHING
seen as a 'brand of incarceration'
and was able to undermine the
presumption of innocence.

STARE DECISIS

Illinois v. Allen, 397 U.S. 337 (1970)

Page 397 U. S. 341

on the part of his attorney, saying:"

"There is going to be no proceeding. I'm going to start talking and I'm going to keep on talking all through the trial. There's not going to be no trial like this. I want my sister and my friends here in court to testify for me."

"The trial judge thereupon ordered the petitioner removed from the courtroom."

413 F.2d at 233-234. After this second removal, Allen remained out of the courtroom during the presentation of the State's case in chief, except that he was brought in on several occasions for purposes of identification. During one of these latter appearances, Allen responded to one of the judge's questions with vile and abusive language. After the prosecution's case had been presented, the trial judge reiterated his promise to Allen that he could return to the courtroom whenever he agreed to conduct himself properly. Allen gave some assurances of proper conduct, and was permitted to be present through the remainder of the trial, principally his defense, which was conducted by his appointed counsel.

The Court of Appeals went on to hold that the Supreme Court of Illinois was wrong in ruling that Allen had, by his conduct, relinquished his constitutional right to be present, declaring that:

"No conditions may be imposed on the absolute right of a criminal defendant to be present at all stages of the proceeding. The insistence of a defendant that he exercise this right under unreasonable conditions does not amount to a waiver. Such conditions, if insisted upon, should and must be dealt with in a manner that does not compel the relinquishment of his right."

RELINQUISHMENT OF RIGHTS
removal of the petitioner from the
courtroom. The trial continued
without the defendant.

STARE DECISIS

From Casetext: Smarter Legal Research

Young v. Callahan

COFFIN, Chief Judge.

Appellant David Young appeals the dismissal by the district court of his petition for habeas corpus. Of three grounds urged below as warranting habeas relief, only one is pressed on appeal: appellant contends that his Fourteenth Amendment right to due process was violated when, over objection and without inquiry into security needs, he was confined at trial to the prisoner's dock.¹ In earlier cases we have either found resolution unnecessary or that ample justification was present. Here we must decide the question whether the dock without any particular justification can today pass constitutional muster. We conclude that it cannot.

¹ The Massachusetts prisoner's dock or box has been described thusly:

"The dock is a box approximately four feet square and four feet high. It is open at the top so that the defendant's head and shoulders can be seen when he or she is seated. The dock is placed typically at the center of the bar enclosure which separates the spectator's section from that portion of the courtroom reserved for trial principals. The dock is usually fifteen to twenty feet behind counsel table, and is sometimes on a raised platform." *Walker v. Butterworth*, 457 F. Supp. 1233 (D.Mass. 1978).

USAGE OF THE DOCK
has been questioned by the
defendant due to infringement
upon the fairness of the trial.

STARE DECISIS

Commonwealth v. Moore

Defendant was tried in the Court of Oyer and Terminer of Butler County on three bills of indictment *29 which charged (1) assault with intent to ravish; (2) indecent assault; and (3) contributing to the delinquency of a minor. He was acquitted on the first two charges, and found guilty of the third contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The court thereupon directed the defendant "to pay the costs of prosecution, and further sentence suspended." Defendant has appealed.

The appeal will be quashed. We have held that where a defendant is convicted of a criminal offense and sentence is suspended, there is no judgment to support an appeal. *Com. v. Mellon*, 81 Pa. Superior Ct. 20; *Com. v. Lipschutz*, 89 Pa. Superior Ct. 142; *Com. v. Torr*, 111 Pa. Superior Ct. 178, 169 A. 238. See Note, 126 A.L.R. 1210. While this rule is not an inflexible one and will yield in exceptional cases to prevent injustice to a defendant (*Com. v. Trunk*, 311 Pa. 555, 167 A. 333; *Com. v. Ragone*, 317 Pa. 113, 176 A. 454; *Com. v. Haines*, 130 Pa. Superior Ct. 196, 196 A. 621; *Com. v. Tluchak*, 166 Pa. Superior Ct. 16, 21, 70 A. 2d 657), the facts of this case do not fall within any of the recognized exceptions. See *Com. v. Sarricks*, 161 Pa. Superior Ct. 577, 56 A.2d 323.

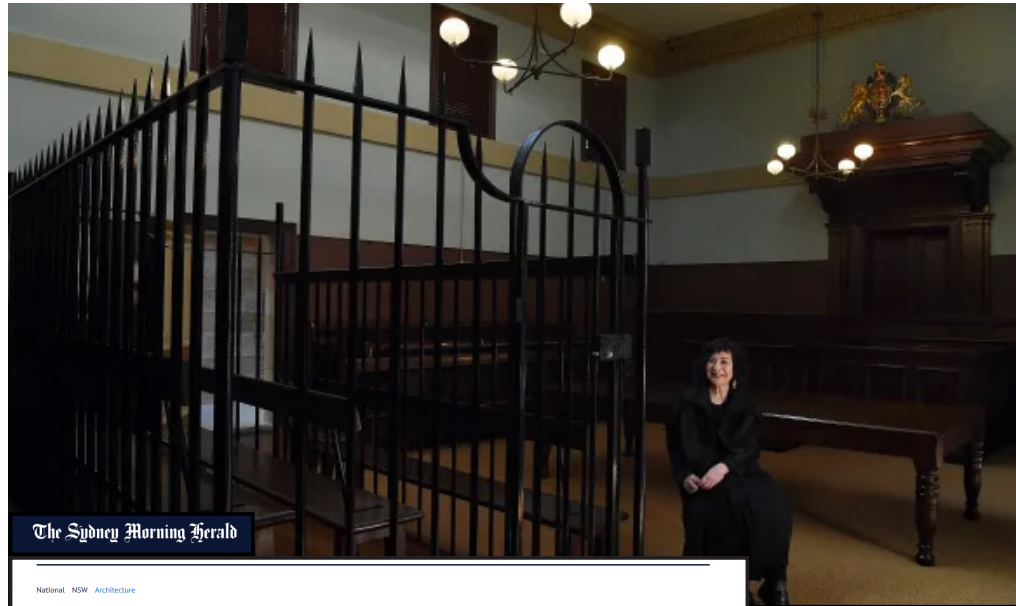
Furthermore, the order of the court directing payment of costs does not save defendant's appeal. In *Com. v. Cauffiel*, 97 Pa. Superior Ct. 202, at page 205 (appeal refused 298 Pa. 319), under like circumstances, this Court said: "The orders of the court directing the defendant to pay the costs of prosecution and suspending sentence were not sentences within the meaning of the law: *Com. v. Hamel*, 44 Pa. Superior Ct. 464; *Com. v. Dunleavy*, 16 Pa. Superior Ct. 380. The liability of a defendant for costs is not a part of the penalty imposed by the statutes which provide for the punishment of these offenses. Such liability is an incident of the judgment, arising out of our statutes providing *30 for the payment of costs in criminal proceedings: *PORTER, J.*, in *Com. v. Hamel*, supra. Until there is a sentence upon a bill no appeal lies."

The appeal is quashed.

USAGE OF THE DOCK

was argued to create a
suggestion of danger and guilt
around the defendant.

IN THE MEDIA



The Sydney Morning Herald

National NDW Architecture

This was published 5 years ago

Guilty by design: How architecture influences jury decisions

The principle of a fair trial is integral to the criminal justice system, but legal and architecture experts argue **the design of a courtroom can influence a jury's decision.**

IN THE MEDIA



listen

How courtroom design influences juries

Andrew Davies and Anita Barraud
Posted 16 Dec 2014, updated 18 Dec 2014

For at least a century, most American trials have seated the accused at the bar table with their legal team to avoid giving the impression of guilt. A 2005 US Supreme Court decision reinforced this stance, stating that any form of visible constraint **violates the presumption of innocence.**

However, courtroom design varies around the world. **Glass cages are now used almost universally throughout the UK and other European countries,** after first being documented at the trial of former SS Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961.

Metal cages are also used (...)

DETAIL



LEVELS

DISTANCE

SCALE

HEIGHT

DESIGN

EQUALITY

STABILITY

PROGRESS

MATERIALITY

SOUNDPROOFING

SEGREGATION

INDEPENDANCE

ENCLOSURE

ARRANGEMENT

VISIBILITY

PROPORTIONS

WIDTH

POSITIONING

PROXIMITY

ACCESSIBILITY

PROTECTION

OPENNESS

SECURITY

POWER

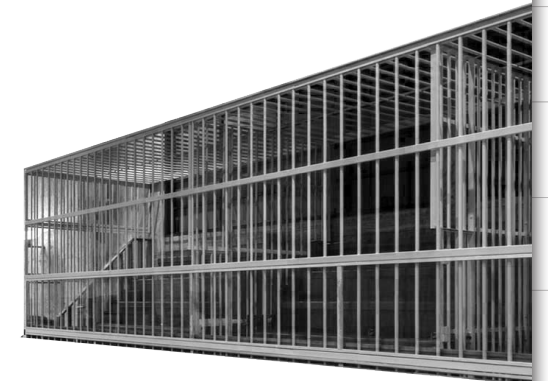




Wooden Stand



Chair



Metal Cage Dock



Chair



Glass Dock



Chair

Shaping Judgement through Spatial Characteristics

A simple chair unassuming in its basic function can be radically transformed by the spatial characteristics applied to it. Once neutral, it becomes a powerful architectural element when altered by material, position, scale, or enclosure. Place the chair on a **raised platform**, and it becomes a position of **authority**. Elevation alone introduces hierarchy, suggesting that the seated figure holds power over those below. This single spatial move shifts perception from equality to judgment. Surround it with **solid wood panels**, and the chair becomes part of a formal dock a structured enclosure that conveys tradition, seriousness, and ritual. Here, the material gives weight to the space, grounding it in formality and reinforcing the gravity of the proceedings. Replace the wood with **metal bars**, and the same sitting place becomes a cage. Now the spatial message is one of confinement and suspicion. What was once a position of presence becomes one of control and surveillance. The material and enclosure recast the individual as a threat even before any words are spoken. Substitute the metal with **transparent glass**, and the meaning shifts again. The chair is still enclosed, but now visible. The glass dock offers openness and neutrality on the surface, but still subtly separates. Its transparency suggests fairness, yet maintains a **boundary control** softened by visibility.

These transformations reveal how spatial characteristics are not passive they actively **construct meaning**. Through height, material, boundary, and visibility, even the most ordinary architectural element can carry messages about power, vulnerability, and judgment. In legal settings especially, these decisions shape more than space they shape how justice is seen, felt, and enacted.

Presentation of Evidence
THROUGHOUT TIME



AGORA OF ATHENS

HELIAIA

1st Century BC



OUTDOORS

CELTIC COURTS

1st - 5th Century



SAINT MAXIMUM

BASILICAE

5th - 10th Century



TREE OF JUSTICE

OUTDOOR COURTS
12th - 16th Century

SEMI PUBLIC SPACES
13th - 15th Century



WESTMINSTER HALL



ASSIZE OF CLARENDON

ASSIZE COURTS

17th - 18th Century



FREDERICK COUNTY

PURPOSE BUILT
COURTS

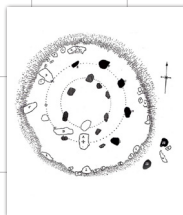
18th - 19th Century



PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA

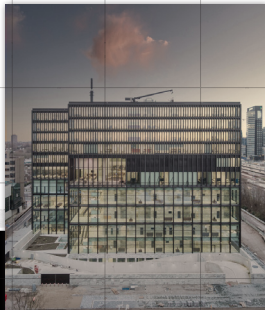
MONUMENTAL COURTS

20th Century

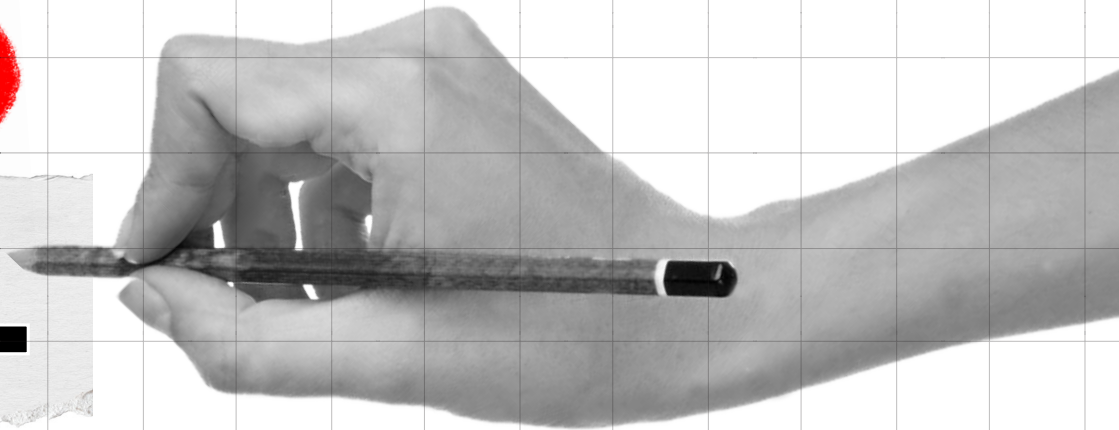
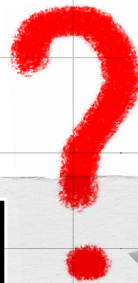


'PUBLIC' COURTS

21st Century

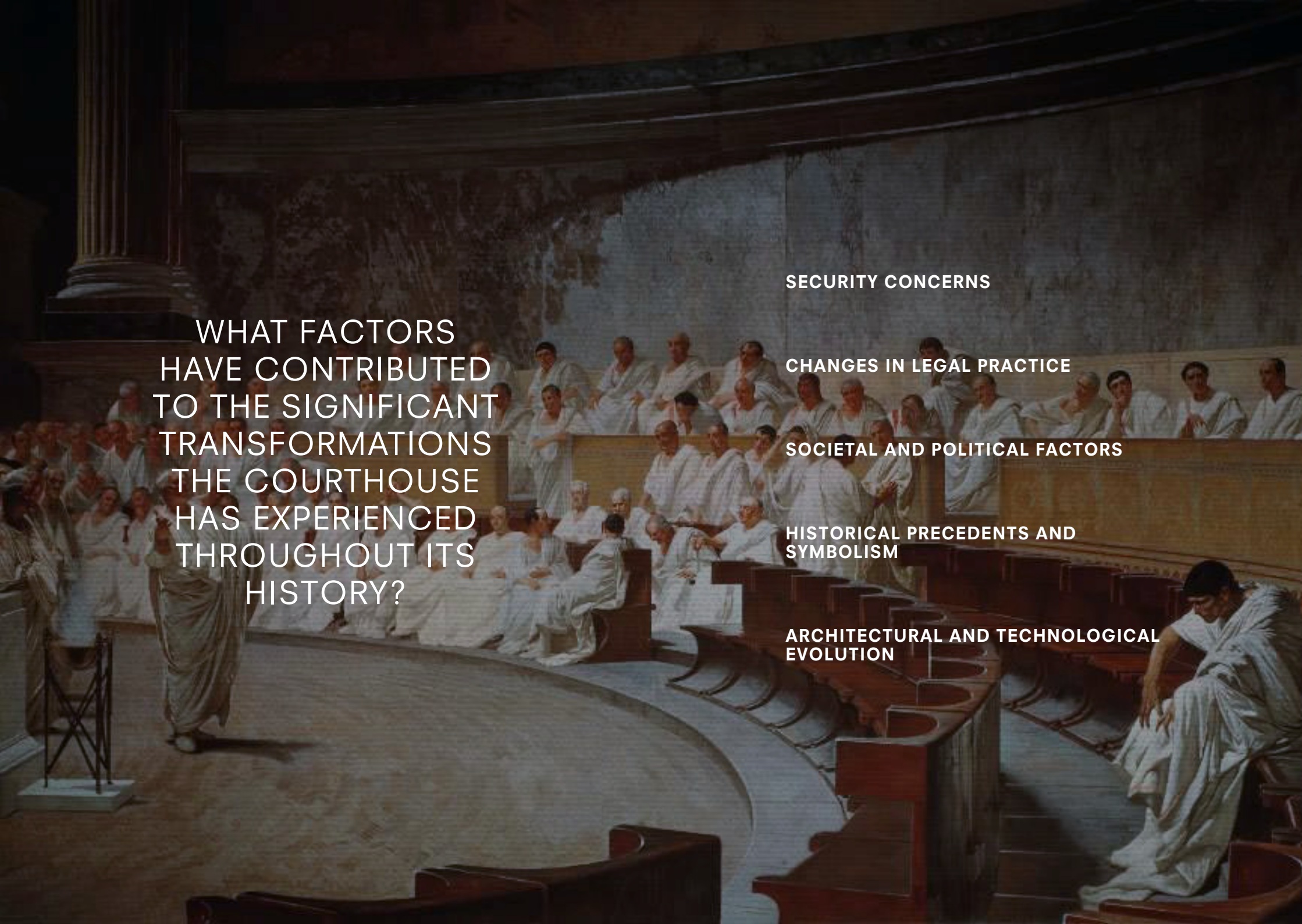


AMSTERDAM COURT



The Courthouse throughout History

Historically, courthouses were designed as highly hierarchical and authoritative spaces, emphasizing the power of judges and the state. Grand, imposing architecture and rigid interior layouts reinforced strict social order and control, with clear physical separations between judges, plaintiffs, defendants, and the public. Over time, changing ideas about justice and democracy have influenced courthouse design, gradually introducing seemingly greater openness and transparency. Modern courthouses often strive to balance authority with accessibility inviting public participation while maintaining security and order. Power dynamics are becoming more nuanced, with spaces designed to support not only judgment but also mediation, education, and community engagement. Despite these intended shifts, many courthouses retain deeply ingrained spatial hierarchies that continue to shape how justice is experienced reflecting the ongoing tension between tradition, authority, and the pursuit of more inclusive and equitable legal spaces.



WHAT FACTORS
HAVE CONTRIBUTED
TO THE SIGNIFICANT
TRANSFORMATIONS
THE COURTHOUSE
HAS EXPERIENCED
THROUGHOUT ITS
HISTORY?

SECURITY CONCERNS

CHANGES IN LEGAL PRACTICE

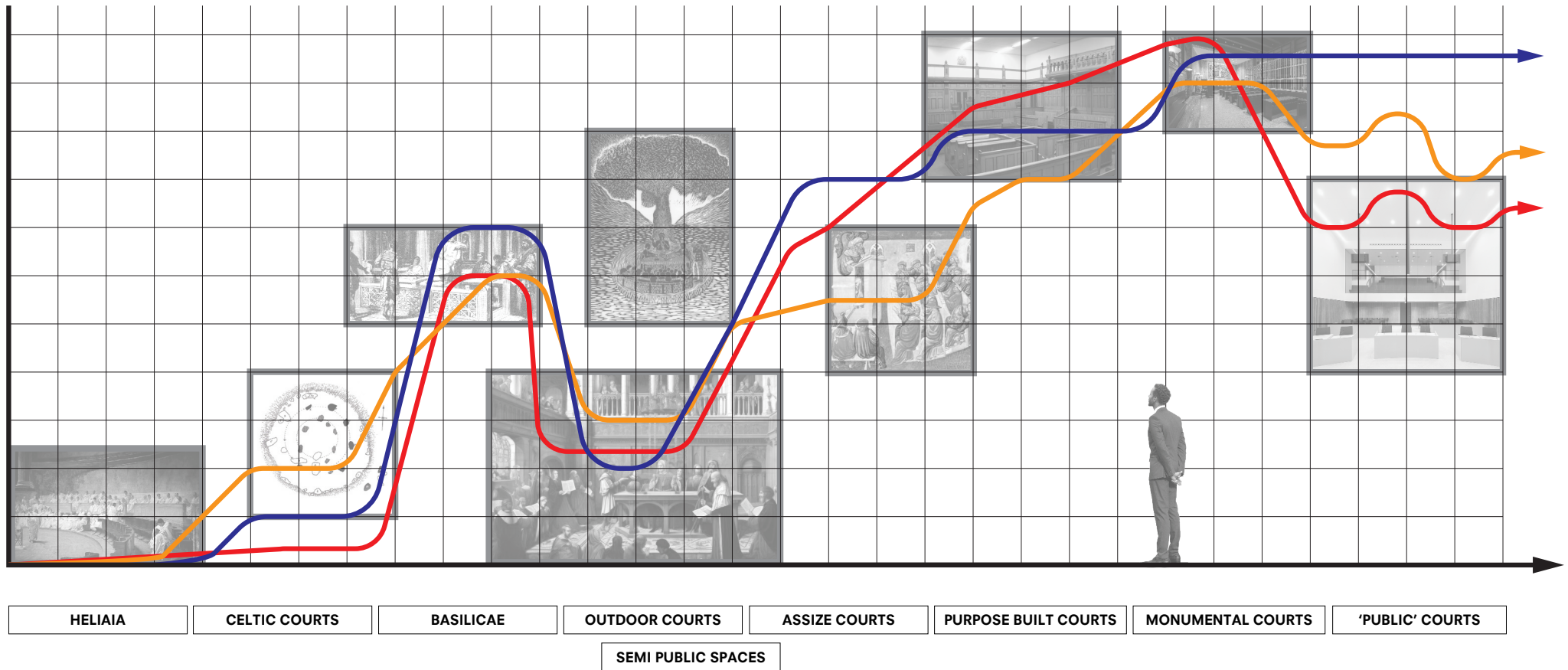
SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL FACTORS

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS AND
SYMBOLISM

ARCHITECTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL
EVOLUTION

Presentation of Evidence

DYNAMICS THROUGHOUT TIME

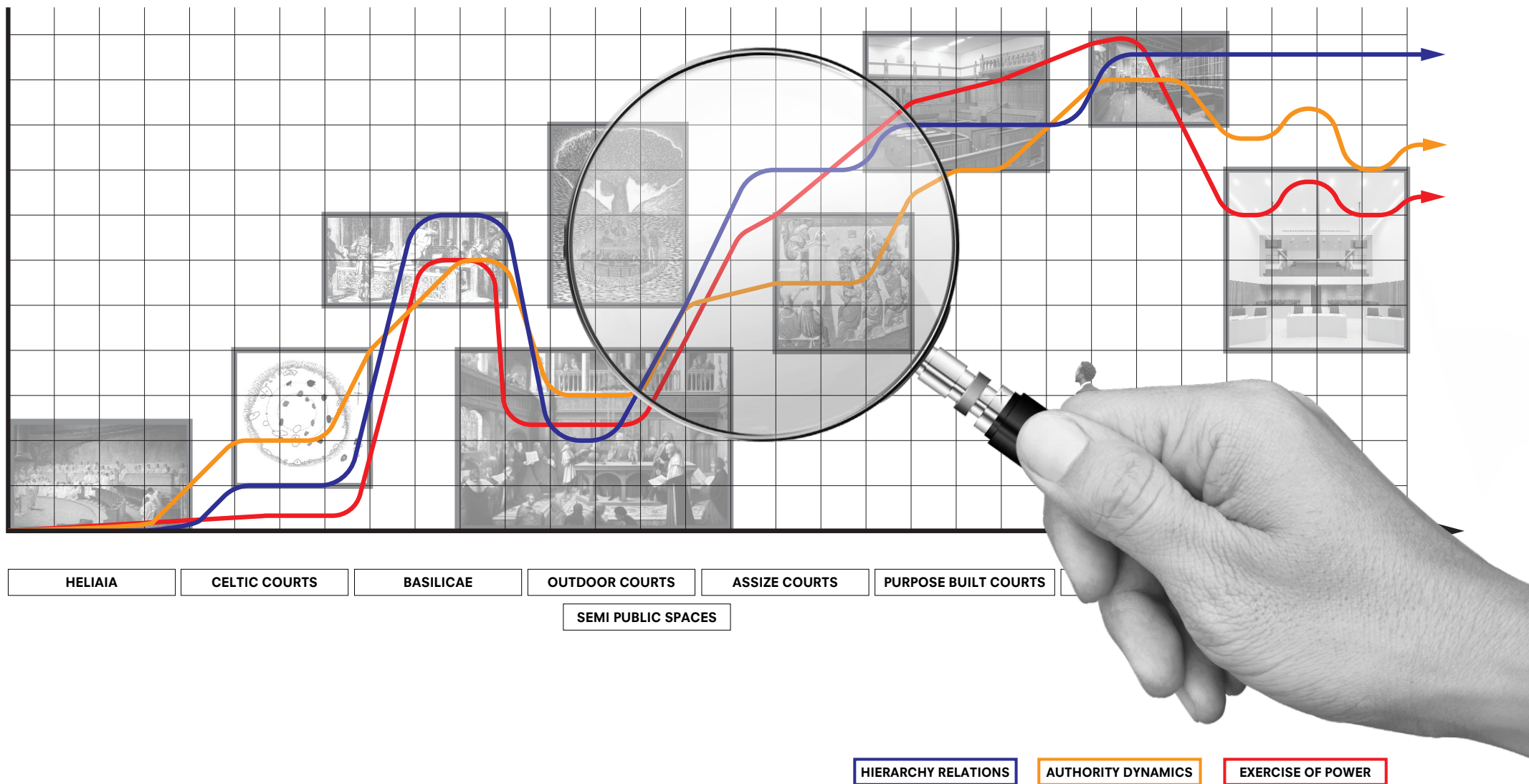


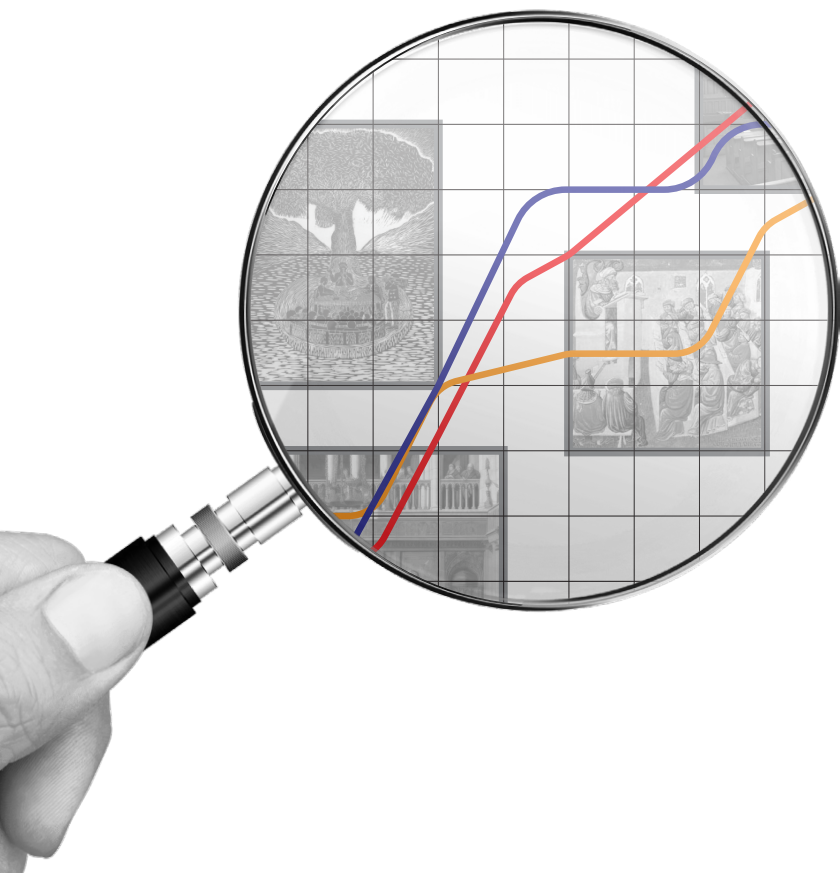
Over time, the relationships between hierarchy, authority, and the exercise of power have evolved significantly. Traditional systems relied on clear, rigid hierarchies where authority was centralized and power visibly asserted through spatial dominance and formal protocols. Today, these dynamics are becoming more fluid and distributed, emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and participation. Authority is still maintained but exercised with greater sensitivity to inclusivity and dialogue. This shift reflects broader societal changes, challenging old power structures and prompting new ways to understand and engage with authority in both physical spaces and social interactions.

HIERARCHY RELATIONS

AUTHORITY DYNAMICS

EXERCISE OF POWER





12TH - 18TH CENTURY I

OUTDOOR COURT - SEMI PUBLIC SPACES - ASSIZE COURTS

Power resided with the monarch.

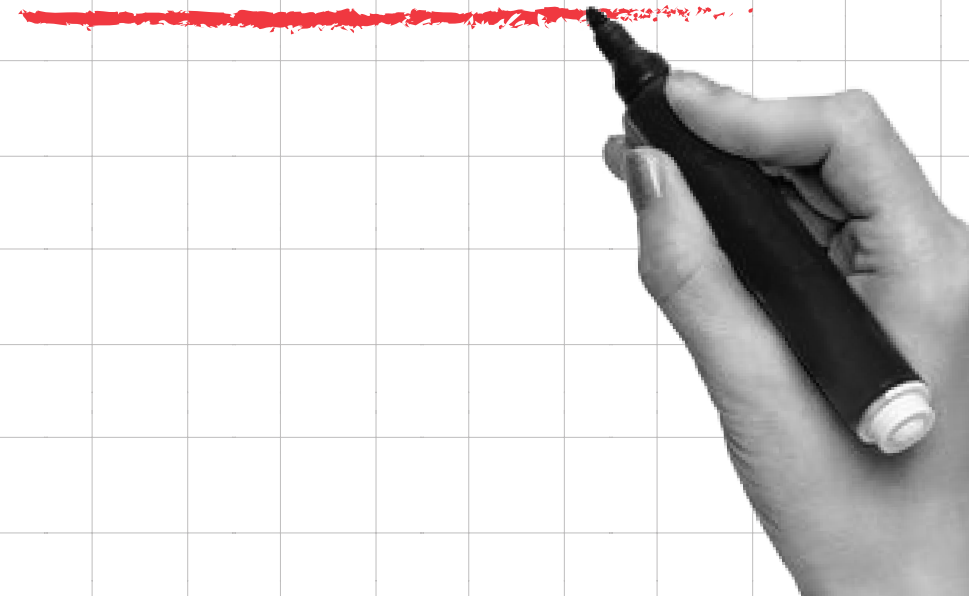
Justice was **dispensed openly** under trees and through travelling assize courts in **public locations**.

Sharing the **authority** and **hierarchy** of the law-making process / judging with the **common**.

Infusing of **semi-public spaces** such as town and guild halls, with **judicial importance**.

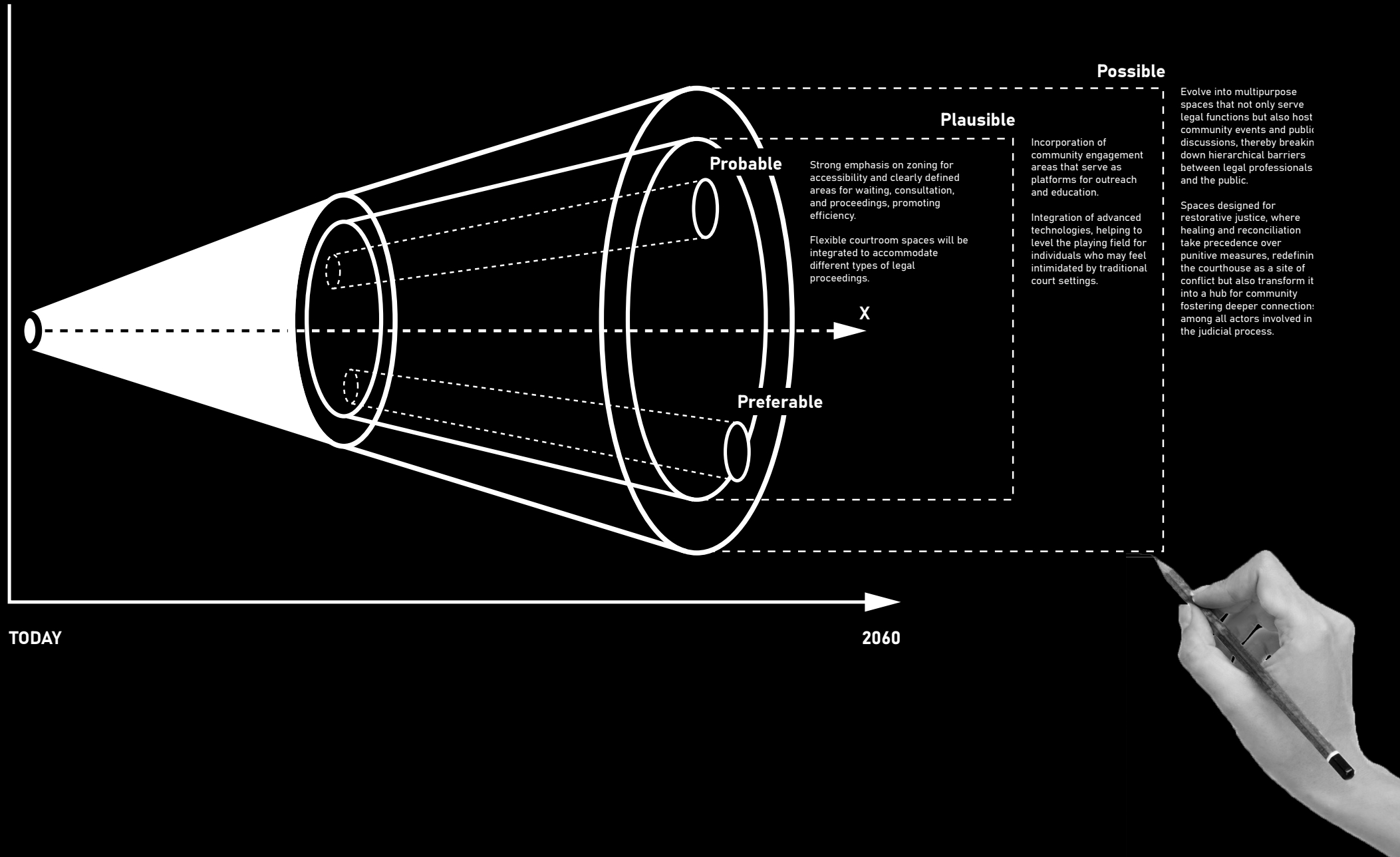
**TODAY, ONE TENDS TO THINK OF
THE COURTHOUSE AS A PUBLIC
BUILDING WHICH USES MASSING,
SHAPE AND STYLE TO CONVEY
A SENSE OF IMPORTANCE OR
FOREBODING.**

**THEREBY DEEMING THEM DIFFERENT
FROM SURROUNDING BUILDINGS
AND MAKING THEM CULTURALLY
SPECIFIC MARKERS IN THE CIVIC
LANDSCAPE.**



Presentation of Evidence

THE FUTURE



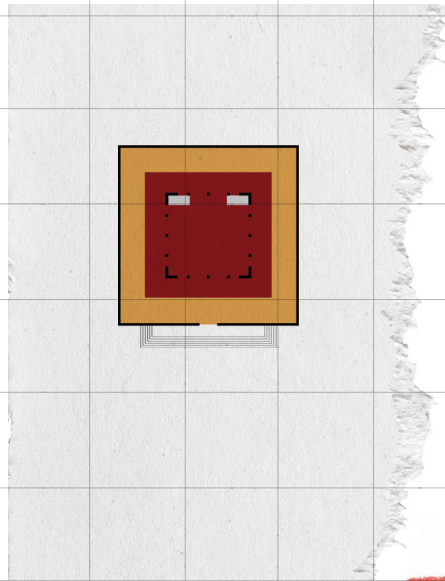


Tree of Justice

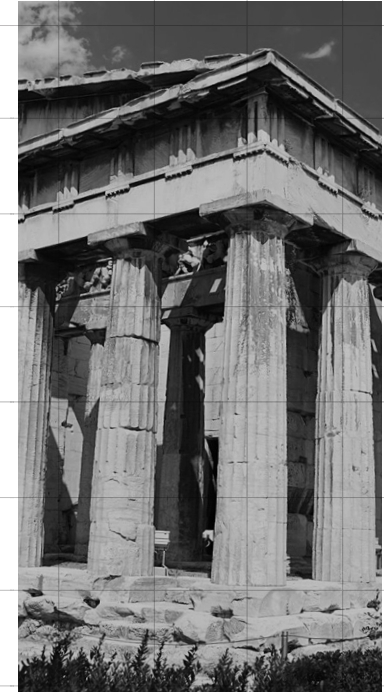
The Tree of Justice symbolizes the ancient tradition of delivering justice under the shade of a tree, where communities would gather to resolve disputes openly and fairly. This natural setting represented transparency, wisdom, and impartiality justice rooted in the shared space of the people rather than enclosed in distant halls. Over time, the image of the tree became a powerful metaphor for justice itself: grounded, enduring, and branching out to protect and support society. It reminds us that justice grows from community dialogue and fairness, nurtured in an open and accessible environment.

CASE STUDIES

ANCIENT GREECE



**HELIAIA | ANCIENT
ATHENS**
approx. 575,75 sqm

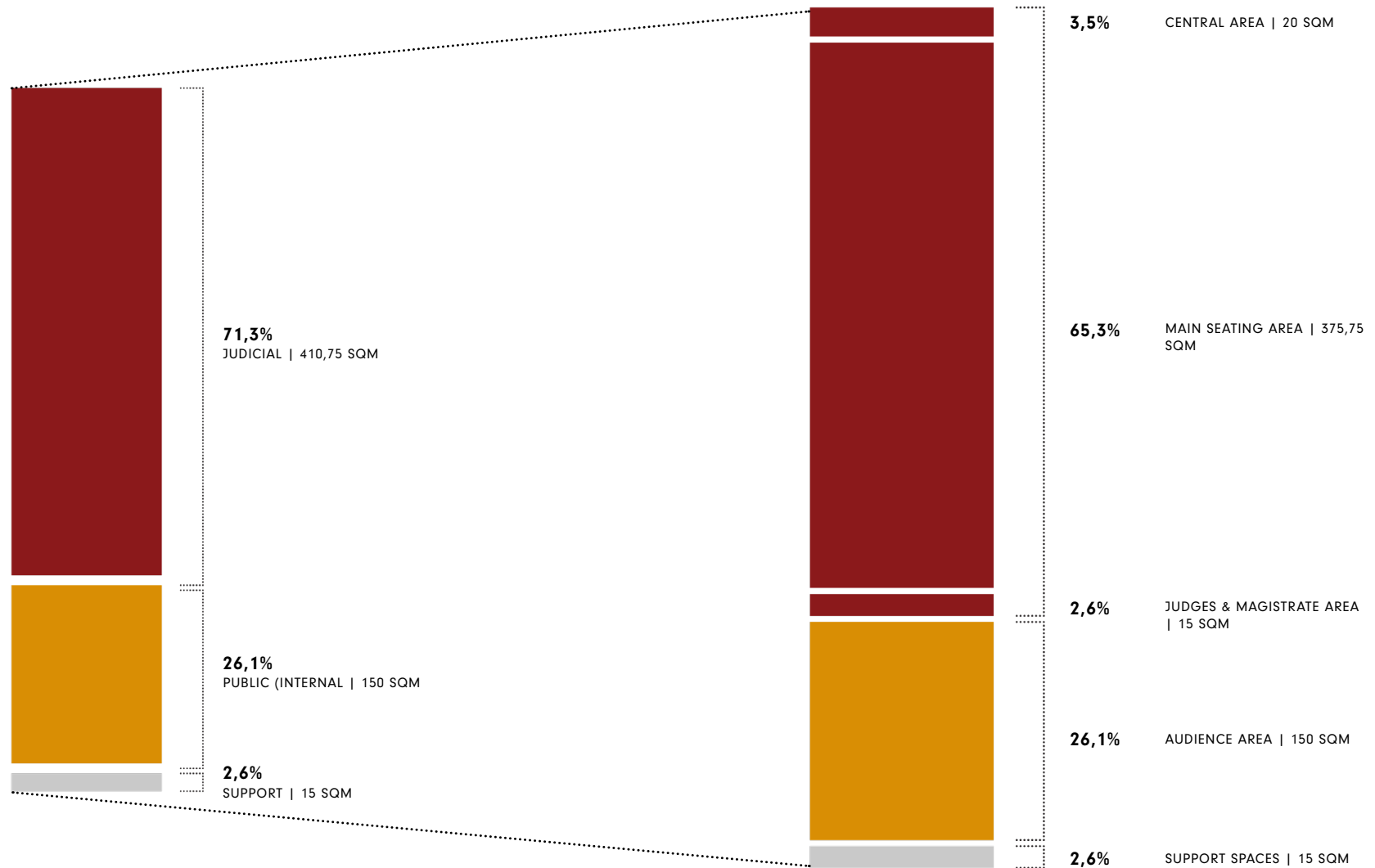


Heliaia | Ancient Athens

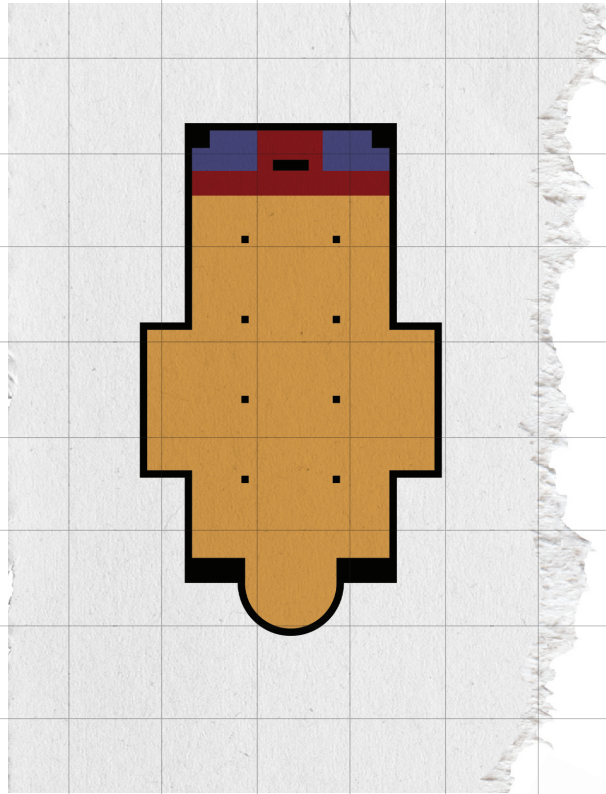
The Heliaia was the principal popular court in ancient Athens, embodying unique hierarchical and territorial dynamics. Unlike elite judicial bodies, it was composed of large juries drawn from the citizenry, diluting traditional top-down authority and distributing judicial power broadly. However, within this democratic structure, certain roles such as magistrates and officials still held defined authority, creating a layered hierarchy. Territorial divisions influenced jury selection and participation, linking justice to local communities and reinforcing the relationship between citizens and the polis. The Heliaia's design balanced communal involvement with structured governance, reflecting early experiments in participatory justice while managing the complexities of social hierarchy and territorial identity.

Case Studies

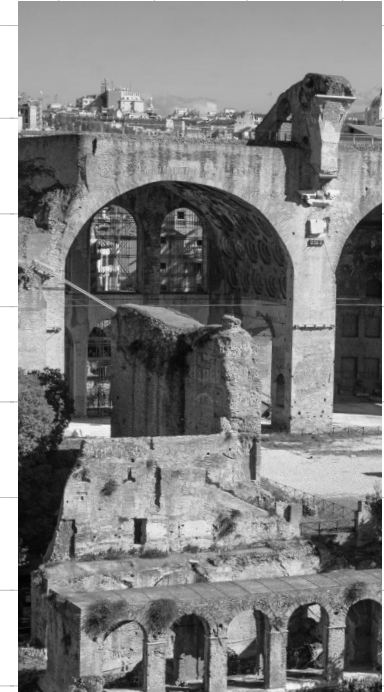
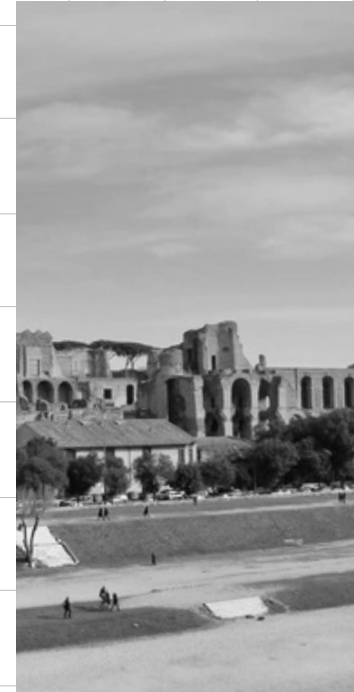
ANCIENT GREECE



ANCIENT ROME



**BASILICA | ANCIENT
ROME**
approx. 3.075 sqm

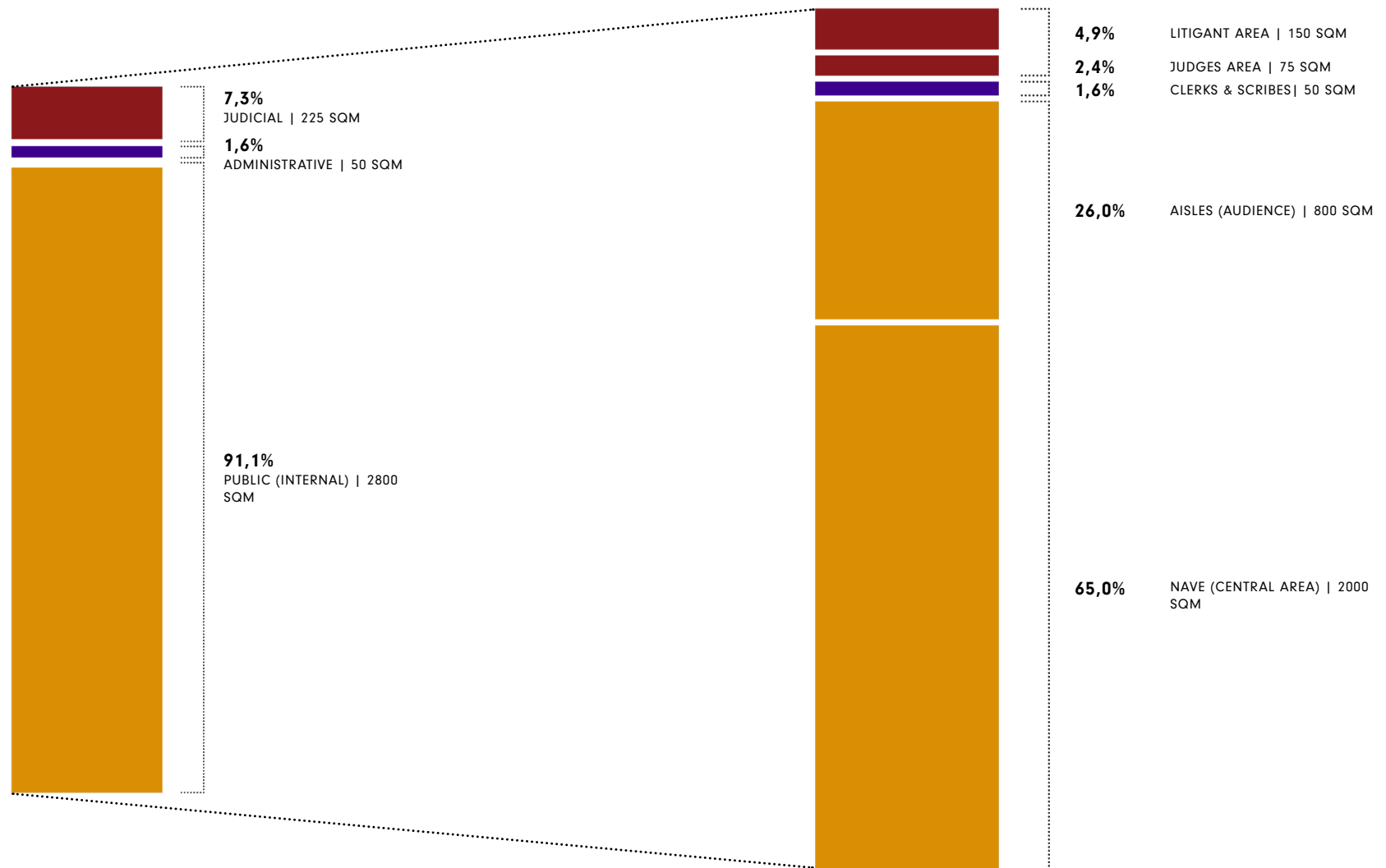


Basilica | Ancient Rome

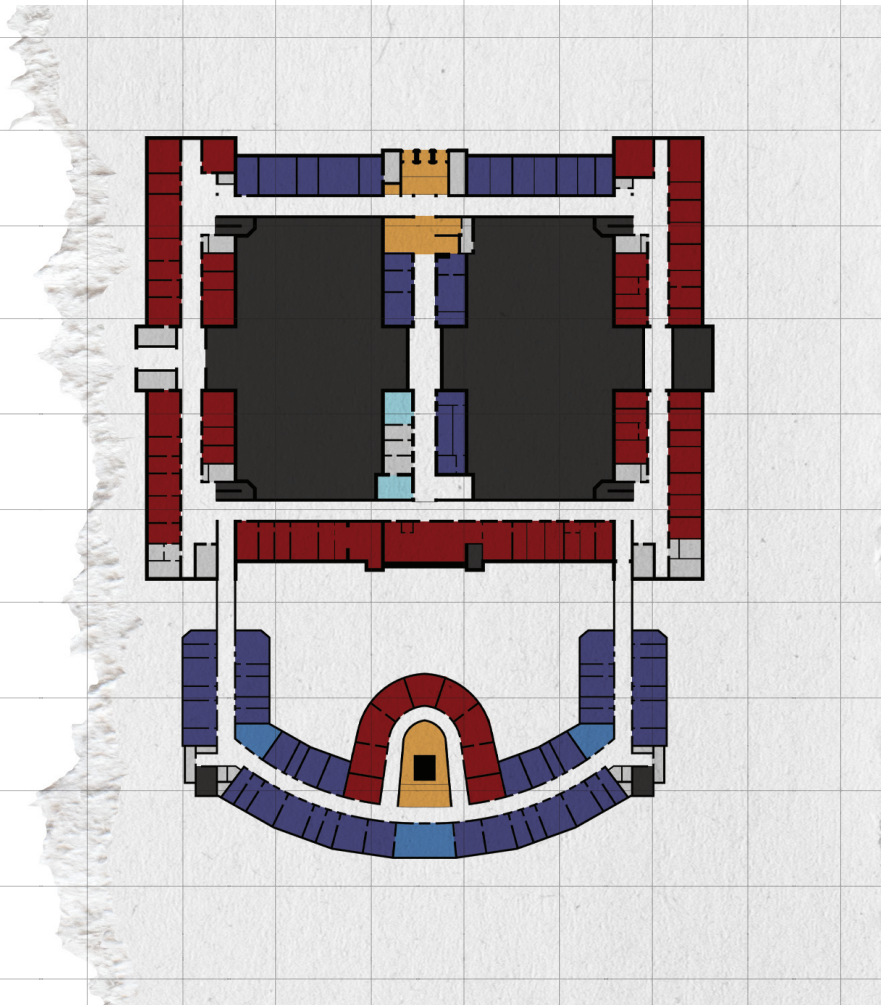
In ancient Rome, basilicas served as important public buildings where legal proceedings, commercial activities, and civic administration took place. Architecturally, they were designed to express hierarchy and authority; the elevated tribunal area highlighted the power of magistrates and judges, while the open hall allowed citizens and visitors to witness proceedings, reinforcing transparency and social order. Spatially, basilicas acted as territorial anchors within Roman forums, symbolizing the central role of law and governance in public life. Their grand scale and formal layout reinforced the authority of the state while facilitating interactions among diverse social groups within the urban fabric.

Case Studies

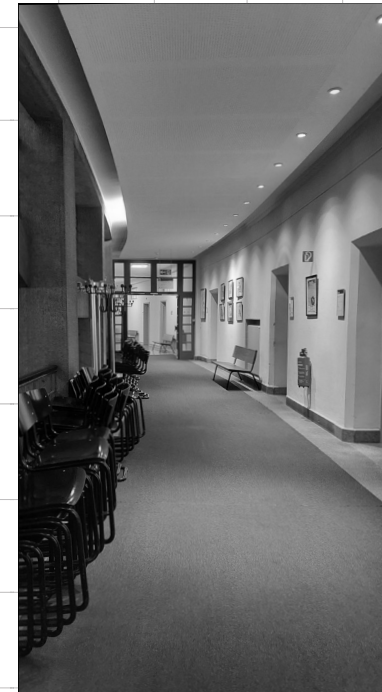
ANCIENT ROME



GERMANY



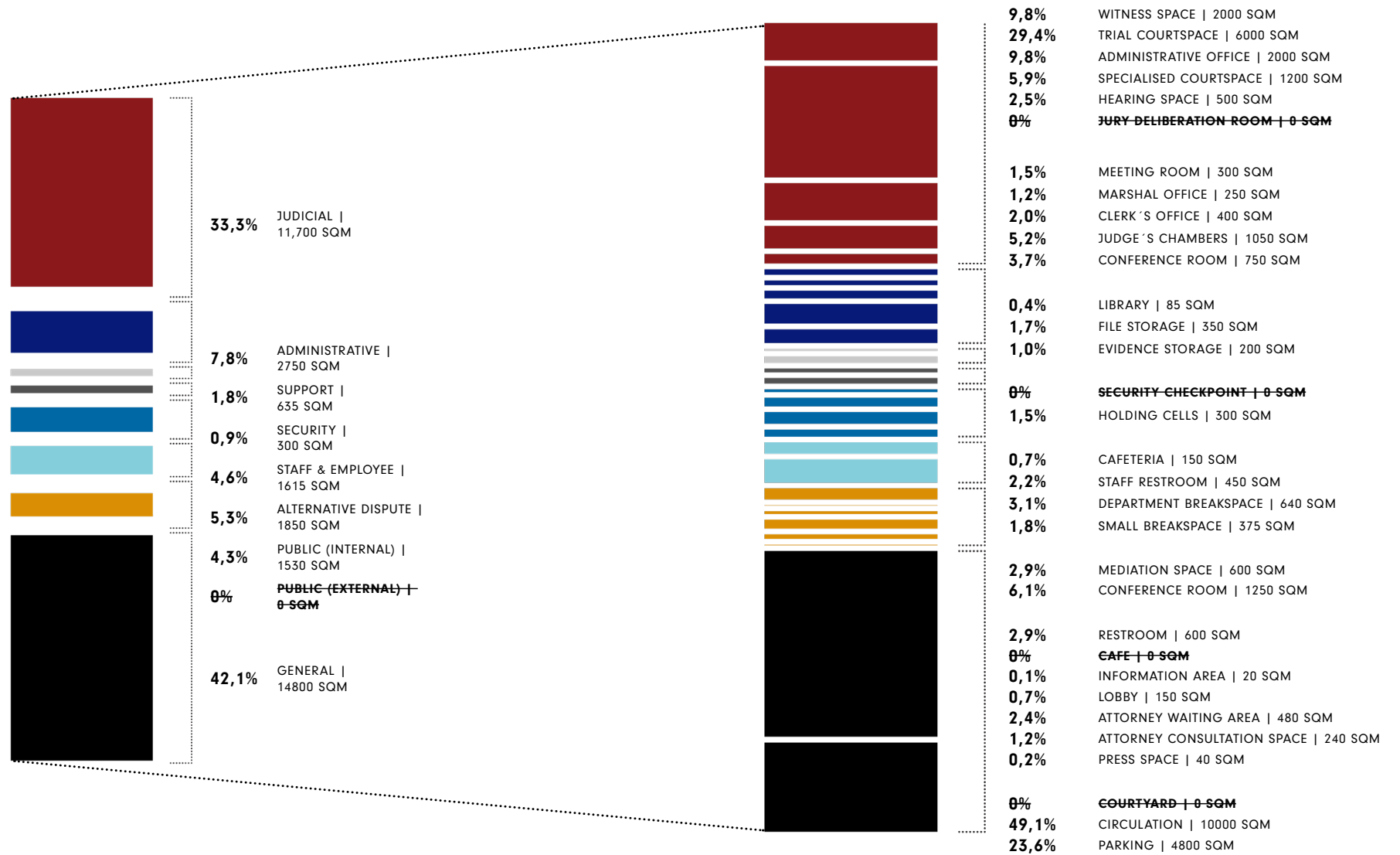
**LANDGERICHT I
HAMBURG**
approx. 35.180 sqm



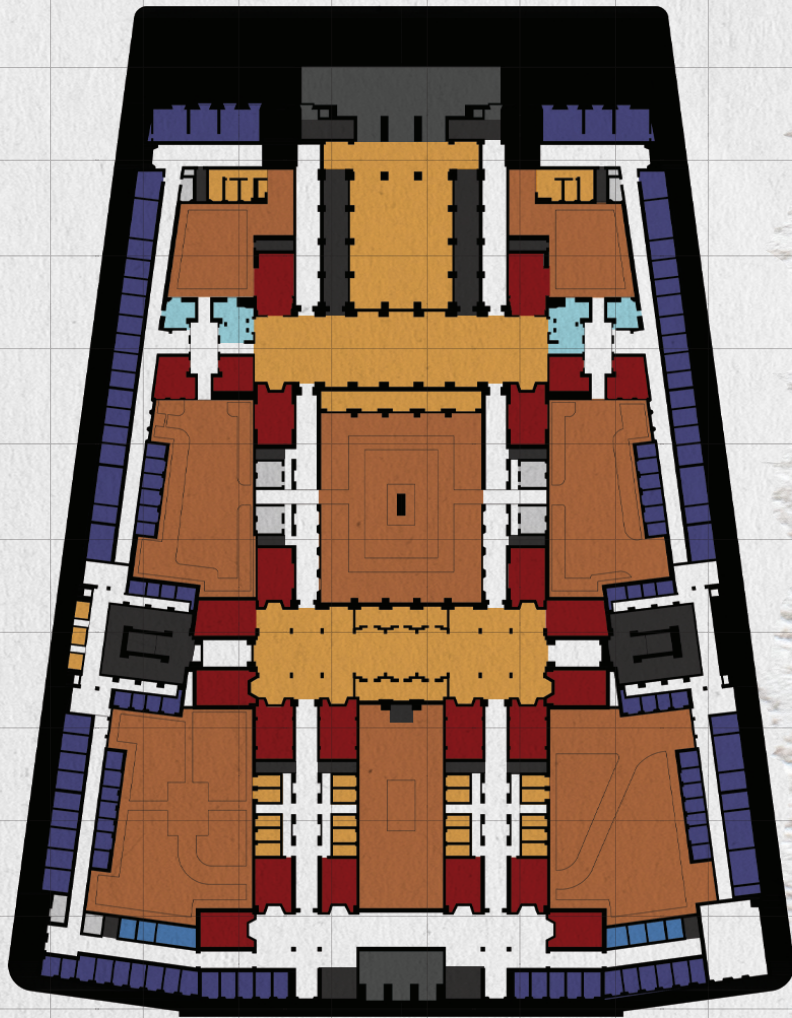
Landgericht Hamburg | Early 20th Century | 1912

The Landgericht Hamburg, serving as a major regional court, reflects the evolution of judicial architecture through its blend of historic and modern elements. The building's design balances authority and accessibility, using materials and spatial arrangements that convey transparency while maintaining the solemnity of the legal process. Its layout supports the complex functions of a contemporary court, with clear separations between public areas, judicial chambers, and secure zones. Positioned within Hamburg's urban context, the Landgericht underscores the court's role as a pillar of justice anchored in tradition yet responsive to the needs of a dynamic, modern society.

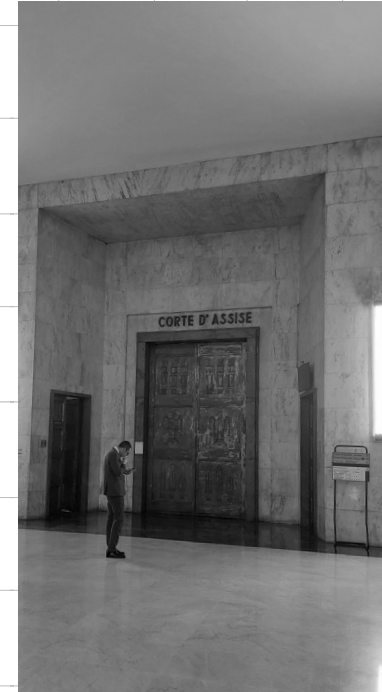
GERMANY



ITALY



**PALAZZO DI
GIUSTIZIA | MILAN**
approx. 90.600 sqm

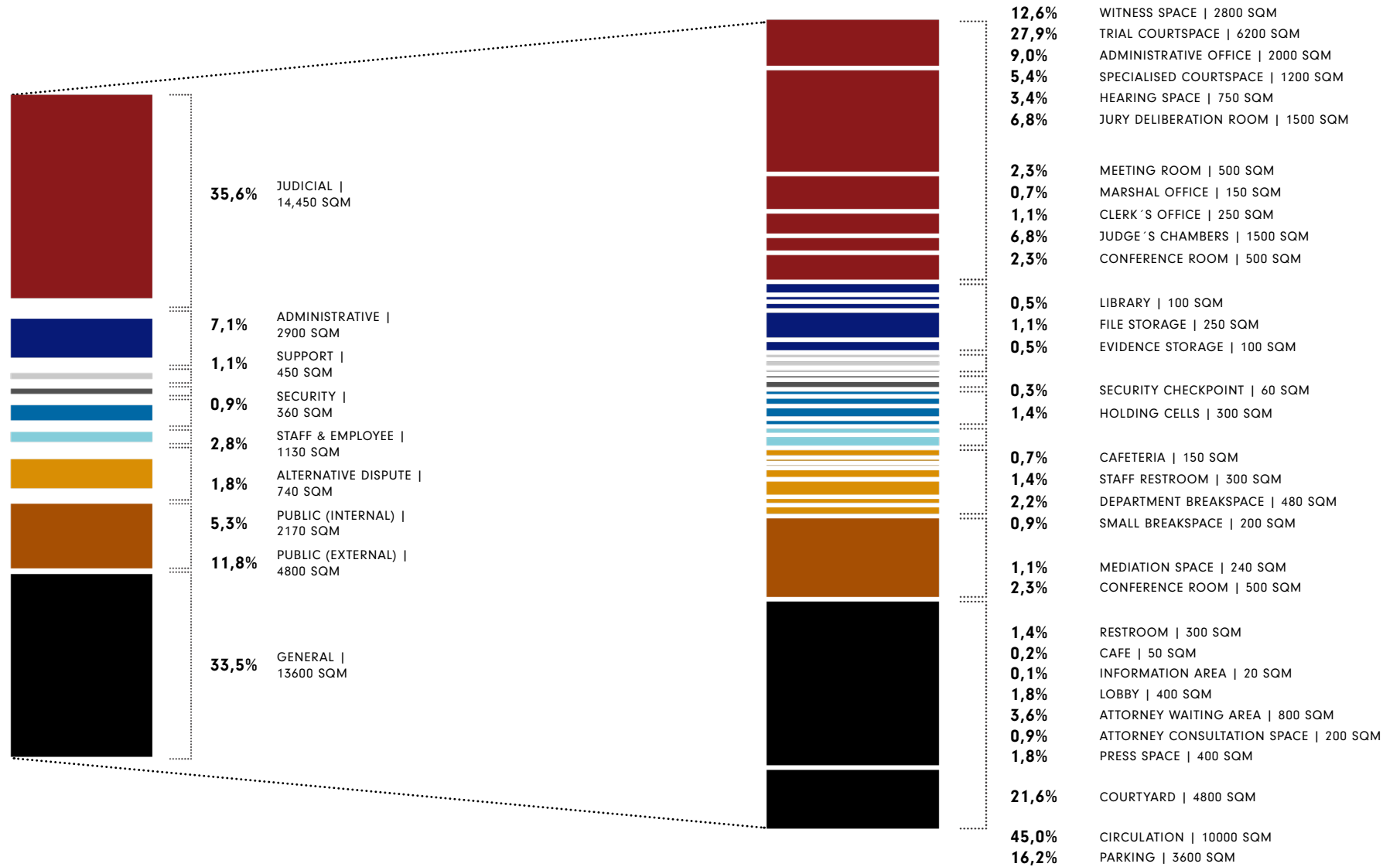


Palazzo Di Giustizia | 20th Century | 1940

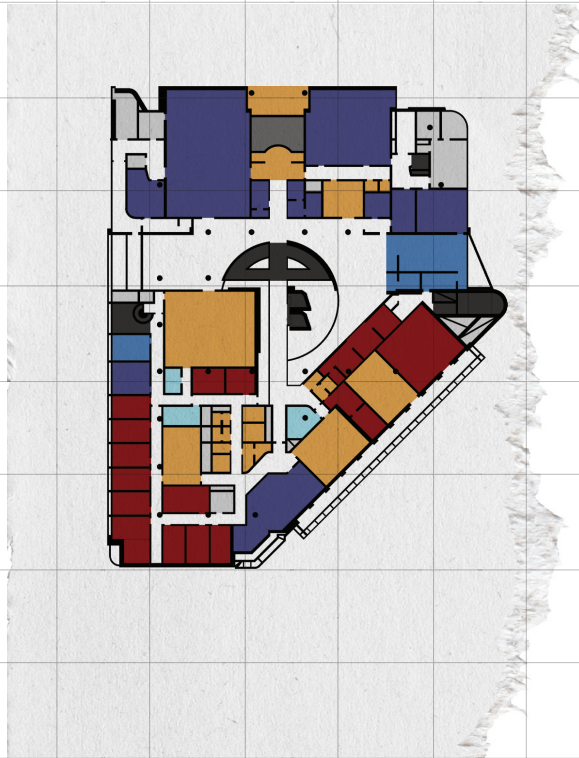
The Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan marks a significant shift from earlier courthouse designs, reflecting changing ideas about justice, authority, and public engagement. Unlike medieval or Renaissance courts that were often scattered within palaces or modest civic buildings, this grand structure embodies the 20th-century drive toward monumental, purpose-built institutions symbolizing the modern rule of law. Its imposing scale, heavy stone façades, and neoclassical details assert judicial power with clarity and formality, while internal layouts introduce more structured circulation and dedicated spaces for administration, trials, and public access. This evolution demonstrates a move from informal, fragmented justice to a centralized, hierarchical system both physically and symbolically mirroring Milan's transformation into a modern metropolis and the justice system's increasing complexity and professionalism.

Case Studies

ITALY



NORWAY



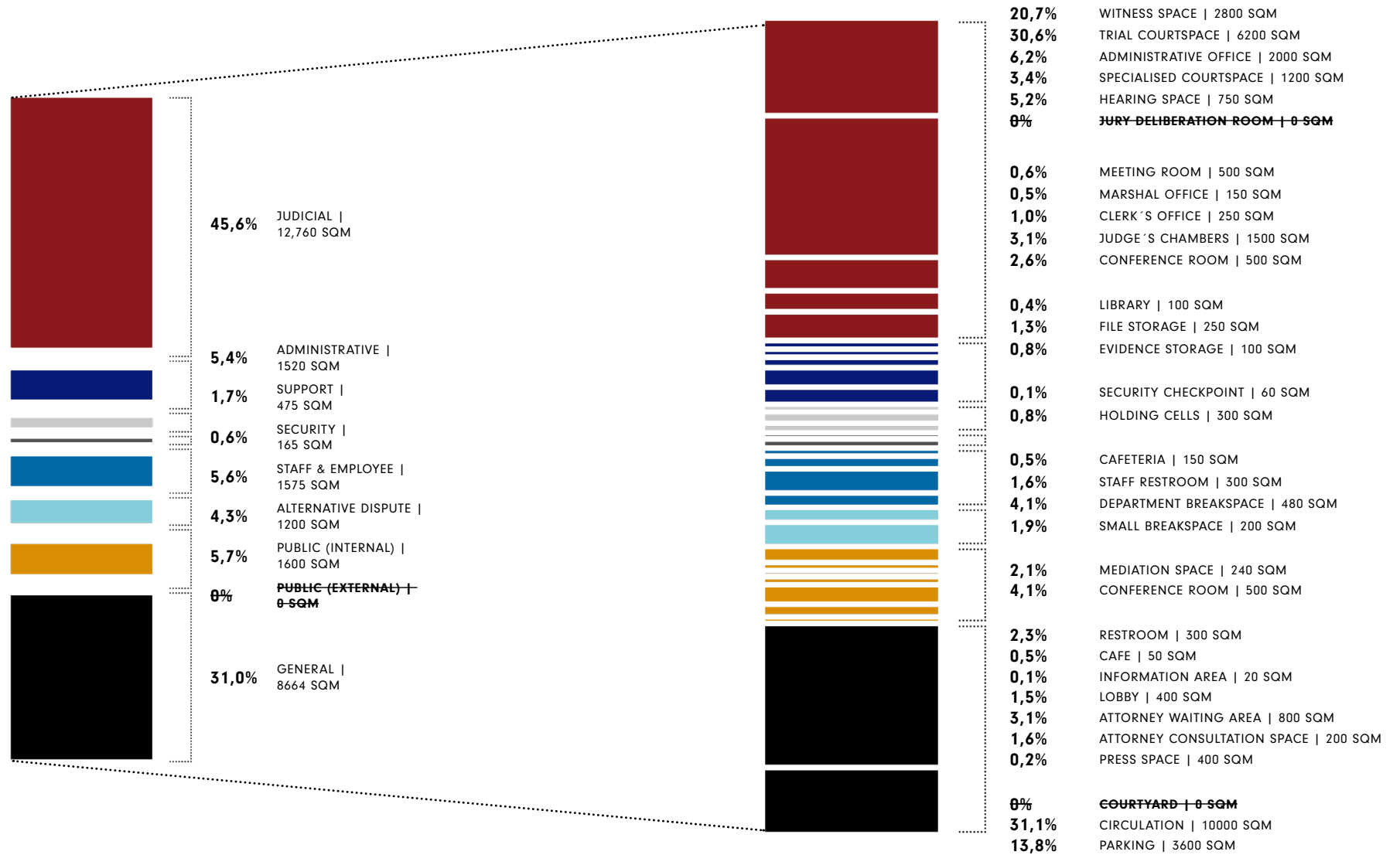
TINGHUS | OSLO
approx. 27.959 sqm



Tinghus Oslo | Early 20th Century | 1994

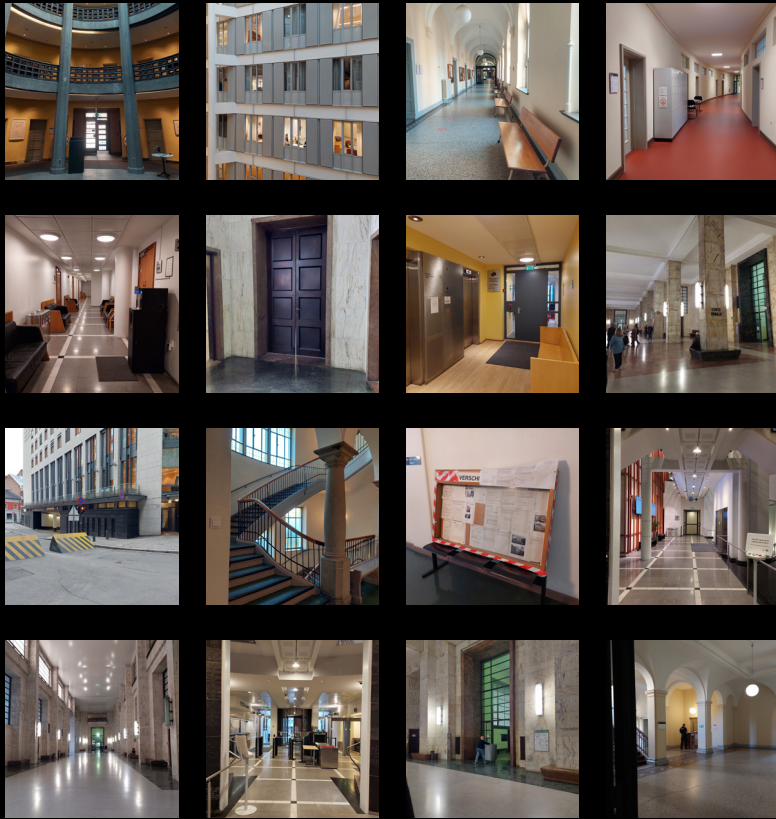
The Tingshuset in Oslo is a contemporary courthouse that embodies transparency, openness, and accessibility key principles in modern justice architecture. Its design emphasizes light-filled spaces and clear circulation paths, breaking away from traditional imposing and hierarchical courthouse forms. Situated prominently in the city, the Tingshuset fosters a sense of civic engagement, inviting the public into the legal process. The building's materiality and spatial organization reflect Norway's commitment to a justice system that is approachable and egalitarian, balancing authority with openness in both form and function.

NORWAY

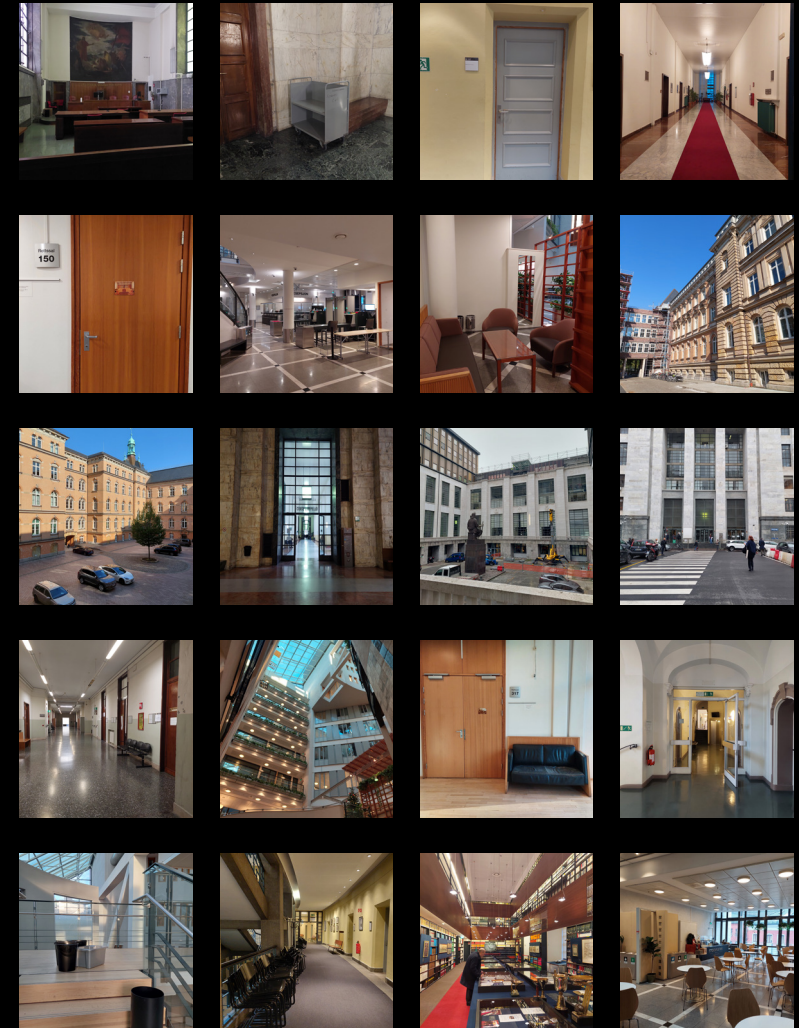


Case Studies

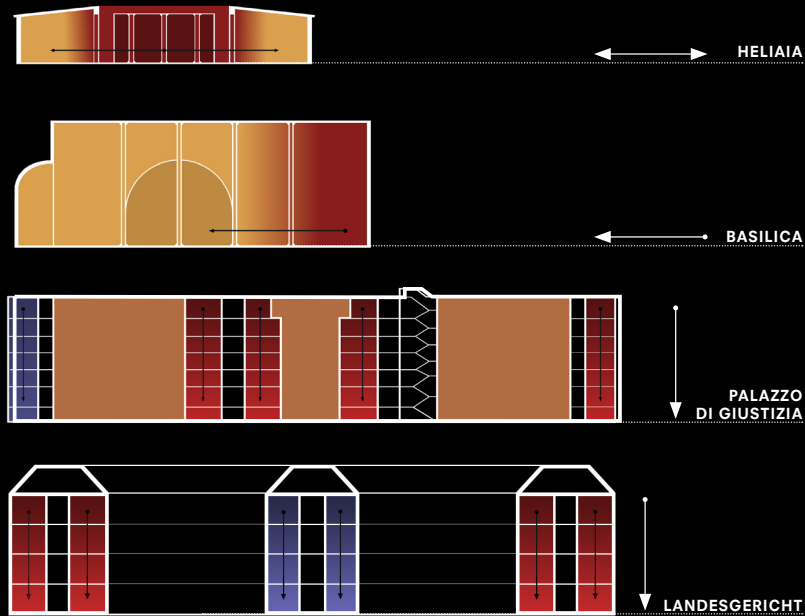
IMPRESSIONS



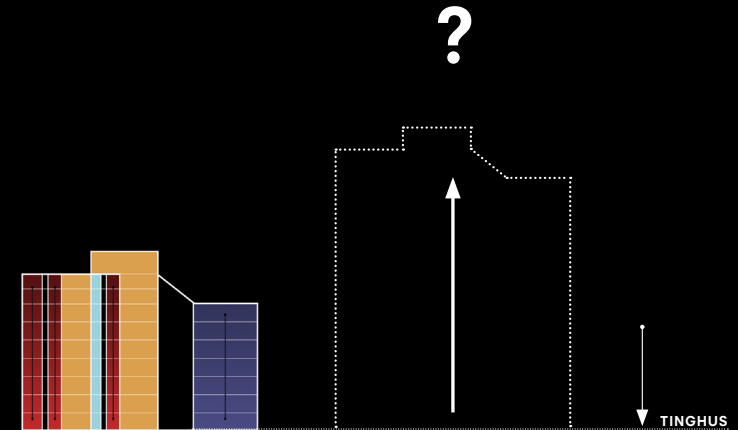
Despite their architectural significance, the Tinghuset in Oslo, Landgericht Hamburg, and Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan all reveal common challenges of underutilization and aging infrastructure. These buildings often struggle to meet the demands of modern justice systems, with outdated layouts and worn facilities limiting their functionality. Many spaces within these courthouses remain underused, reflecting rigid spatial hierarchies that no longer align with evolving legal practices. Physical deterioration from fading materials to inadequate technological integration further impacts their effectiveness, creating environments that feel both neglected and constraining. This disconnect between the symbolic importance of justice and the practical needs of its administration highlights the urgent need to rethink and revitalize courthouse design for the 21st century.



CONCLUSION



THE SHIFT FROM A HORIZONTALLY SPREAD DISTRIBUTION TO A VERTICAL, ONE-DIRECTIONAL STRUCTURE, WITH THOSE IN POWER POSITIONED AT THE TOP AND OTHER ACTORS PLACED BELOW, SYMBOLISES AUTHORITY AND HIERARCHY



COURTHOUSES HAVE STARTED TO BECOME INCREASINGLY CONDENSED, ENCAPSULATING POWER, AUTHORITY, AND TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS, THEREBY LIMITING SPATIAL FREEDOM WITHIN.

WITH A GROWING RISK THAT THEY WILL EVOLVE INTO MORE VERTICAL, MONUMENTAL STRUCTURES, SYMBOLISING AUTHORITY AND SEGREGATION THAT EXTENDS BEYOND THE COURTHOUSE ITSELF.

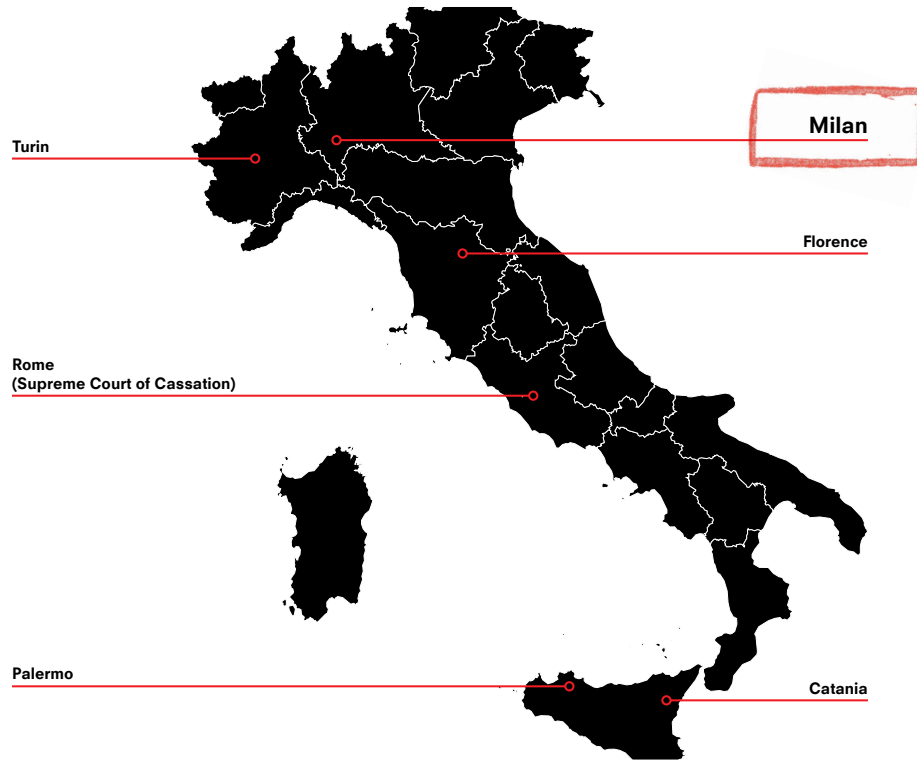


PRIMARY CASE

Westminster Hall

Westminster Hall, one of the oldest surviving parts of the Palace of Westminster, holds profound historical significance as a site where justice and governance intertwined. Originally serving as a royal and judicial hall, it was the venue for major trials and parliamentary gatherings, symbolizing the fusion of law and power in medieval England. Its vast, open space and grand timber roof reflect a period when justice was public and theatrical, reinforcing authority through spectacle and ceremony. Over time, as legal systems evolved toward more formalized and institutionalized courts, Westminster Hall's role shifted, yet it remains a powerful emblem of justice's historical roots and the continual transformation of legal authority.

REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE



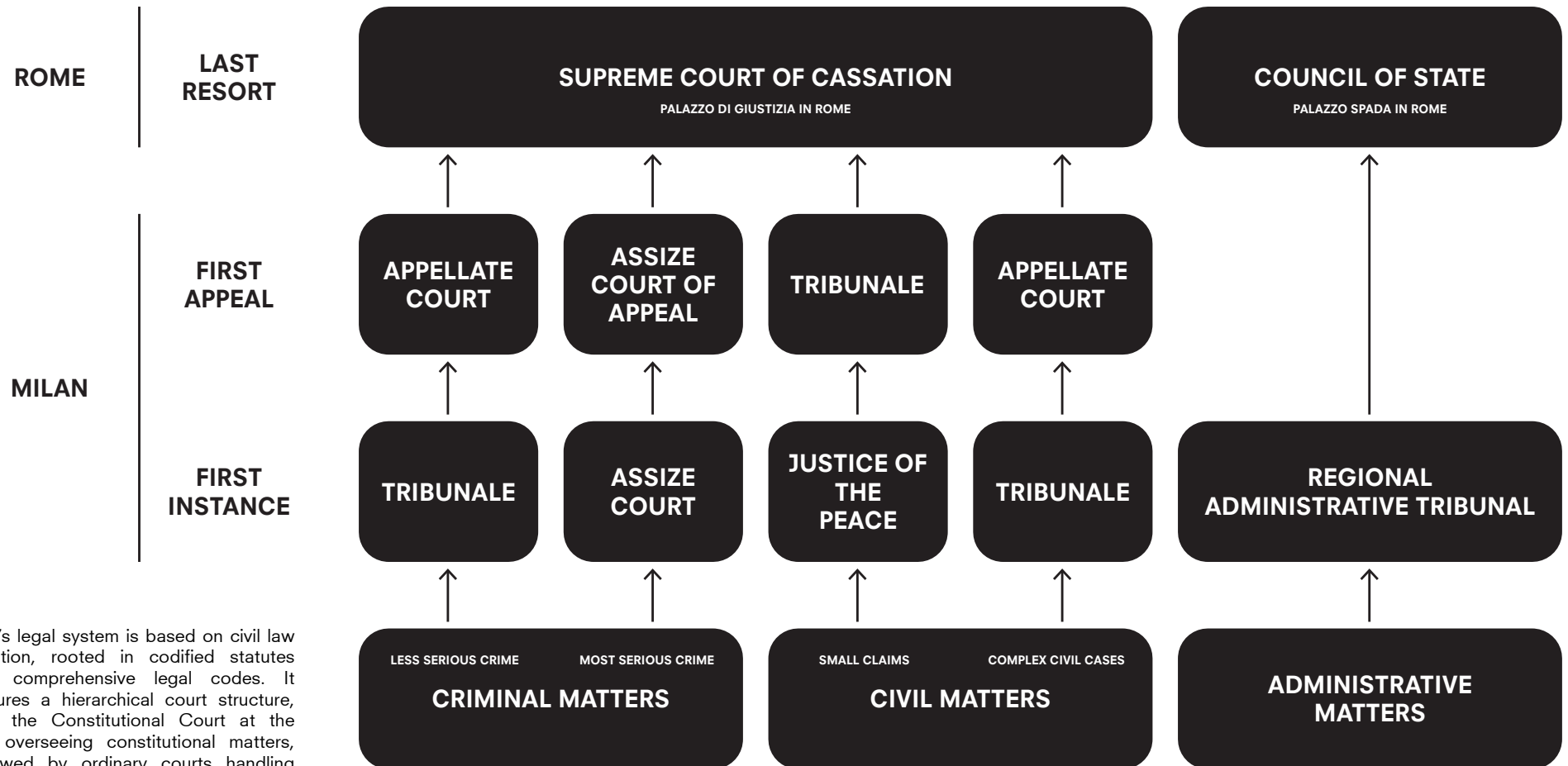
The Italian Republic was established after a popular referendum in **1946** that ended the monarchy, and the Constitution came into force in **1948**. The Italian Constitution separates the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, although there is ongoing interaction between them. Amendments to the Constitution require a supermajority in Parliament.

The Constitutional Court oversees the constitutionality of laws. The President of the Republic is the head of state and represents national unity. Legislative power is vested in a bicameral Parliament, consisting of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The executive power is entrusted with the Government, which includes the Council of Ministers and the President of Council, who coordinates the executive functions.

The judiciary is independent, and judges are appointed through exams. As far as ordinary courts exercising civil jurisdiction are concerned, the courts of first instance are the justices of the peace (who are honorary judges) and the **Tribunali**: the respective jurisdiction is determined according to the amount of money at stake or according to the subject matter. Intermediate appeals are brought to the **appellate courts** and a final appeal (on points of law only) can be lodged with the Italian Supreme Court, the **Suprema Corte di cassazione**.

Justices of the Peace and Tribunali handle some criminal cases, but there are specialized courts for specific types of crimes. **Juvenile Courts** and their appeal divisions deal with crimes committed by minors. **Assize Courts** handle the most serious crimes and consist of six lay judges and two professional judges. **Assize Courts of Appeal** review appeals from the Assize Courts.

Legal representation is mandatory in civil and criminal cases, with limited options for those who cannot afford a lawyer. Paralegals are not officially recognized in Italy; law offices may have legal assistants or secretaries who handle administrative tasks but do not represent clients in court.

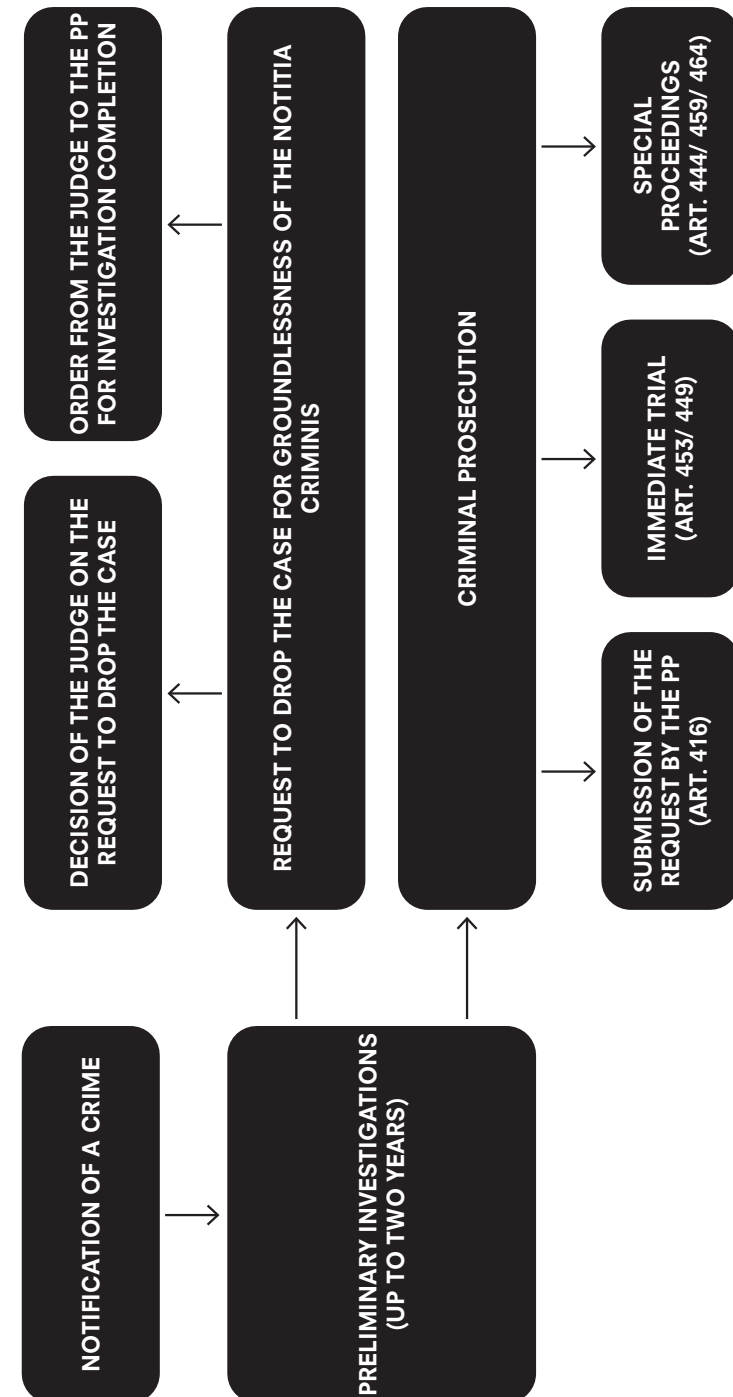


GLOBAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE (2024)

Italy's legal system is based on civil law tradition, rooted in codified statutes and comprehensive legal codes. It features a hierarchical court structure, with the Constitutional Court at the top overseeing constitutional matters, followed by ordinary courts handling civil and criminal cases. Italy emphasizes written laws and judicial interpretation, blending tradition with modern reforms to address evolving societal needs.

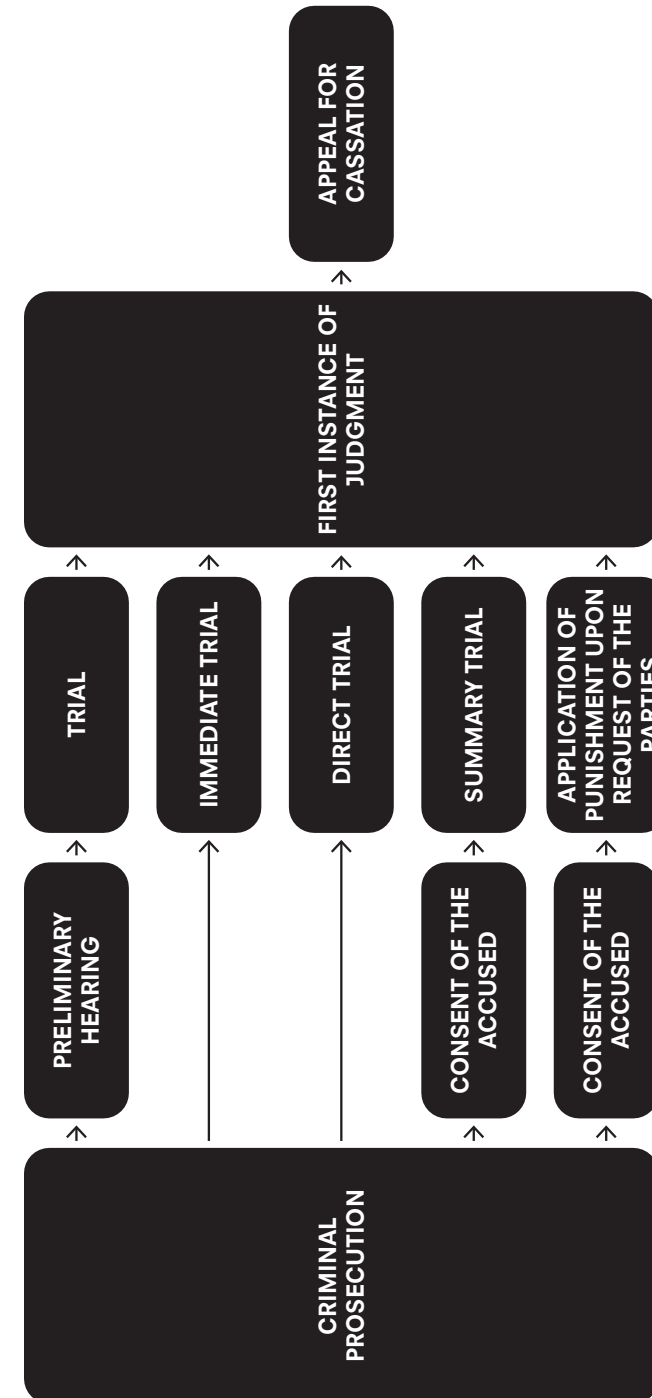
PROCESS AND PROCEEDINGS IN ITALY: CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION PROCESS

Italian criminal proceedings are governed by a code approved in **1988**, rooted in an adversarial system and revised multiple times since its inception. The criminal process begins when the authorities are notified of a potential crime, the **Notification of a Crime**. Then, during the **Preliminary Investigations**, the **Public Prosecutor (PP)** leads the investigation while the police collect necessary evidence. **Defense lawyers** also have investigative powers, allowing them to gather evidence in favour of the defendant. This investigation can last up to 18 months or two years for serious crimes. Arrest can be made in cases of flagrant offenses, where a suspect can be detained for up to **96 hours**. The **Preliminary Investigations Judge (PIJ)** plays a crucial role at this stage. The PIJ acts as an impartial authority, safeguarding the suspects rights and ensuring that the investigation is conducted lawfully. The PIJ has the authority to approve or deny key investigative measures, such as arrests, searches, and the seizure of evidence. If the PP believes there is insufficient evidence to proceed, they may submit a request to dismiss the case; **Request to Drop the case for Groundlessness**. The judge reviews the PP's request and decides whether the case should be closed or further investigated. If the judge deems the investigation incomplete, they may order the PP to continue the investigation. If sufficient evidence is available, the PP decides to initiate **Criminal Prosecution**. This can lead up to '**Submission of the Request by the PP**', '**Immediate Trial**', and '**Special Proceedings**'.



PROCESS AND PROCEEDINGS IN ITALY: CRIMINAL PROSECUTION PROCEEDINGS

Criminal Prosecution in Italy is mandatory. Once the Public Prosecutor is notified of a crime, they must initiate the prosecution. Once a request for prosecution is filed, the judge in the **Preliminary Hearing** assesses whether there is sufficient ground for the trial. If there is enough evidence from the initial investigation, the preliminary hearing may be bypassed. The PP can request an **Immediate Trial** or **Direct Trial**, skipping the preliminary phase. The **Trial** is public and conducted under the principles of orality and unity, meaning the evidence is presented in the presence of both parties. In certain cases, such as minor crimes or when the accused cooperates, simplified procedures may be followed. In exchange for the reduced sentences, the accused may waive certain defense rights, this is the **Consent of the Accused** phase. The more simplified procedures are the **Summary Trial** and **Application of Punishment upon Request of the Parties**, which both require the accused's consent. After the trial or simplified procedures, the **First Instance Judgment** (Sentenza di Primo Grado) is issued. This judgment can be appealed by either party. Finally, the convicted person, the PP, or the offended party can file an appeal against the judgment. The case may then proceed to the **Supreme Court of Cassation**, which reviews cases only on points of law.



LOCATION



The Palazzo di Giustizia is prominently located in Milan's Porta Vittoria district, a vibrant and historically significant neighbourhood that bridges the city's historic core with its modern expansions. This area is characterized by a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings, reflecting Milan's evolving urban identity. The courthouse stands along key thoroughfares, making it highly accessible while symbolically anchoring the neighbourhood with its imposing presence. Surrounding buildings feature a variety of materials and styles, from classical stone façades to more contemporary structures, creating a rich urban texture that complements the courthouse's monumental stature. Porta Vittoria's blend of daily urban life and civic function underscores the Palazzo di Giustizia's role not only as a centre of legal authority but also as an integral part of the city's social and cultural fabric.

Primary Case

LOCATION



TORRE VELASCA

UNIVERSITY
OF MILAN

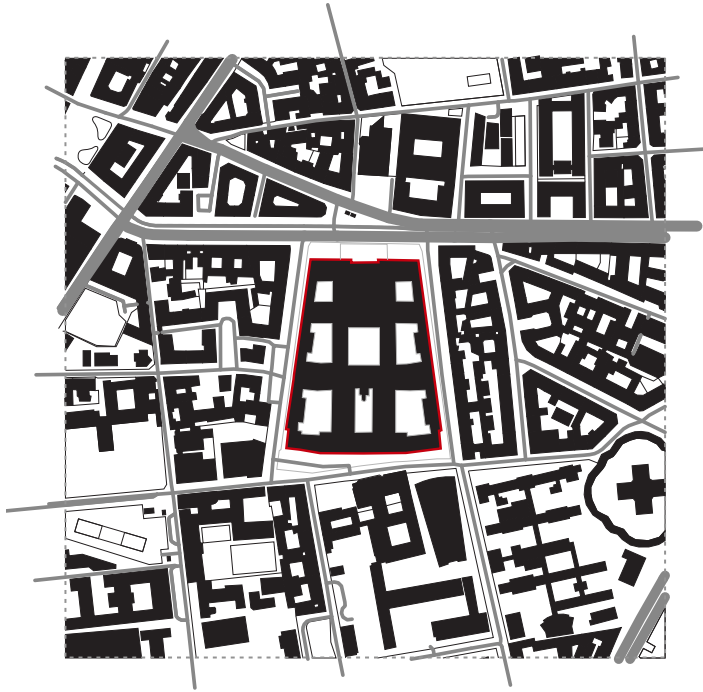
CITYLIFE DISTRICT

PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA

ROTONDA DELLA BESANA

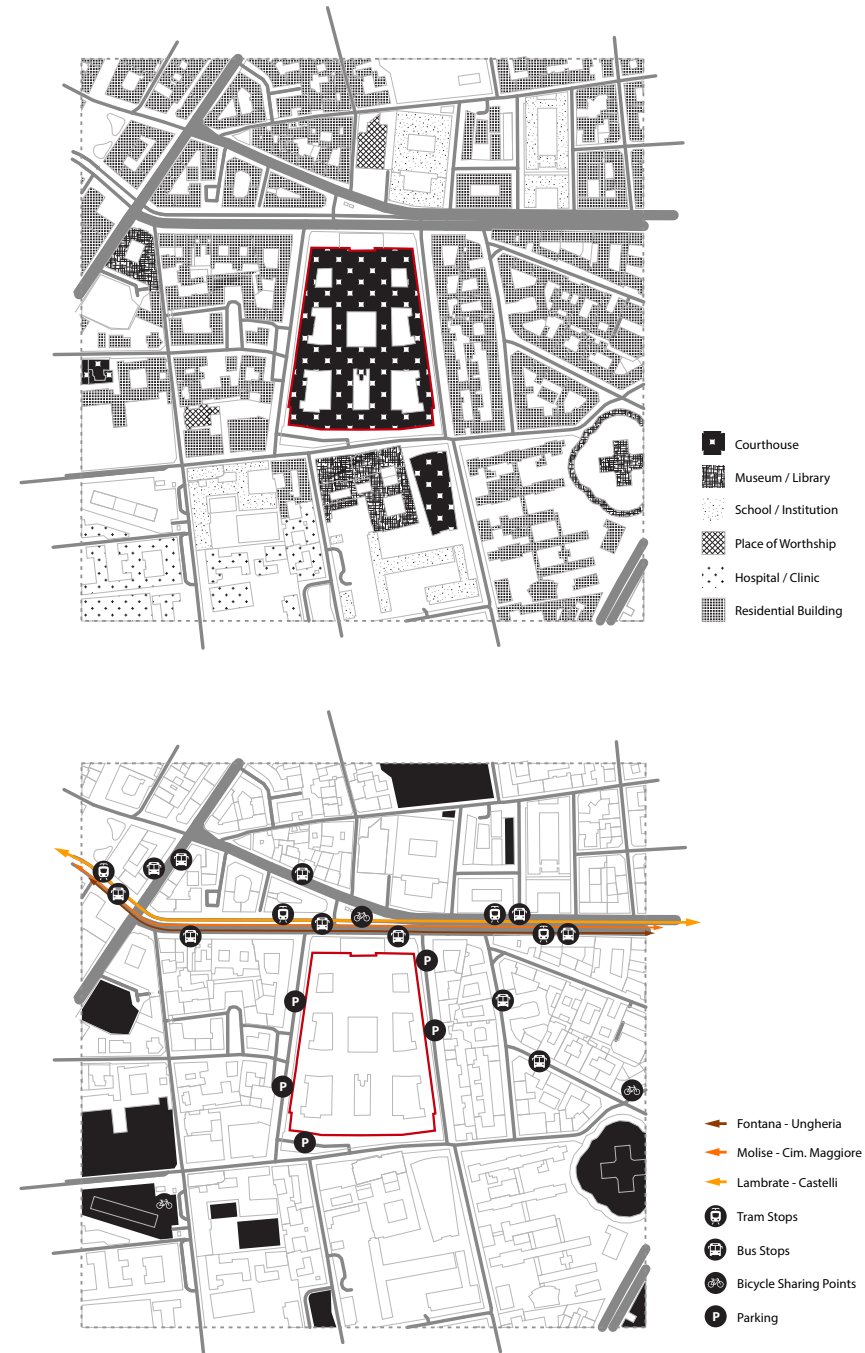
Primary Case

SITE ANALYSIS



The Palazzo di Giustizia is located in Milan's Porta Vittoria district, a vibrant area with a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings. Recent urban developments have added multifaceted structures, including modern residential complexes like the Porta Vittoria development, which features flats, a hotel, office spaces, and retail areas. The area also benefits from ongoing urban regeneration, with a new 40,000 m² public park enhancing green spaces and community facilities.

The courthouse is well-connected through excellent public transport options, including the nearby M3 metro, trams, buses, and pedestrian-friendly zones, making it easily accessible to both the public and legal professionals. Its strategic location within a bustling, well-connected district underscores its role as a central hub in Milan's judicial system, efficiently serving both legal functions and the public.



VIEWS



VIEW 1

VIEW 2

VIEW 3



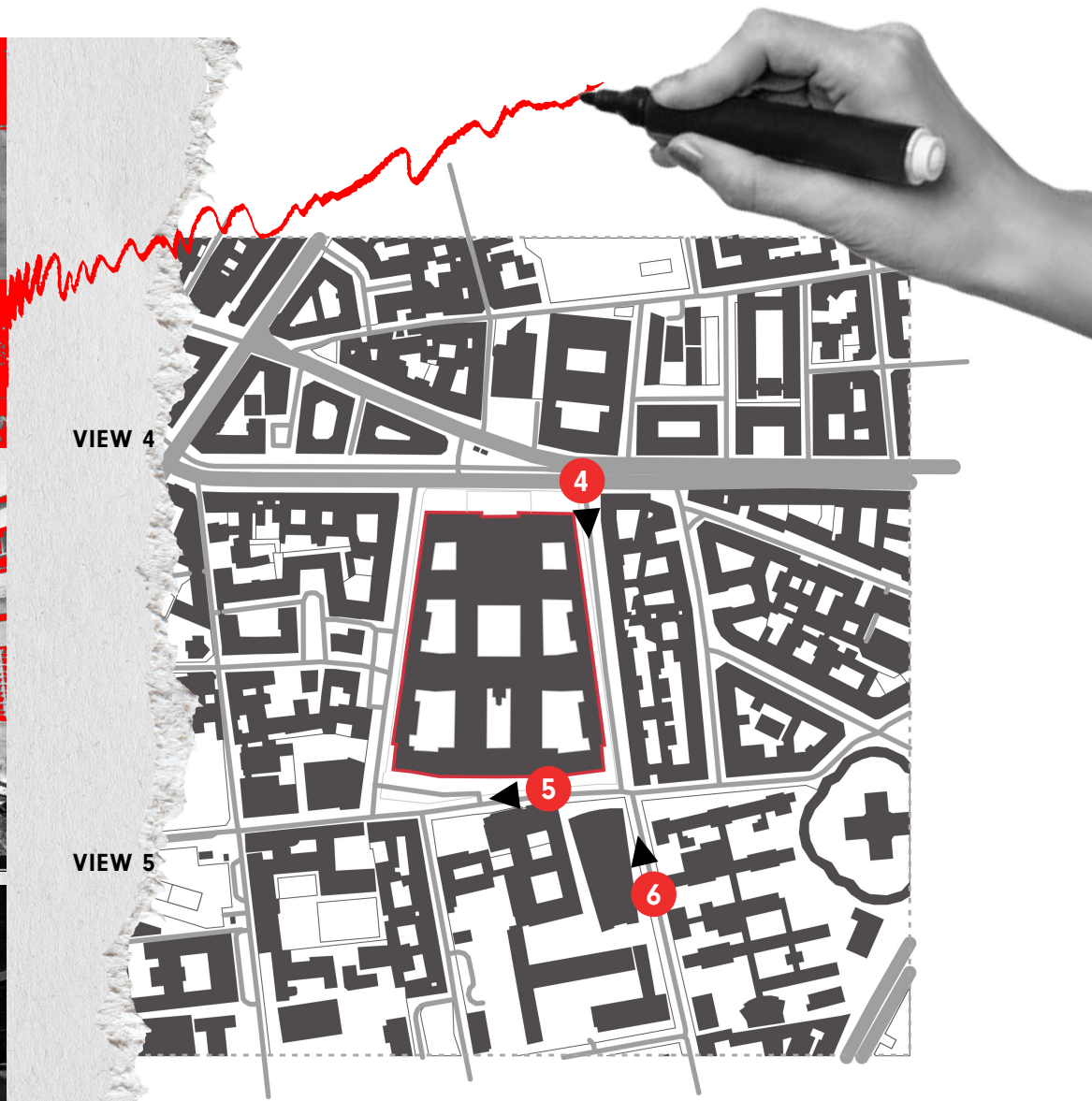
VIEWS



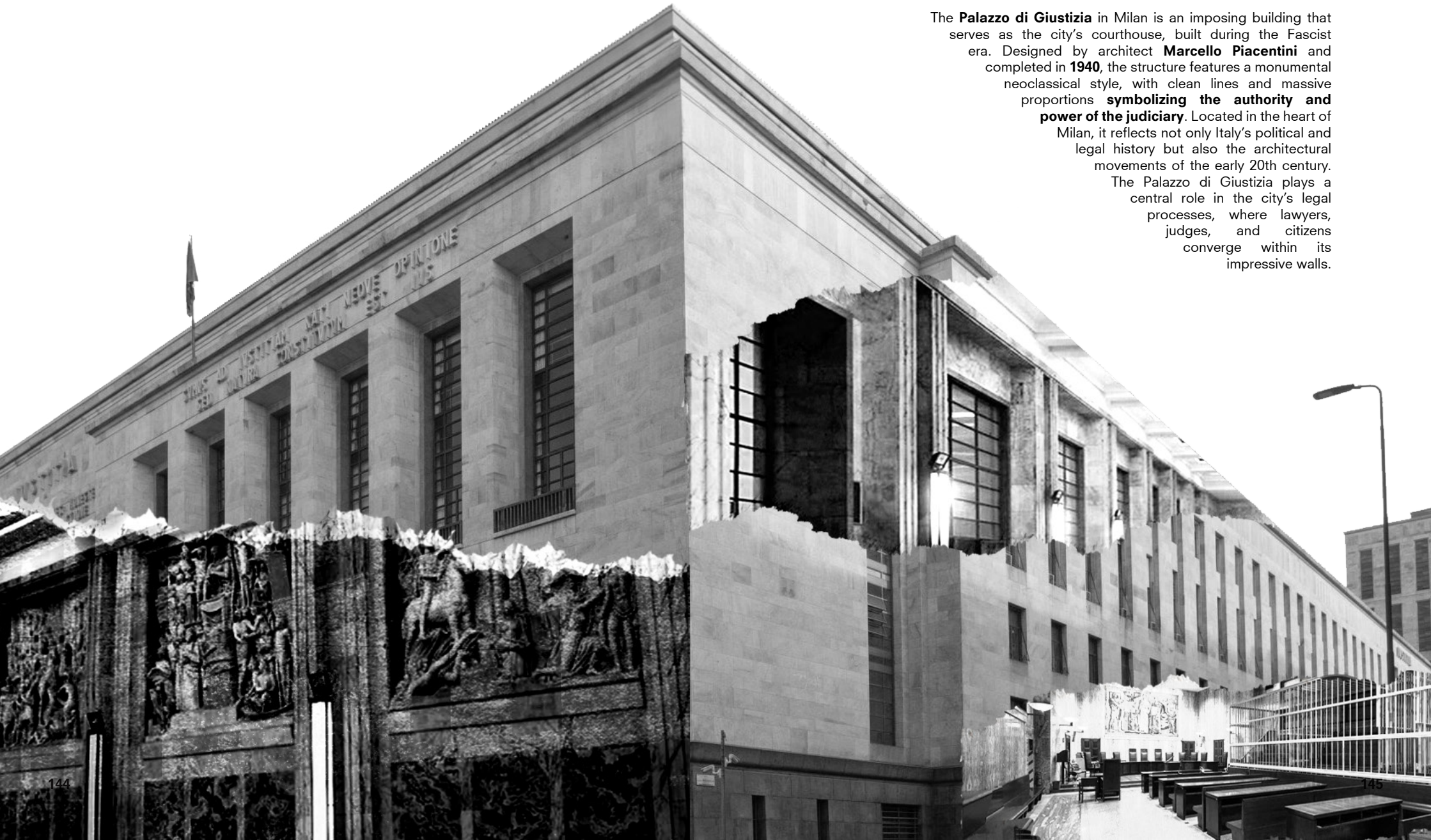
VIEW 4

VIEW 5

VIEW 6



PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA



The **Palazzo di Giustizia** in Milan is an imposing building that serves as the city's courthouse, built during the Fascist era. Designed by architect **Marcello Piacentini** and completed in **1940**, the structure features a monumental neoclassical style, with clean lines and massive proportions **symbolizing the authority and power of the judiciary**. Located in the heart of Milan, it reflects not only Italy's political and legal history but also the architectural movements of the early 20th century. The Palazzo di Giustizia plays a central role in the city's legal processes, where lawyers, judges, and citizens converge within its impressive walls.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Rome, 1888-1910

Italian Renaissance Revival Style. Its grand facade with intricate carvings, large arches and a stately presence. The building combines classical elements with modern functionality, reflecting the authority of the Italian judicial system.

PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA



Palermo, 1938-1957

Constructions started in the fascist period. The building is an example of Rationalist architecture from the fascist era.

PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA



Florence, 2012

The building features a modernist design, showcasing innovative and functional approaches to legal spaces. Its contemporary architecture stands in contrast to Florence's historic buildings.

PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA



1900

FUTURE



PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA

Milan, 1932-1940

Built in the fascist-era architecture, the building showcases grand imposing structures with minimal decoration. The building features strong symmetry, large stone facades, and monumental spaces, reflecting power and authority.



TRIBUNALE DI TORINO

Turin, 1990-2000

The building uses piedmontese brickwork, linking it to the city's traditional architecture with large stained glass windows to maximize natural light, showcasing a modernist approach that focuses on practical use of space and efficient layout.



PALAZZO DI GIUSTIZIA

Future?

The future of courthouses may involve integrating all functions into a single building. It will emphasize more transparency, public accessibility and a harmonious relationship with the surroundings.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Milan, 1932-1940



Catania, 1937-1953



Palermo, 1938-1957



COMPARISON

Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan

Architectural style;

- Built between 1932-1940 by Marcello Piacentini
- Sober, clean lines and massive volumes
- Constructed during the Fascist period

Location

- Major administrative and judicial hub for northern Italy

Interior and Design

- The design focuses on functionality rather than decoration
- Simple interiors with focus on separation of different user groups to ensure smooth circulation and privacy

Judicial Function

- Lower and mid-level court cases



Palazzo di Giustizia in Rome

Architectural style;

- Built between 1888-1910 by Guglielmo Calderini
- Numerous ornamental details including statues & columns.
- Reflects an eclectic style with Neobaroque influence.

Location

- Rome's role as the political and judicial capital of Italy

Interior and Design

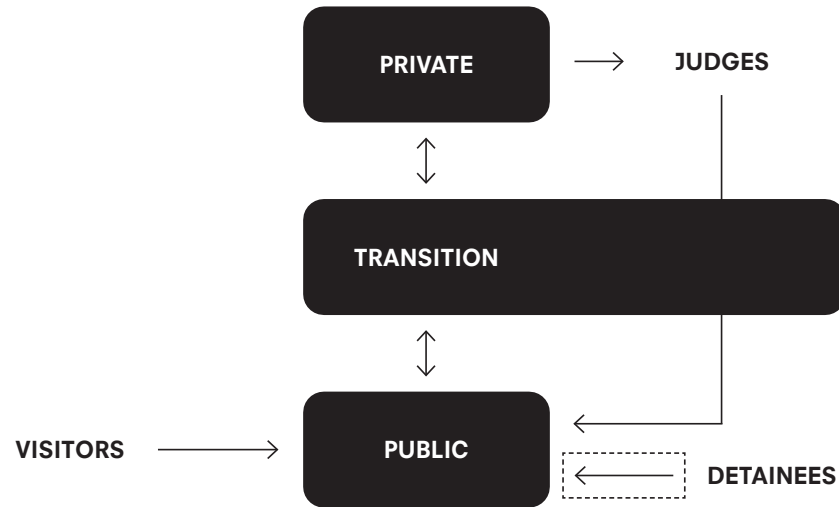
- Grand and opulent, with monumental staircases, vaulted ceilings, and richly detailed frescoes and mosaics.
- Scale and ornamentation much more elaborate

Judicial Function

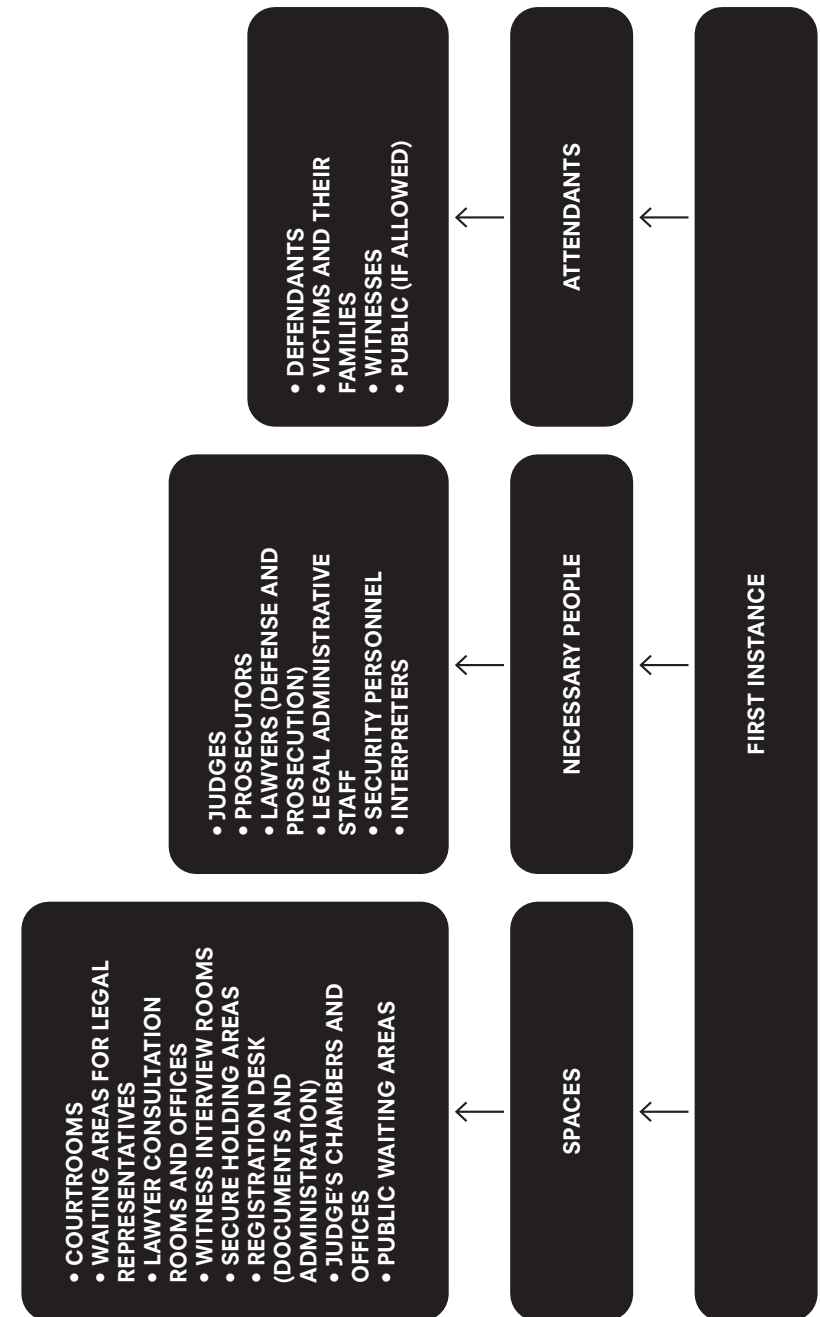
- Corte Suprema di Cassazione; highest court in Italy



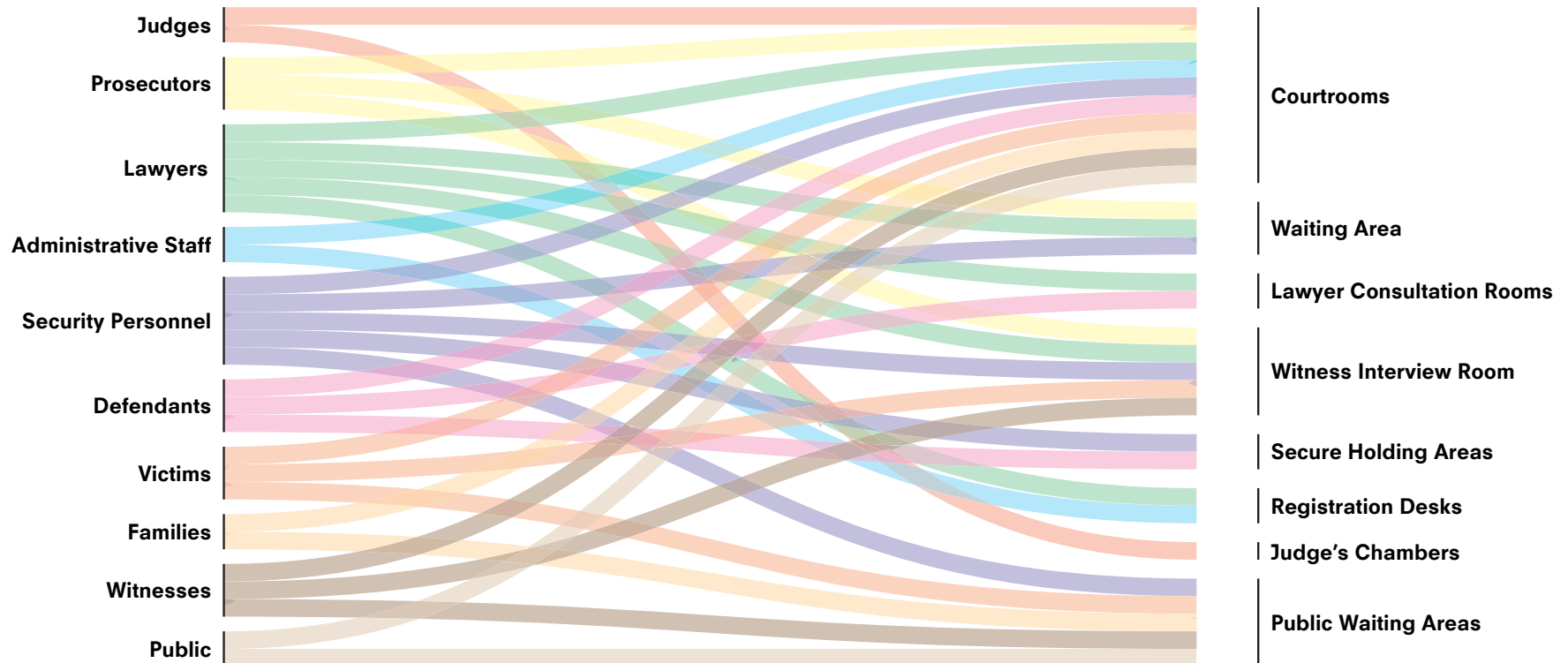
FUNCTIONS & LAYOUTS | FIRST INSTANCE



Courts of first instance are the foundational layer of the judicial system, responsible for hearing and deciding cases for the first time both civil and criminal. Their primary function is to establish facts, apply the law, and deliver judgments based on evidence and witness testimony. The courts of the first instance often include administrative offices, consultation rooms, holding cells (in criminal cases), and waiting areas each supporting the logistical flow and security needs of the proceedings. These spaces must balance openness with control, ensuring both public access and the safe, fair conduct of justice. As the entry point to formal legal resolution, courts of first instance serve a vital role, and their architecture must support clarity, neutrality, and trust in the legal process.

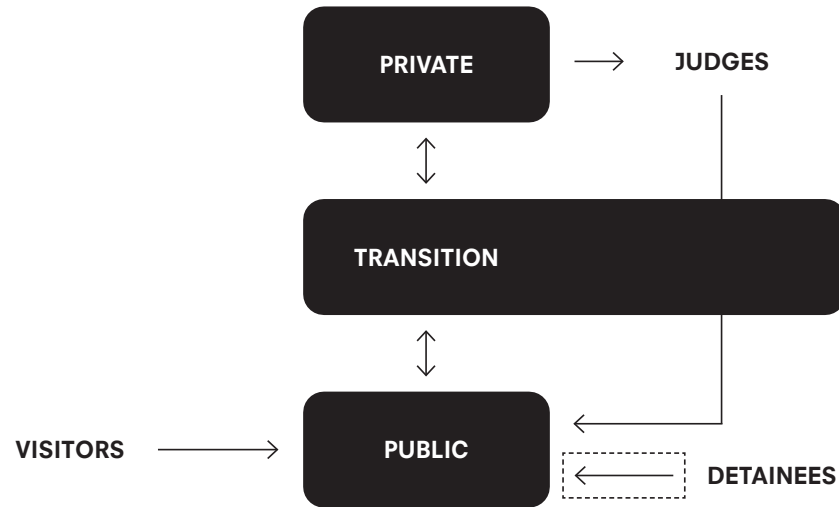


Primary Case
FLOWS | FIRST INSTANCE

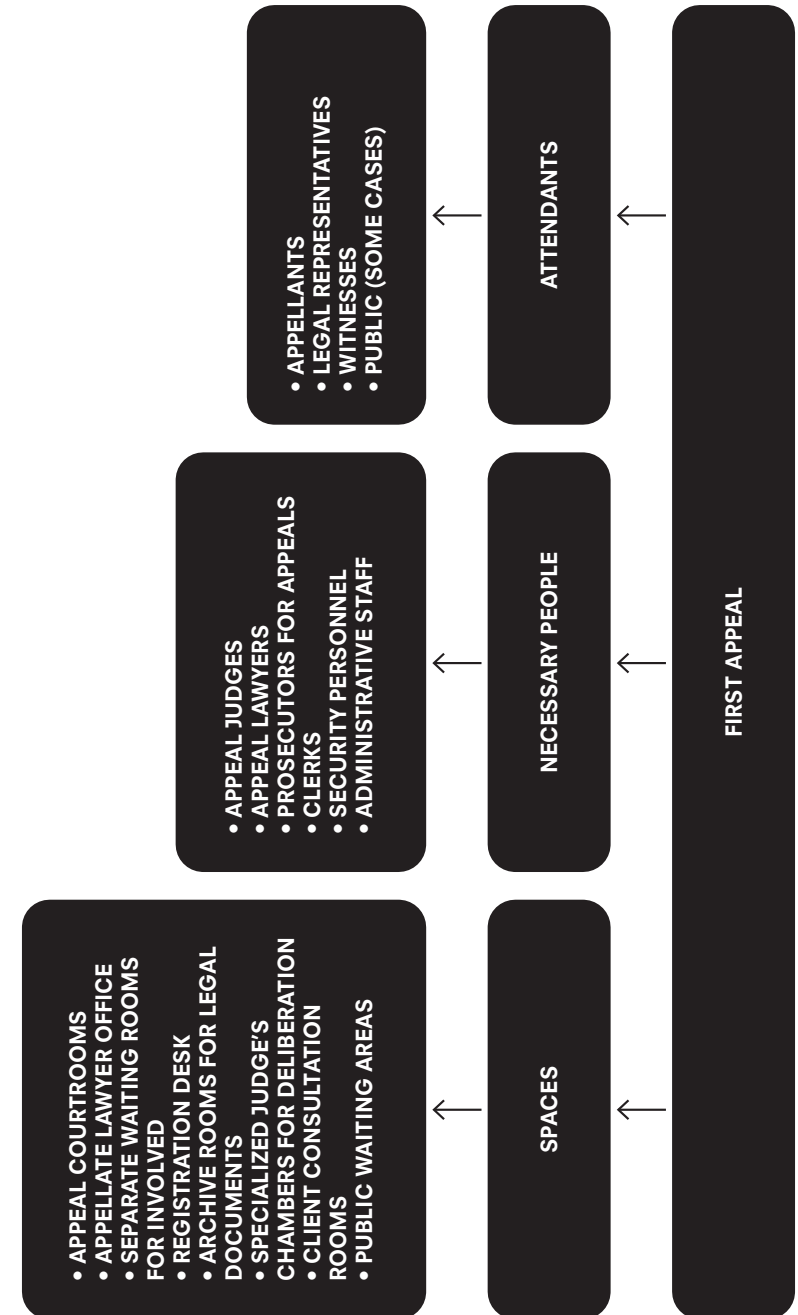


Courts of first instance are carefully organized to manage multiple, distinct flows through the building. These include the circulation of the public, legal professionals, court staff, judges, defendants, and occasionally the press or jury. Each group follows a separate route to ensure security, confidentiality, and procedural clarity. Judges and staff typically access the courtroom from private corridors or secured zones, maintaining neutrality and authority. Defendants, particularly in criminal cases, may be brought in from holding cells via controlled passages to prevent public contact. Plaintiffs, lawyers, and witnesses enter through designated public routes, often passing through shared waiting areas and security checks. These flows converge in the courtroom.

FUNCTIONS & LAYOUTS | FIRST APPEAL

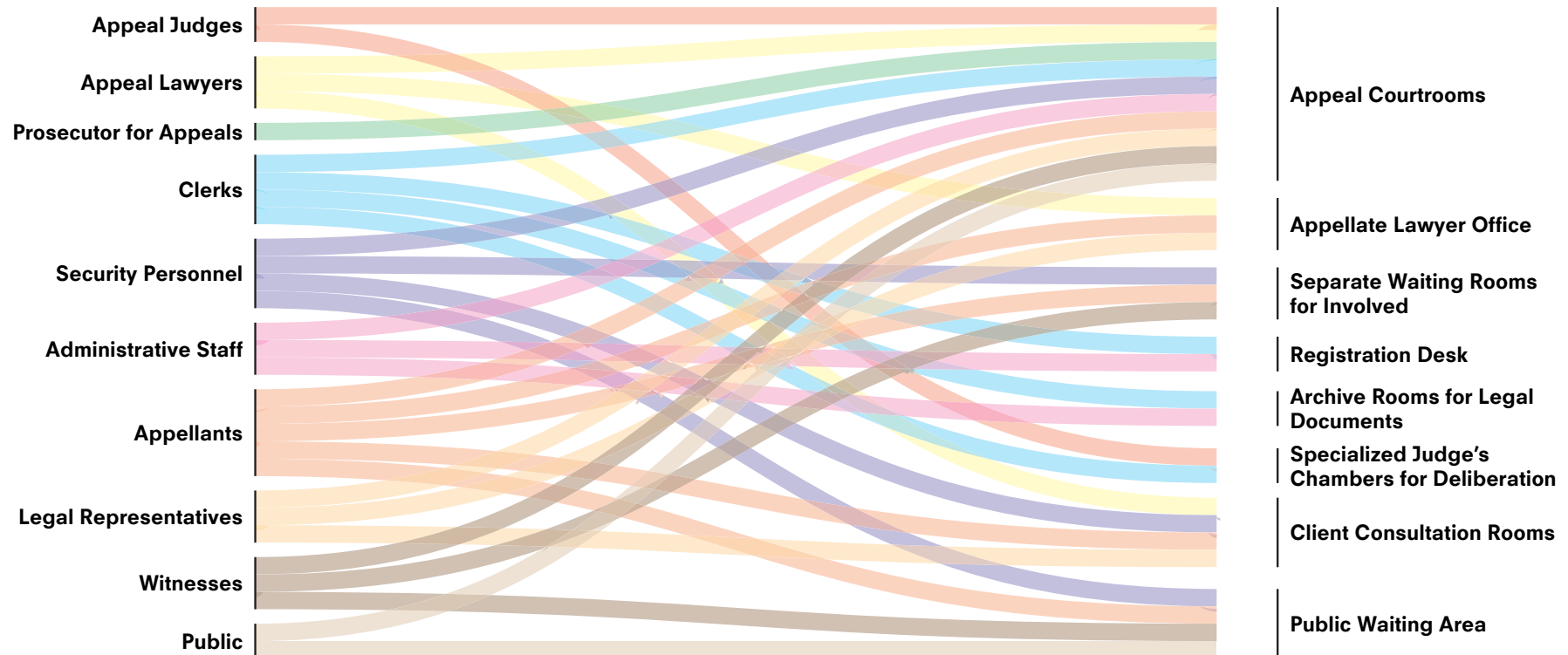


Courts of the first appeal play a crucial role in the justice system by reviewing decisions made by lower courts. Their primary function is to assess whether legal procedures were followed correctly and whether the law was properly interpreted and applied, rather than re-examining facts or hearing new evidence, except in rare instances. These courts typically review the trial record and written submissions, hold hearings focused on legal arguments with minimal witness participation, and issue judgments that may uphold, reverse, or modify the decisions of the lower courts.



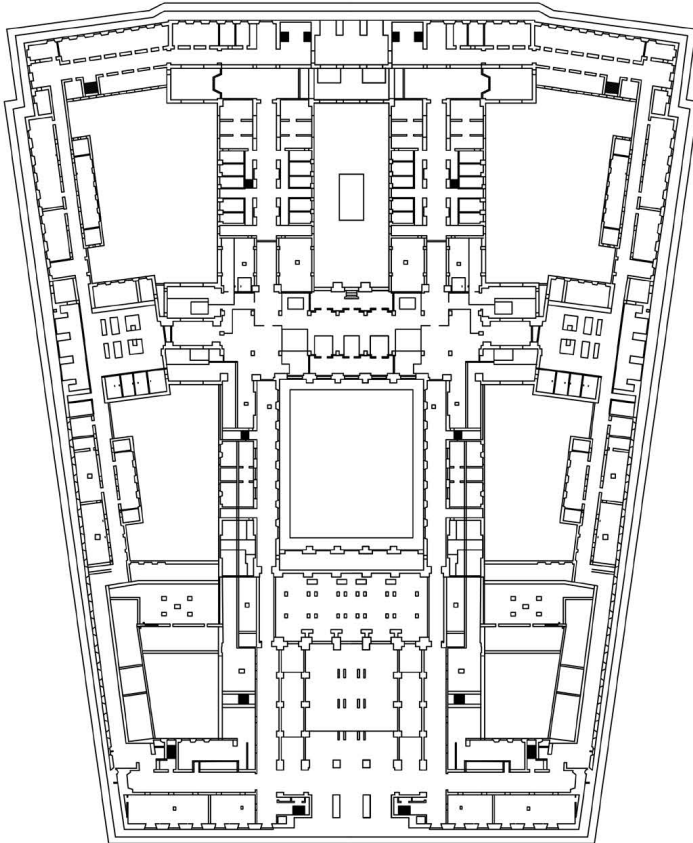
Primary Case

FLows | FIRST APPEAL

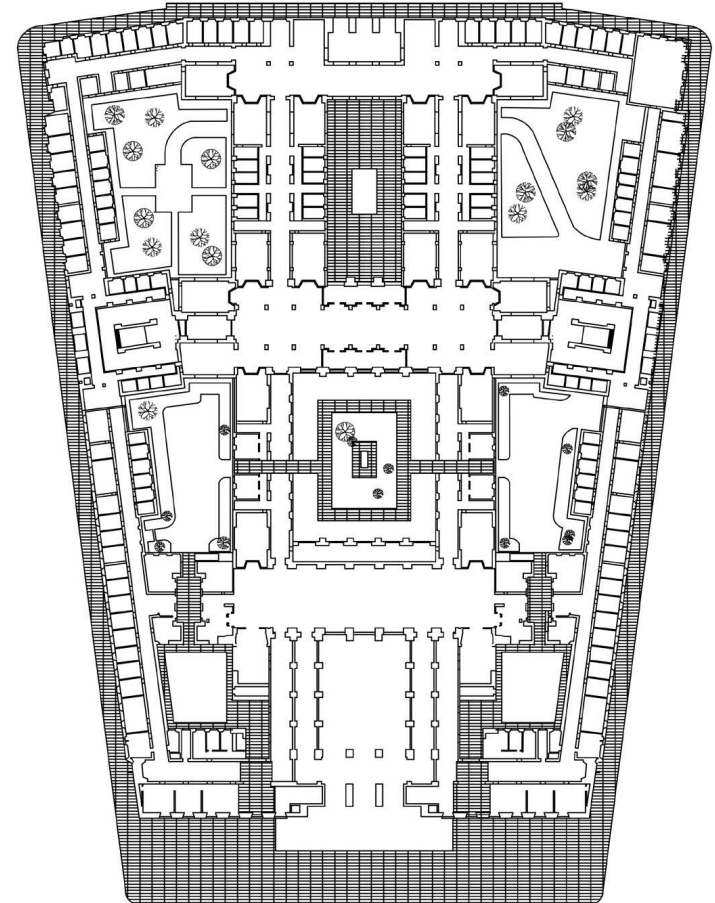


In a court of first appeal, the spatial and procedural flows differ subtly from those of the first instance. Since the appeal process focuses not on re-examining facts, but on reviewing the legal correctness of earlier decisions, the presence of defendants, witnesses, or public spectators is often reduced. Because appeals are largely legal arguments rather than fact-finding trials, the courtroom layout is more focused and formal: minimal witness infrastructure, a larger emphasis on the judges' bench, and a streamlined setup for counsel. Public access may be more limited, and defendants may not be physically present at all, especially in civil appeals. Overall, flows in the court of first appeal are more contained, procedural, and document-driven, reflecting a shift from adjudicating facts to interpreting law.

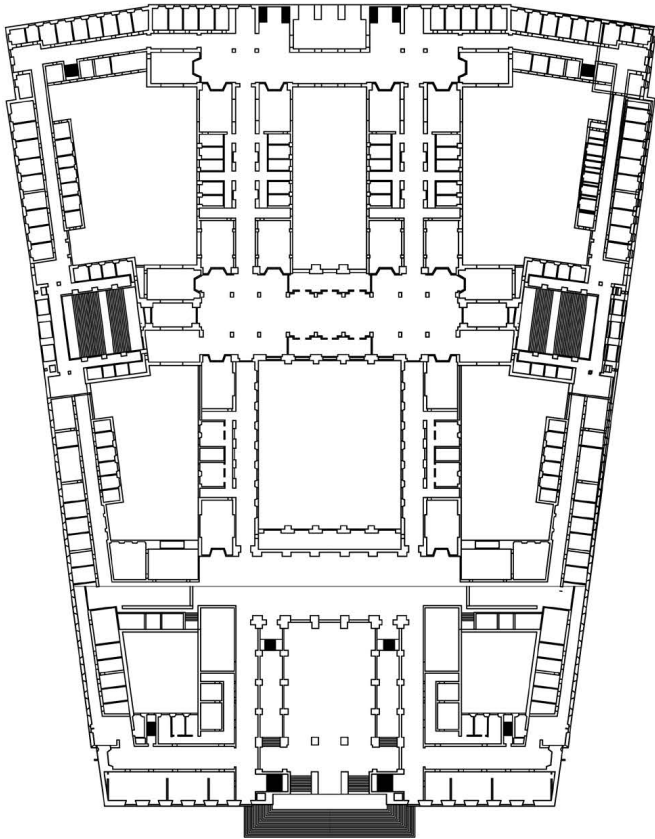
FLOOR PLAN | BASEMENT



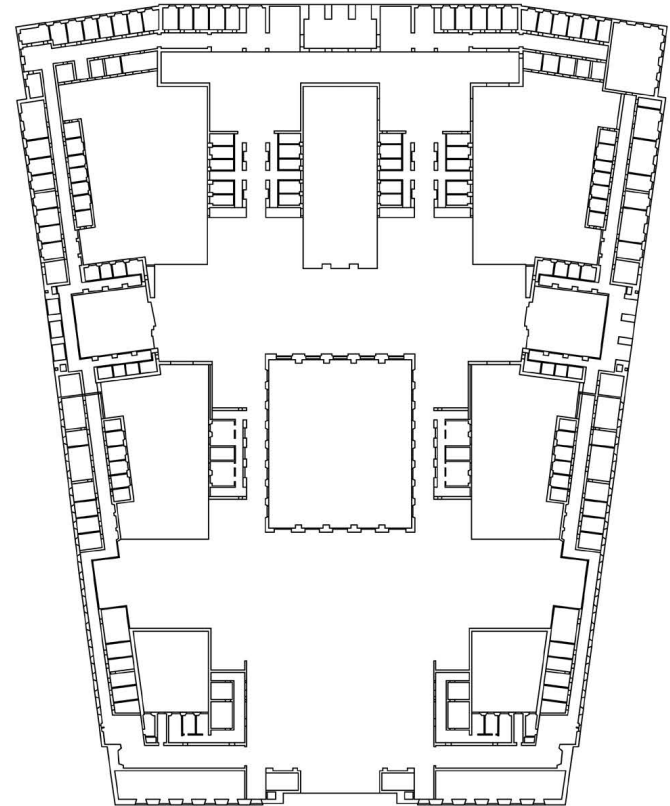
FLOOR PLAN | GROUND FLOOR



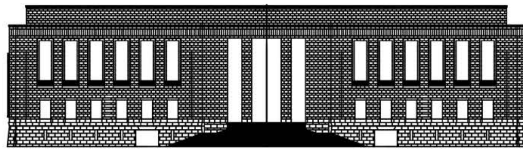
FLOOR PLAN | RAISED FLOOR



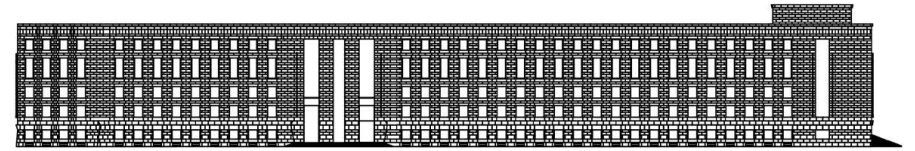
FLOOR PLAN | MEZZANINE FLOOR



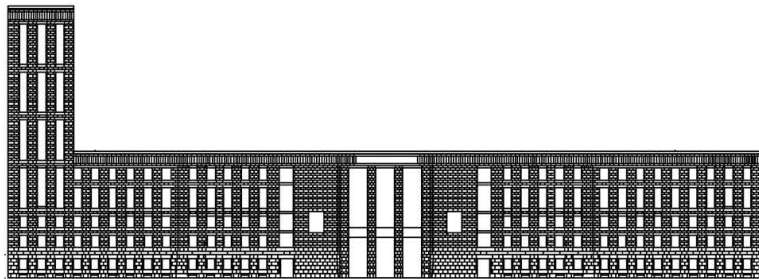
ELEVATIONS



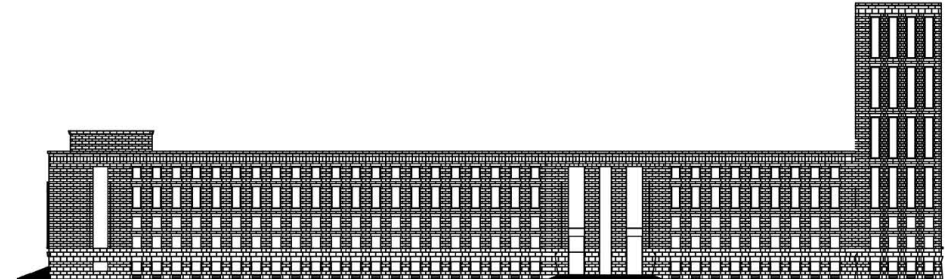
North Elevation



East Elevation

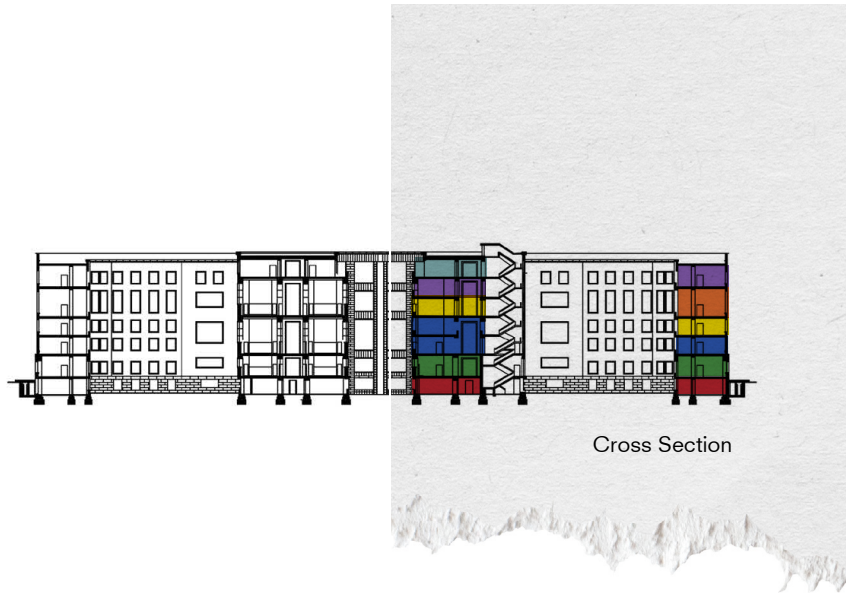


South Elevation

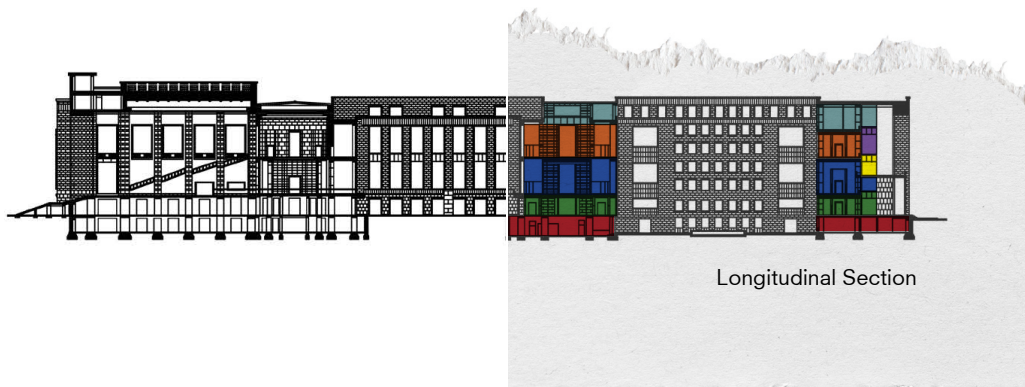


West Elevation

PROGRAMME BREAKDOWN



Cross Section



Longitudinal Section

Top Floor - Private

- | Offices - Kings Attorney, Prosecutors, Press
- | Library
- | Kitchen Services
- | Meeting Rooms

Second Mezzanine Floor - Private

- | Offices - Civil Court of Appeal, Civil Tribunal

Noble First Floor - Semi-Private

- | Classrooms
- | Offices - President of the Tribunale, First President of the Court of Appeal,
- | Attorney General

Mezzanine Floor - Private

- | Offices - Directors of the Civil Court, Court of Appeal, Criminal Procedure
- | Cabinets - Judges and Chancellors: the Cabinets of the Pretori and Vice Pretori
- | Meeting Rooms

Raised Floor - Semi-Private

- | Penitentiary Department
- | Ambulatory Hospital Civil Section
- | Outpatient Offices - Criminal Court, Tribunal, Pretura Civile
- | Classrooms
- | Magna Hall
- | Court of Assise Court
- | Criminal Court
- | Notary Archives
- | Offices - Large Library
- | Bar-restaurant

Ground Floor - Public

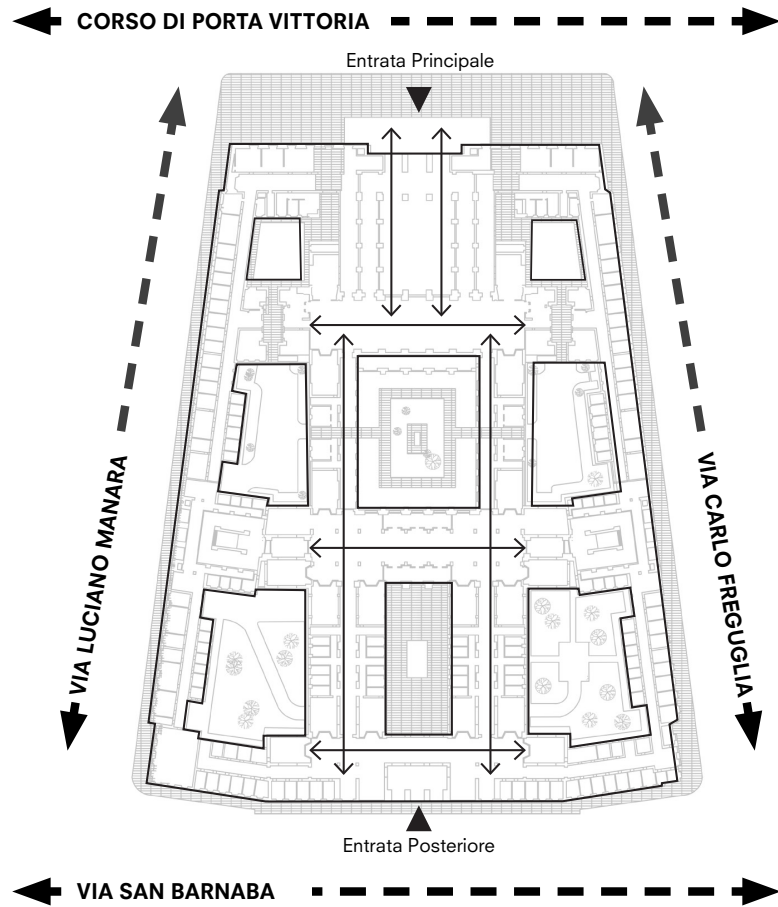
- | Judicial Administration
- | Ancillary Services - Criminal Chamber, Offices of Conciliazione
- | Classrooms
- | Notary Archives
- | Detention Bureau
- | Court Officials
- | Legalization & Vetting Office of Commercial Books
- | Civil Status Archive
- | Judicial Officers of the Court of Appeal
- | Building Maintenance Offices
- | Car Access - First President of the Court of Appeal & Attorney General of the King

Basement Floor - Private

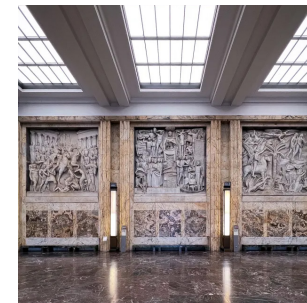
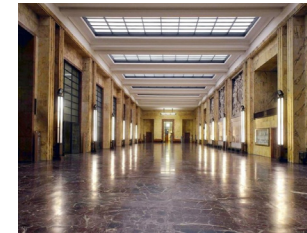
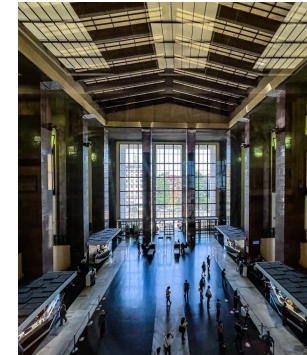
- | Building Services
- | Cells & Tunnels - Detainees
- | Armored Archive - Tribunale Civil Status
- | Warehouses - Court of Appeal, Court of First Instance, Pretura
- | Workshops

Primary Case

MAIN ENTRANCES & AXIS

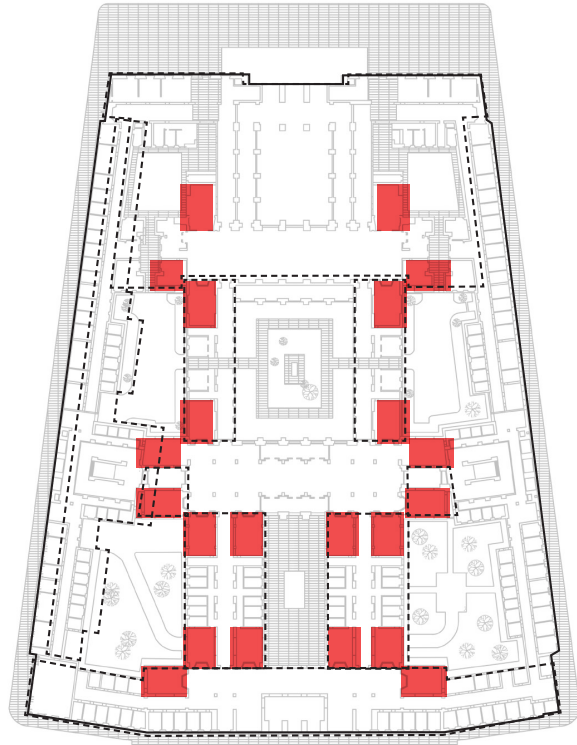


The Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan is organized around a central axis with two main entrances: the formal entrata principale on Corso di Porta Vittoria and the more discreet entrata posteriore on Via San Barnaba. The main entrance serves as a public and symbolic threshold, guiding users to courtrooms and administrative areas. The rear entrance, primarily for staff and judges, supports secure movement through restricted zones. Together, these entrances create a balance between transparency and security, with the axial layout reinforcing hierarchy, order, and clear orientation throughout the building.



Primary Case

COURTROOMS & ZONING



The Palazzo di Giustizia is organized through clear zoning that separates public, private, and secure functions. Courtrooms are spread across multiple levels, arranged by size and type larger ceremonial rooms are centrally located, while smaller hearing rooms are placed peripherally. Public areas connect directly to the main entrance, while judges, staff, and defendants use separate, secured routes. Administrative offices, judges' chambers, and holding cells are zoned away from public circulation to ensure privacy, safety, and order. This layout supports both the daily operation of justice and its symbolic expression of authority and transparency.

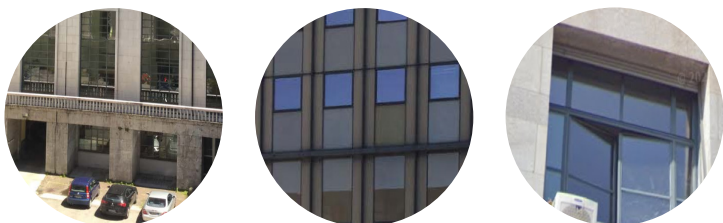


MATERIALITY



Exterior

The exterior is fully clad in Strona Valley marble, with a dark skirt made of Scizzo della Val Masino, both materials sourced from Vallestrona. The facade windows are framed in bronze, while those on the painted iron facades are crafted from painted iron.



Courtyards

The central courtyard and courtyard no. 2, aligned along the building's longitudinal axis, are finished in Botticino with a polychrome base. All windows and openings in the courtyards are framed in painted iron.



Interior

Internal office doors are made of oak, while the classroom doors feature polished walnut, with wooden sections covered in glossy bronze slabs. The floors in offices and corridors are finished in mosaic, complemented by metal details and panels.



Internal Walls

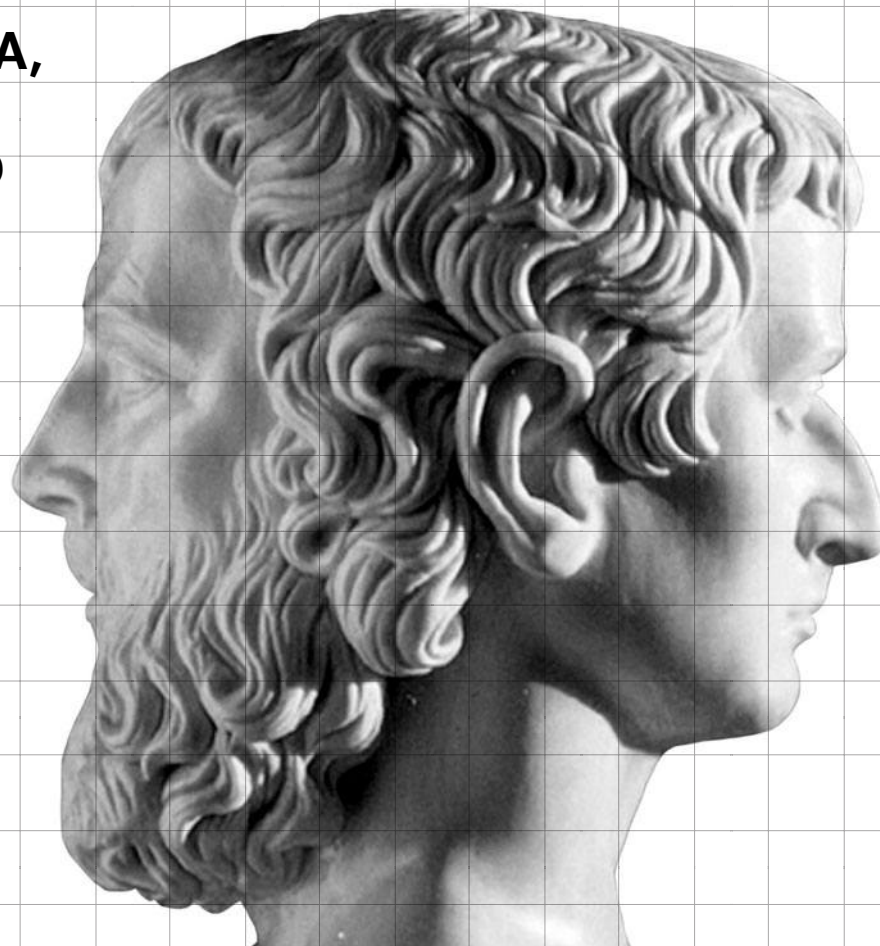
Special attention was given to the study of wall finishes, particularly in areas where the audience is received or gathered. Marble coatings were applied in spaces where the function of the premises is carried out.



Internal Flooring

Linoleum flooring has been used in key areas, including the offices of the Section Presidents, the President of the Court, the Procurator of the King, the Hall of Attorneys, and the Libraries.

MARCELLO
PIACENTINI'S MOST
IMPORTANT WORK IN
MILAN, AND FAMOUS
THANKS TO THE
NEWSCASTS DURING
THE MANI PULITE
INVESTIGATION ERA,
IS A TWO-FACED
JANUS SUSPENDED
BETWEEN
HISTORICISM AND
TIMID OPENINGS
TOWARDS
MODERNITY.

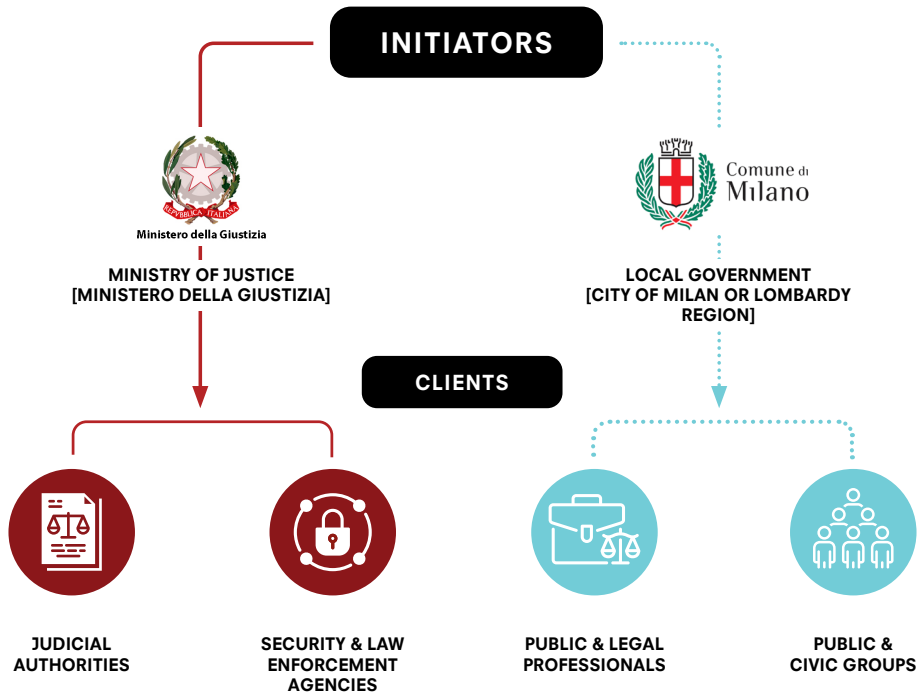


MANI PULITE ('CLEAN HANDS')
WAS A NATIONWIDE JUDICIAL
INVESTIGATION INTO POLITICAL
CORRUPTION IN ITALY HELD IN
THE EARLY 1990S, RESULTING
IN THE DEMISE OF THE FIRST
ITALIAN REPUBLIC AND THE
DISAPPEARANCE OF MANY
POLITICAL PARTIES.

This building is not only an architectural monument but also a symbol of two dark chapters in Italy's history: the **Fascist regime** and the **Mani Pulite** (Clean Hands) investigation in the **1990s**. The Palazzo di Giustizia was constructed as part of Milan's urban transformation under Fascist rule. While it was intended to serve as a **monumental and functional space for the judiciary**, its history became intertwined with the dramatic political events of both the **dictatorship** and the **corruption scandals** of the 1990s. Despite this, the building remains a relatively **underappreciated piece of architecture** in the public eye. Architecturally, the Palazzo represents key aspects of Fascist urban planning and Piacentini's stylistic approach, **balancing functionality with the imposing, authoritarian aesthetic that characterized many buildings of that era**. Even with its associations to oppressive times, it is considered an important work of 20th-century Italian architecture.

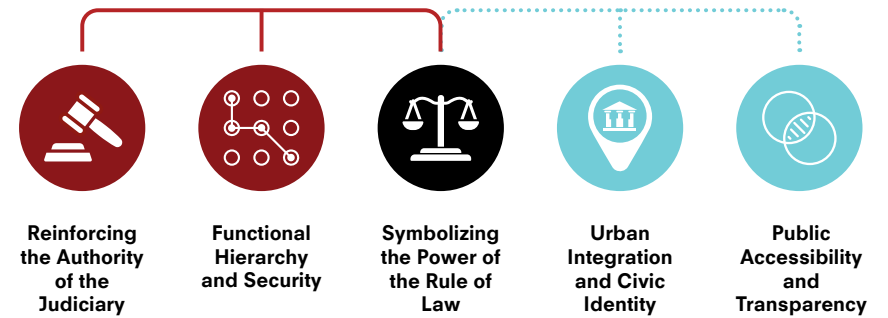
PARTIES INVOLVED

INITIATORS

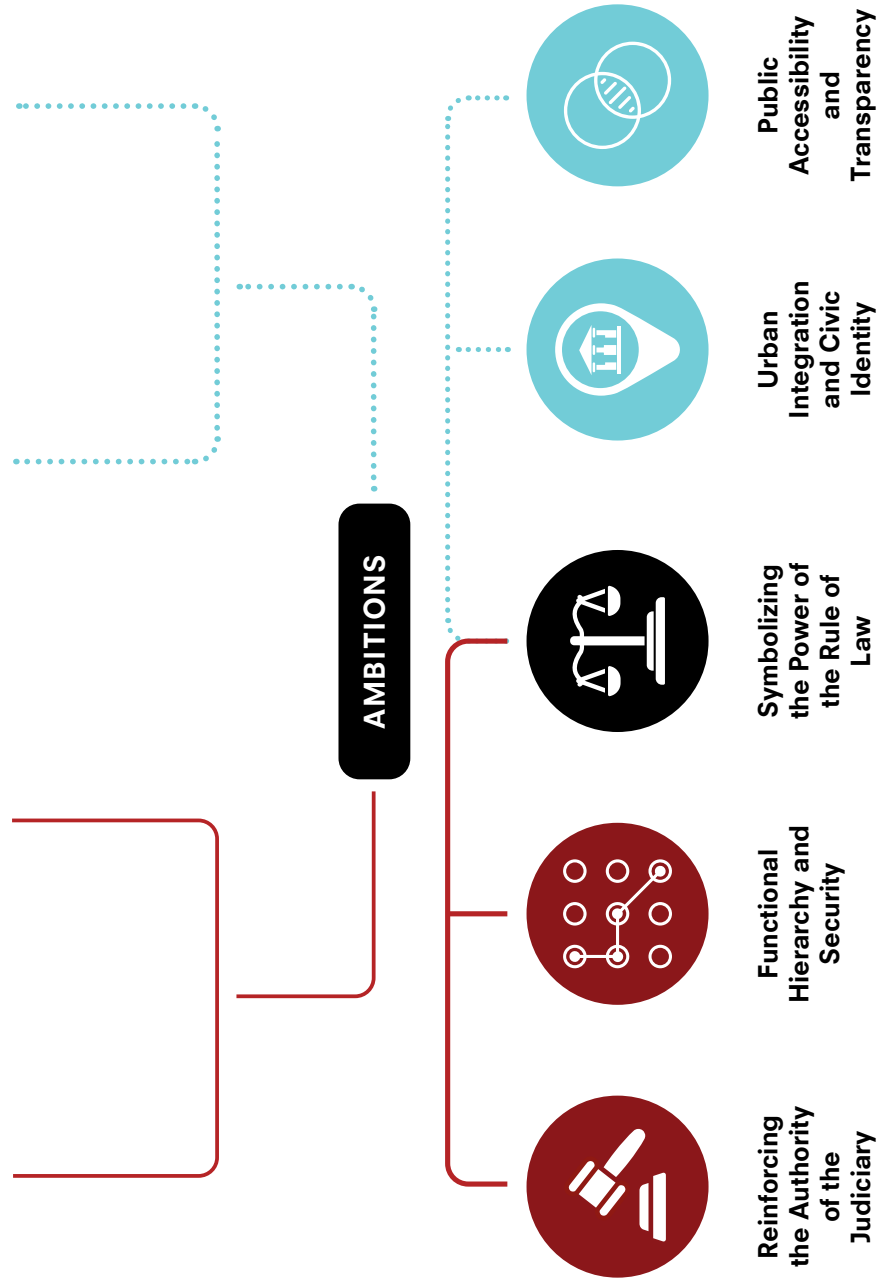
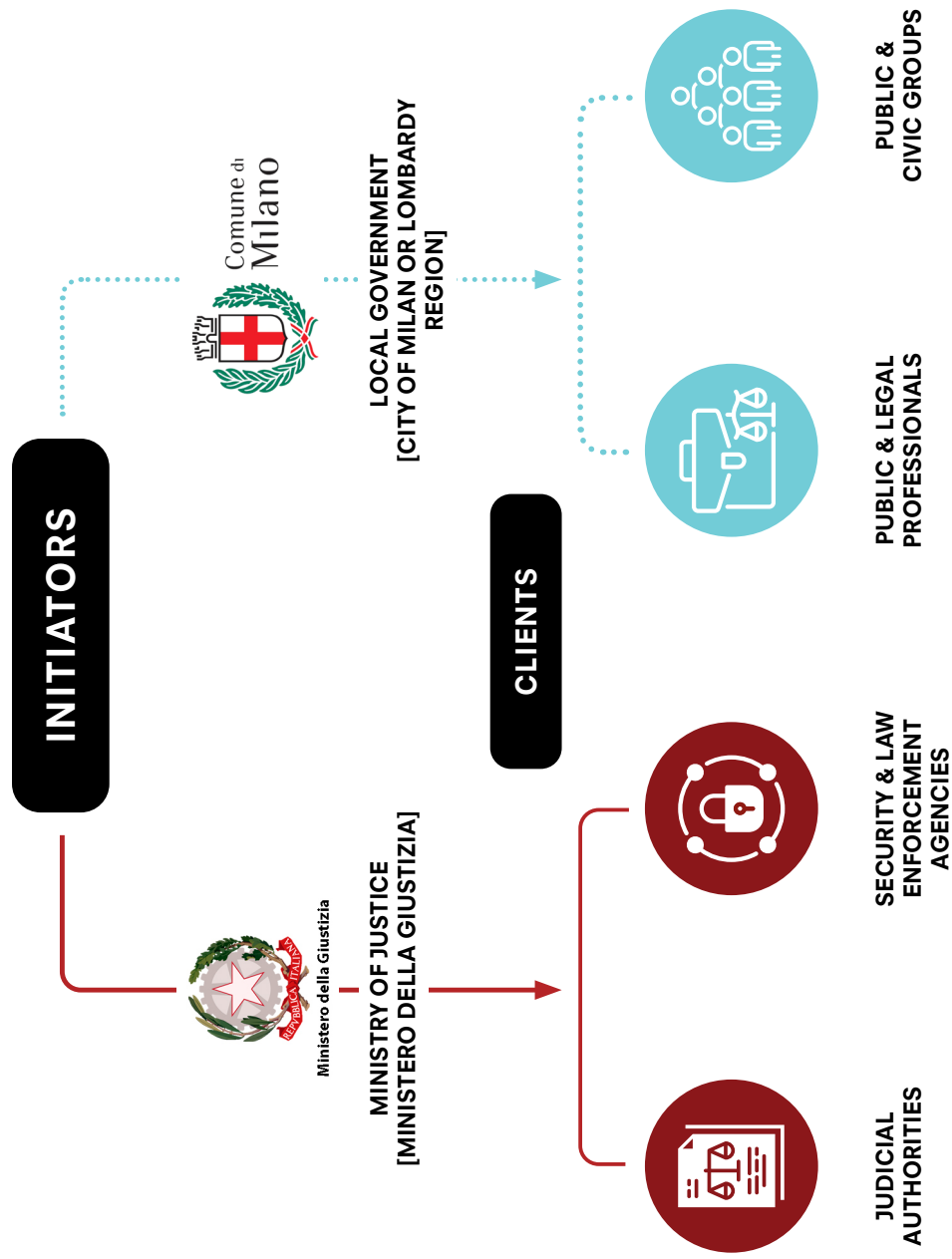


Two key initiators represent the different but overlapping user groups within the Palazzo di Giustizia and Milans justice system the Ministry of Justice and the City of Milan / Lombardy Region. The Ministry of Justice acts on behalf of judicial authorities, security forces, and law enforcement agencies, focusing on functionality, safety, and procedural efficiency within the justice system. Their priorities include secure circulation, modernized court infrastructure, and improved working conditions for legal professionals. In parallel, the City of Milan, representing the public, legal professionals, and civic groups, advocates for greater transparency, accessibility, and civic integration. Their goals may include opening the building to the city, creating public-facing spaces, and reinforcing the courthouse's role as a democratic institution. Together, these two bodies reflect the dual nature of the courthouse as a space of legal authority and a civic institution and any redesign must reconcile these different yet interdependent needs.

INITIATOR AMBITIONS



The Ministry of Justice aims to reinforce the authority of the judiciary, emphasizing functional hierarchy and security to ensure the courthouse operates efficiently and safely. Their focus is on maintaining the building's role as a stronghold of legal power and procedural order. Conversely, the local government seeks to enhance urban integration, civic identity, and public accessibility, promoting transparency to connect the courthouse more openly with the city and its citizens. Together, these ambitions converge around a shared goal: to create a courthouse that not only embodies the power of the rule of law but also reflects its role as a democratic and accessible institution.



Parties Involved
STAKEHOLDERS

THE JUDGE

THE JURY

THE PRESS

THE DEFENDANT

THE PUBLIC

THE LAWYER

THE PLAINTIFF



"Parson's Cause" | George Cooke's, 1834

Beyond the primary initiators, a successful courthouse design must thoughtfully address the needs of all key stakeholders: the judge, jury, lawyers, plaintiff, defendant, press, and public. Each group interacts with the space differently and requires distinct considerations such as privacy, security, accessibility, and visibility. Incorporating their perspectives ensures the design supports fair proceedings, effective communication, and transparency. Recognizing these diverse roles is essential to creating a courthouse that functions smoothly while embodying justice, openness, and trust.

Parties Involved

STAKEHOLDER AMBITIONS



The Judge

PROMOTE
AUTHORITY



The Jury

PROMOTE
IMPARTIALITY



The Lawyer

PROMOTE
ACCESSIBILITY



The Plaintiff

PROMOTE
VISIBILITY



The Defendant

PROMOTE
DIGNITY



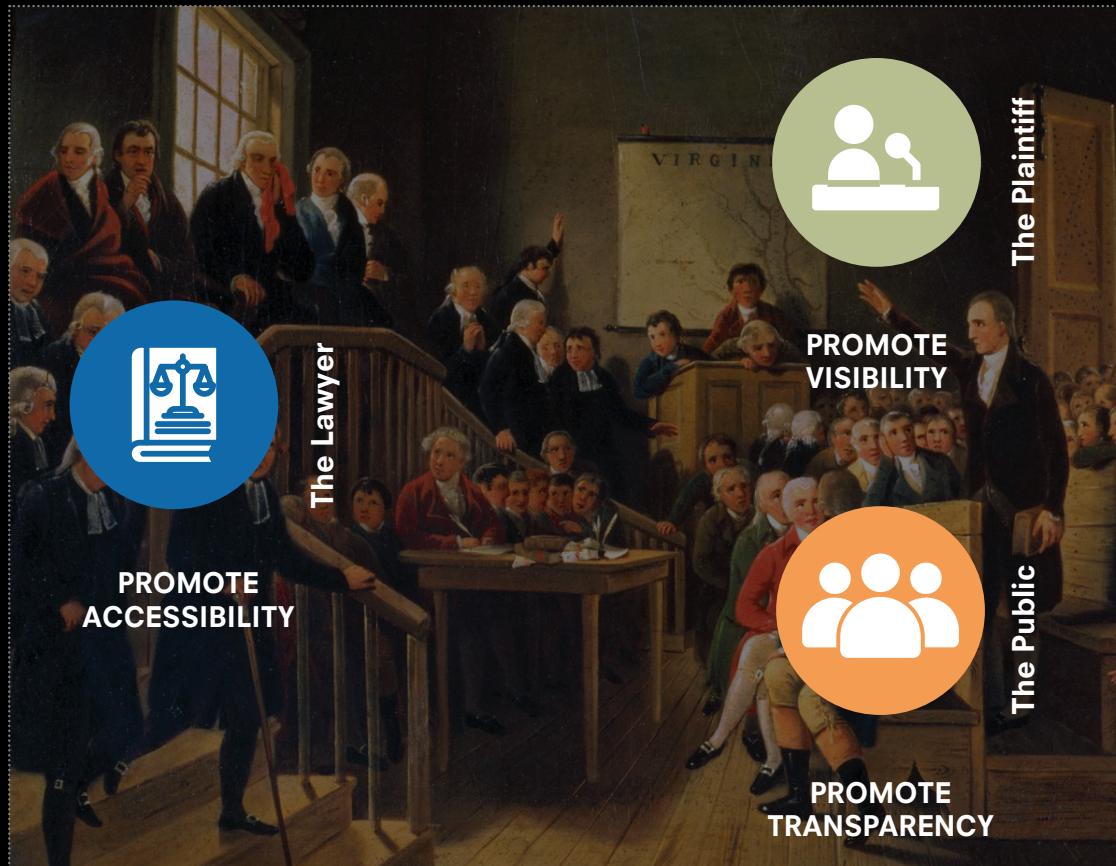
The Public

PROMOTE
TRANSPARENCY



The Press

PROMOTE
COVERAGE



Each of these stakeholders play a vital role in the justice process and have their own ambitions which need to be addressed in the courthouse as a whole. The judge holds authority, guiding proceedings and making final decisions. The jury listens, deliberates, and represents community judgment. The lawyers advocate for their clients, navigating legal arguments. The plaintiff and defendant are the central parties in dispute, directly affected by the outcome. The press observes and reports, ensuring public transparency. Finally, the public serves as witnesses to the justice system's openness, reinforcing its legitimacy and accountability. Together, these roles form the dynamic ecosystem which is the courthouse.



ARGUMENT

The Nuremberg Trials

The Nuremberg Trials marked a pivotal moment in judicial history, establishing a new standard for international justice. For the first time, individuals including state leaders were held accountable for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. These trials emphasized the principles of due process, fair trial, and the rule of law on a global scale. Their legacy profoundly shaped modern international law and reinforced the idea that justice transcends borders, setting a precedent for tribunals and courts worldwide.

RESEARCH QUESTION

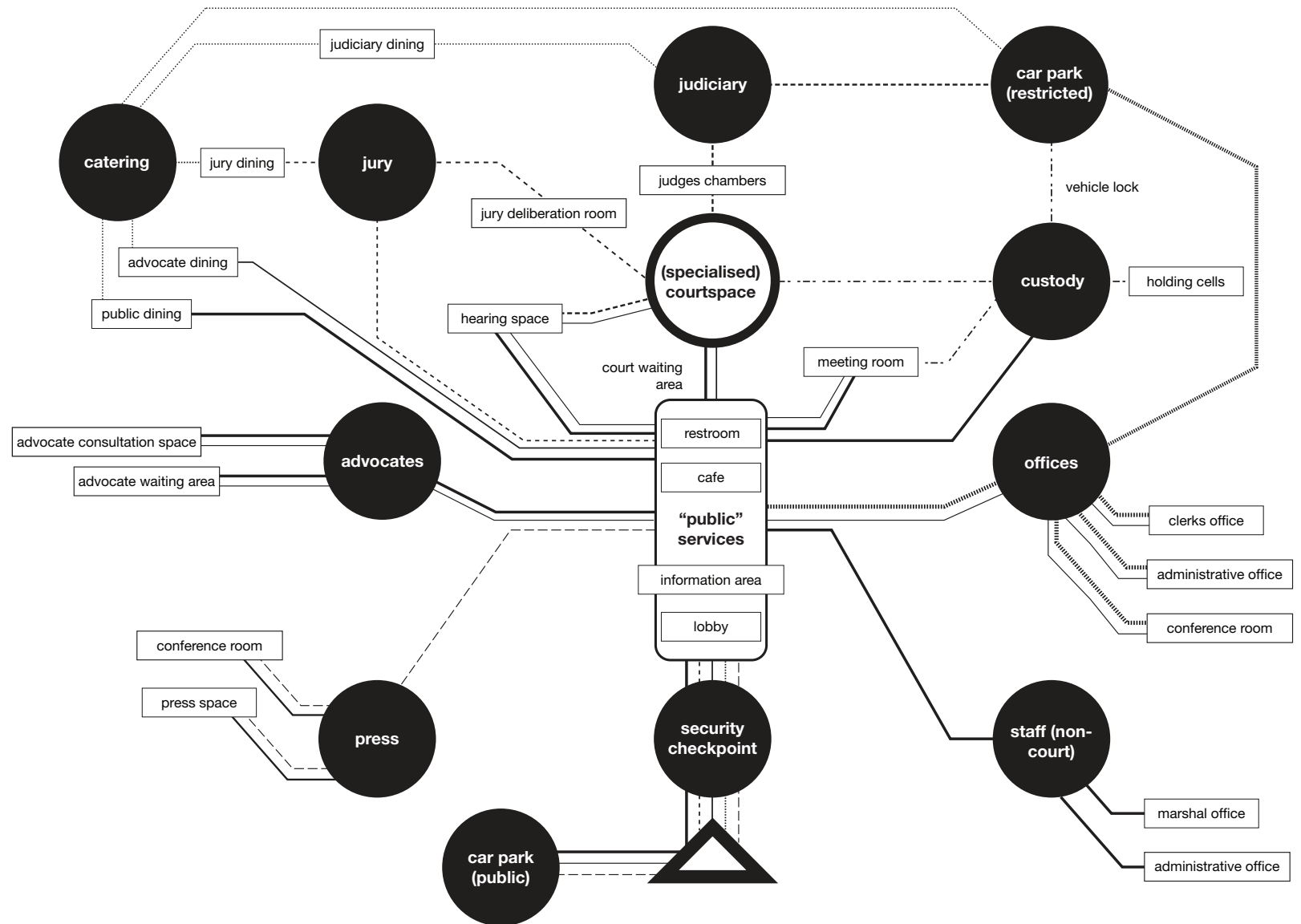
**HOW CAN COURTHOUSE DESIGN
ADDRESS TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS
AND HIERARCHICAL RELATIONS
AMONG KEY ACTORS?**

IS IT NECESSARY FOR THE JUDGE TO SIT ON
AN ELEVATED PODIUM?



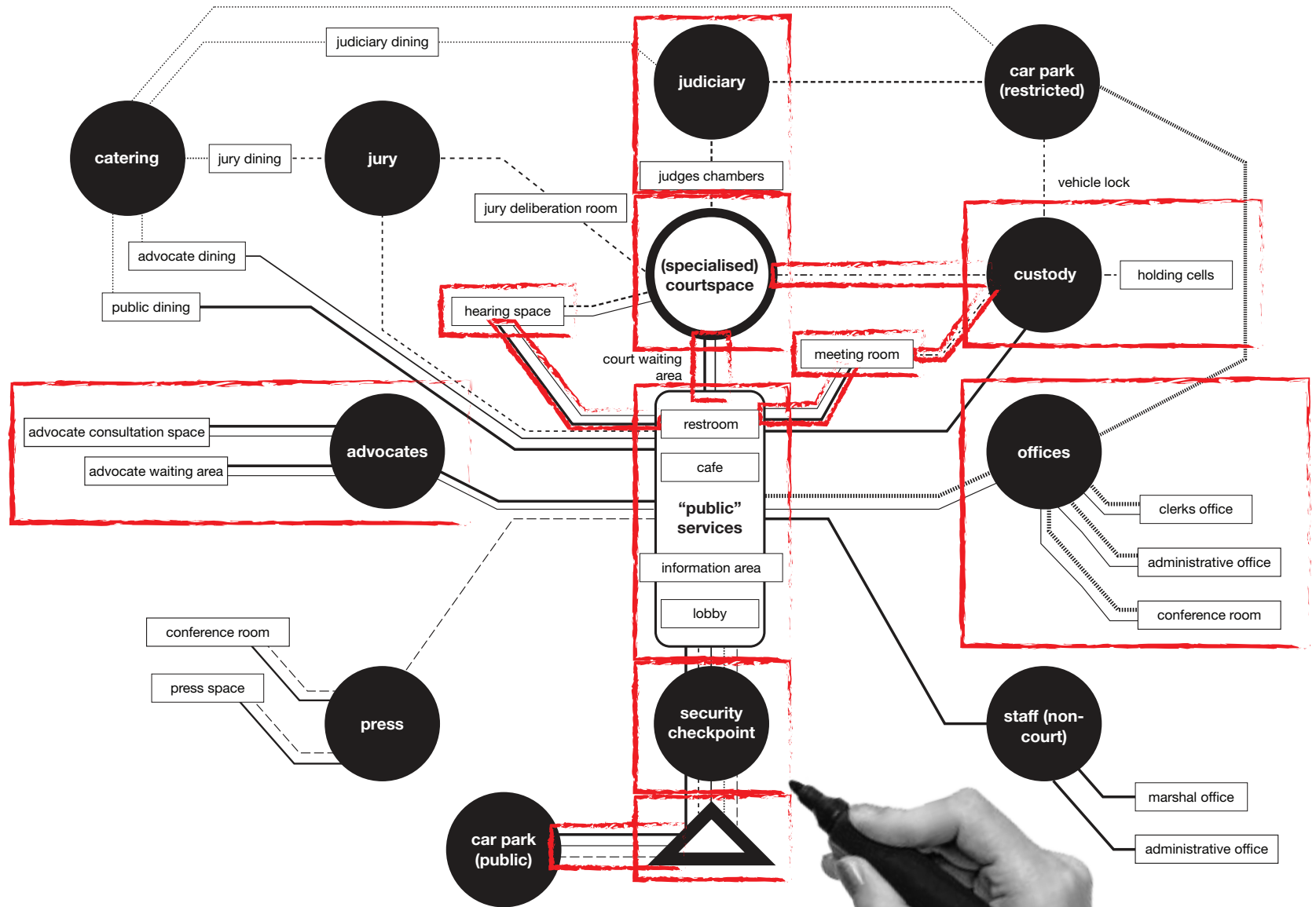
RELATIONAL OVERVIEW | TRADITIONAL

Traditional courthouses are organized with strict spatial hierarchies to ensure security, authority, and procedural order. The main entrance is typically secured with checkpoints, limiting public access. Public areas like lobbies are separated from secure zones, and different user groups judges, lawyers, defendants, and jurors follow dedicated circulation routes to maintain security. Judges and staff use private corridors, while defendants and jurors are escorted through controlled paths. Support functions, such as holding cells and administrative offices, are isolated from public spaces. While this zoning maintains order, it also creates spatial fragmentation, prioritizing security over accessibility and transparency. The presence of security reinforces the impression of the courthouse's as a formal, guarded institution rather than a public building accessible for everyone.



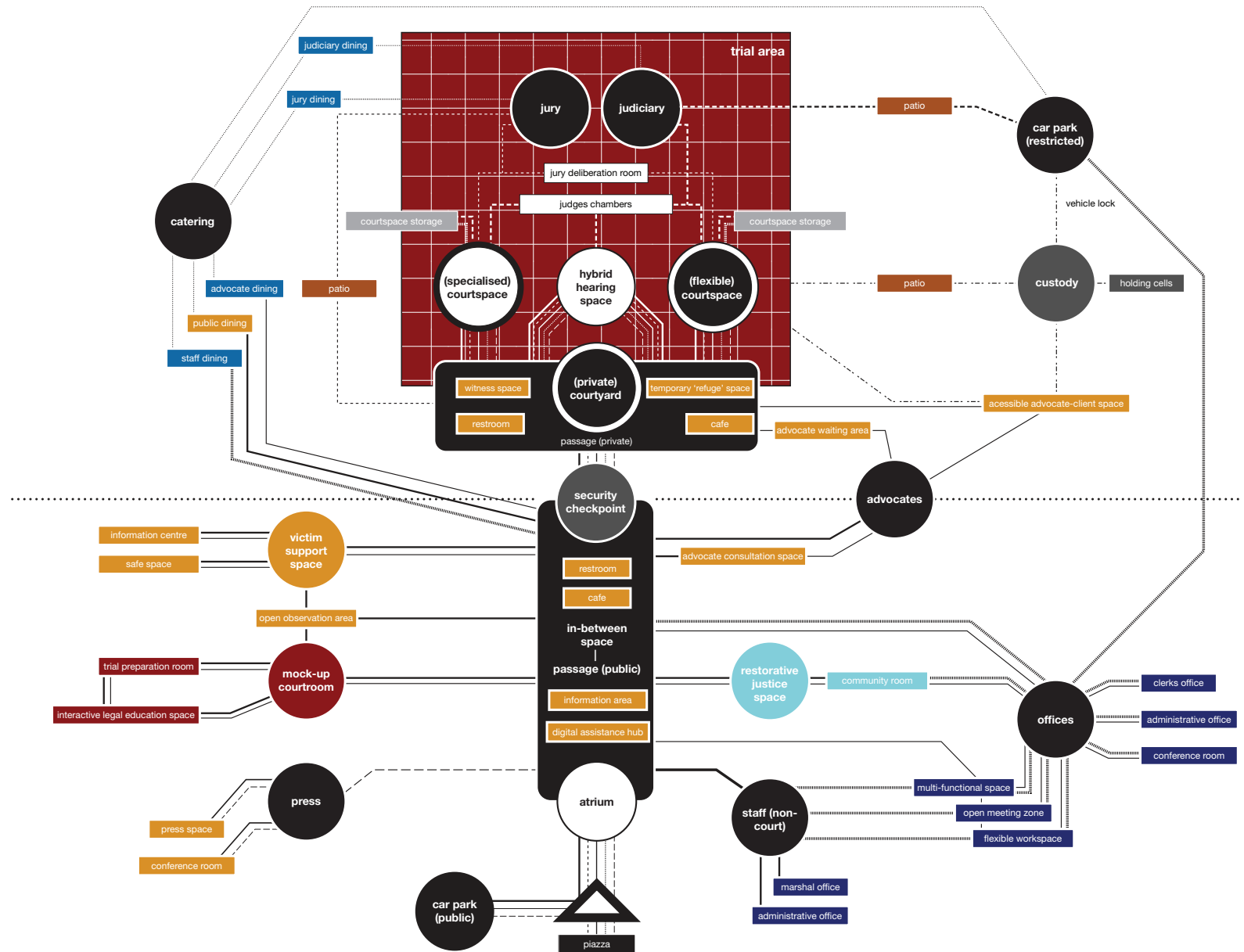
RELATIONAL OVERVIEW | ZONES OF IMPROVEMENT

Traditional courthouses have several areas in need of improvement to enhance accessibility, transparency, and inclusivity. While security zones are crucial for safety, they often create a rigid and intimidating barrier that discourages public engagement. Balancing necessary security with a more inviting, approachable entry experience is key to fostering civic trust. Public areas, such as waiting rooms and lobbies, are often segregated and underused, lacking comfort and opportunities for meaningful interaction. Transforming these spaces into flexible, welcoming environments can promote community connection and openness. Support spaces, like holding cells and administrative offices, are often isolated, reinforcing a fortress-like atmosphere. Designing these areas with greater attention to user experience can improve flow and soften the institutional feel. By addressing these critical areas, courthouses can evolve into open, humane spaces that better reflect modern values of justice and democracy.



RELATIONAL OVERVIEW | AMENDED

Security measures become balanced with openness, creating a smoother and less intimidating entry experience. Public and waiting areas turn into comfortable, flexible environments that encourage interaction and engagement. Circulation paths become more integrated, reducing rigid separations and fostering a sense of shared presence among all users. Support spaces are designed with care, improving both functionality and atmosphere. Dedicated educational and civic zones invite the community in, reframing the courthouse as not just a site of authority, but as a space for learning and connection. Together, these changes create a courthouse that embodies transparency, inclusivity, and modern justice.



SPATIAL KEY POINTS



The research highlights a clear shift in how courthouse spaces can be reimagined to better reflect contemporary values of justice. Embedding restorative justice principles within the building's structure is essential, creating environments that facilitate mediation, dialogue, and healing alongside traditional judicial functions. This shift calls for democratising space by prioritizing public access and openness, breaking down the exclusivity historically associated with courthouses and fostering transparency and trust within the community.

To address power imbalances, implementing flexible space strategies becomes crucial. Adaptable environments allow for varied configurations that can accommodate different users and activities, softening rigid hierarchies and promoting inclusivity. Complementing this, introducing dynamic public spaces acts as a mediator between distinct user groups, encouraging interaction and a sense of shared ownership rather than separation. Finally, reframing authority through the integration of educational spaces further transforms the courthouse's role. By embedding areas dedicated to learning and civic engagement, the courthouse becomes not just a site of enforcement but also a space of knowledge-sharing and community partnership. Together, these spatial strategies pave the way for courthouses that are more open, humane, and reflective of evolving ideas about justice and society.

EMBEDDING OF RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE PRINCIPLES WITHIN
STRUCTURES

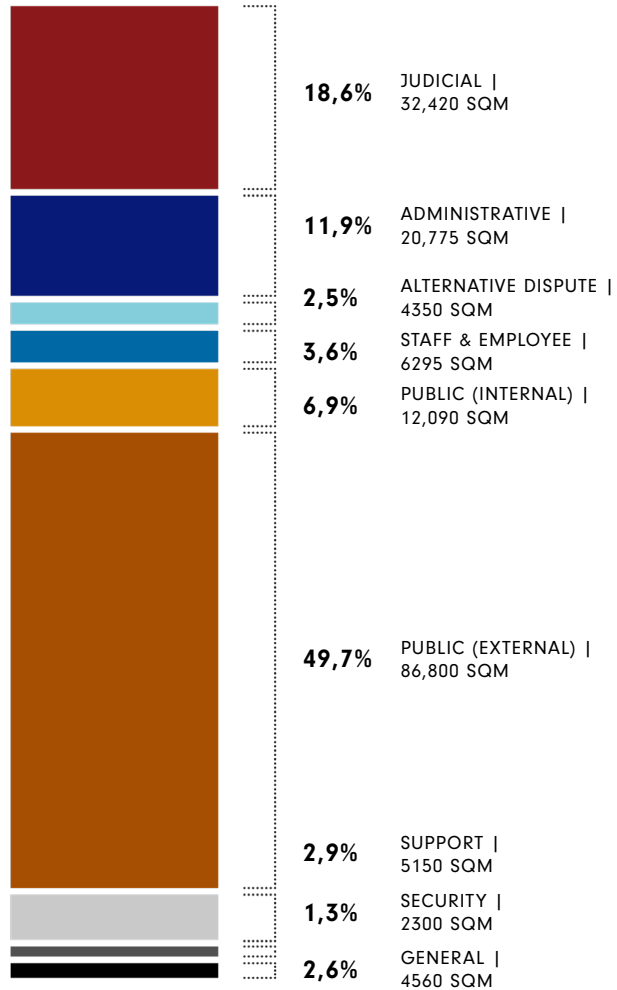
DEMOCRATISING SPACE
THROUGH PUBLIC ACCESS

IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE
SPACE STRATEGIES
TO ADDRESS POWER
IMBALANCES

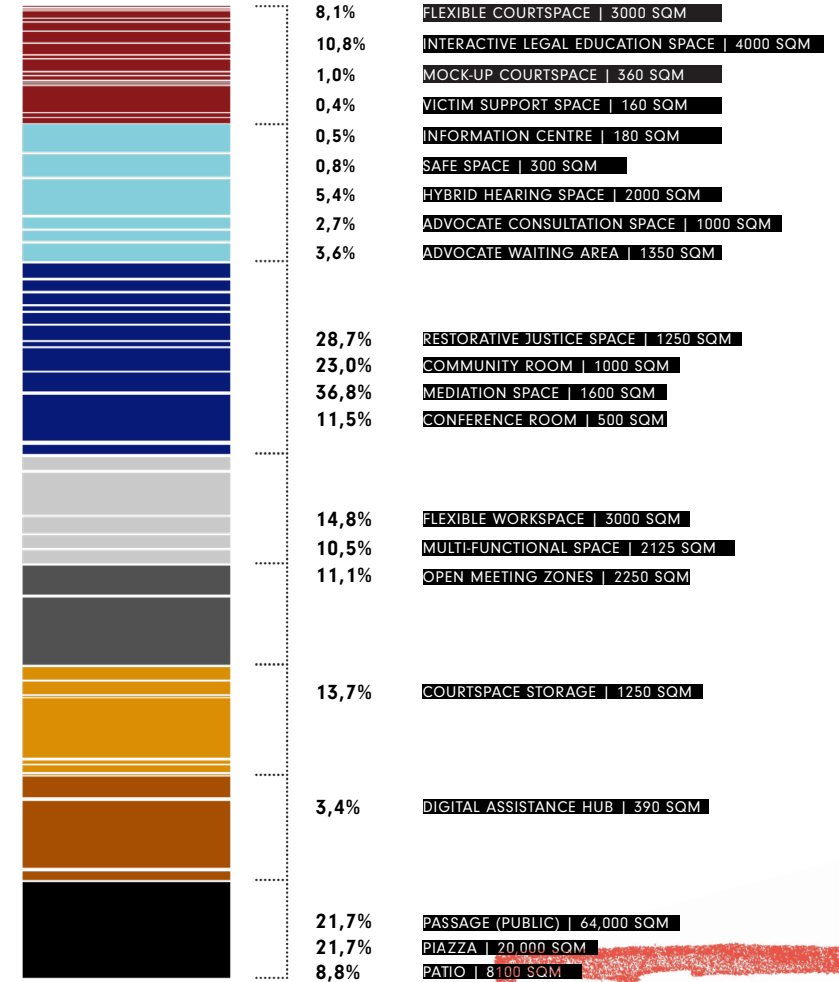
INTRODUCING PUBLIC
SPACES AS DYNAMIC
MEDIATORS

REFRAMING AUTHORITY
THROUGH INTEGRATED
EDUCATIONAL SPACES

Argument
PROGRAMME | AMENDED



Argument
PROGRAMME | ADDITIONAL



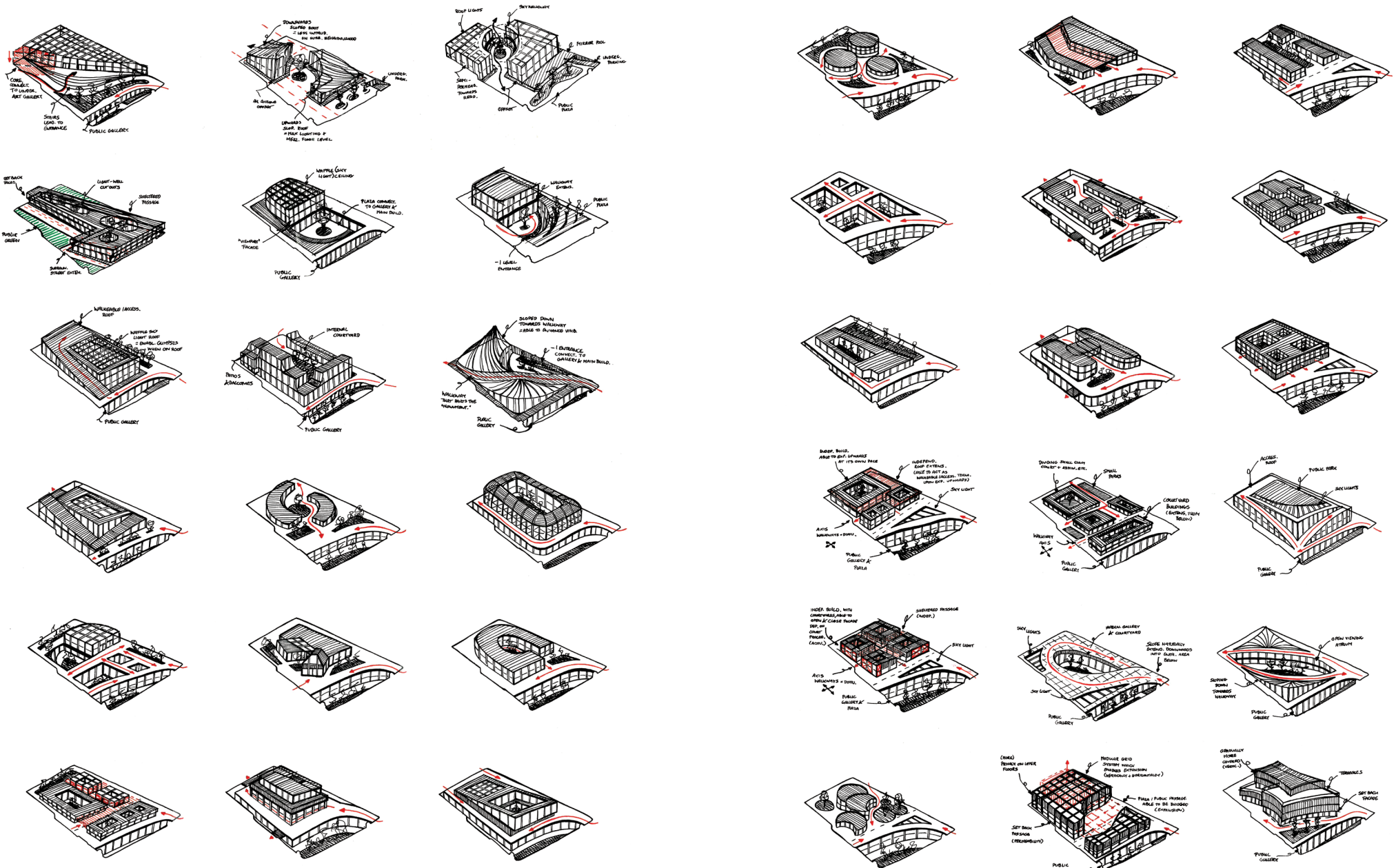
TOTAL COVERAGE:
174,740 SQM

GROSS FLOOR AREA:
87,940 SQM

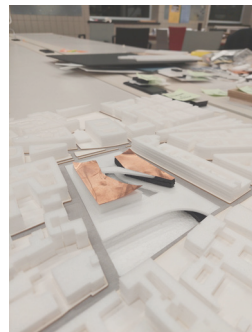
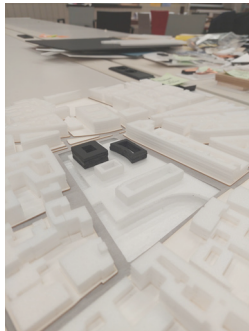
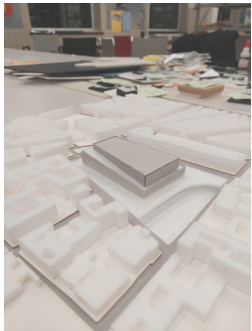
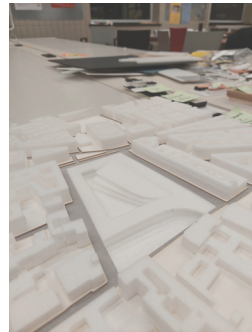
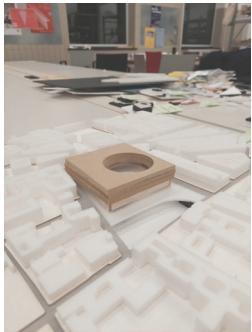
AREA WO EXTERNAL & PARKING
83,380 SQM

Argument

MASSING EXPLORATION



MASSING EXPLORATION



Monolith

A solid, monolithic volume with a central courtyard carved out symbolizing justice as a strong yet transparent institution. The void creates a public heart, encouraging gathering and light infiltration.

Dual Balance

Two distinct volumes represent the duality of law prosecution and defence divided by a central axis. Their separation emphasizes fairness and neutrality in judicial processes, yet they are connected by a suspended walkway, held in balance.

Quiet Ground

The building dissolves into the landscape with minimal vertical extension upwards, suggesting discretion and accessibility. A low-profile approach that respects the surrounding urban scale.

Elevated Justice

A lifted mass hovers above a recessed base, creating a dramatic civic gesture. The raised volume denotes the elevated importance of justice above daily life, while the base forms public plazas. The roof is walkable to allow for public engagement.

Dispersed Justice

Four distinct volumes rise above, grounded by a shared subterranean base. This model symbolizes stability and decentralization, with each tower potentially housing different judicial functions. With an underground level connecting them.

Hidden Court

This design emphasizes discretion and security, with only one volume emerging above ground. The exposed element serves as a civic marker a beacon of justice while the underground program allows for quiet integration into the urban fabric.

Civic Embrace

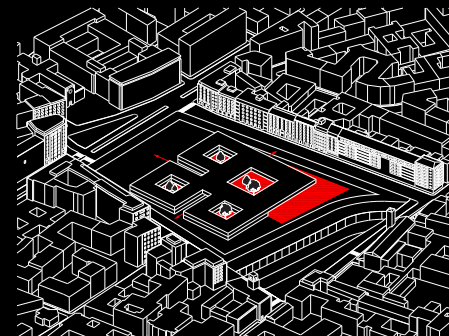
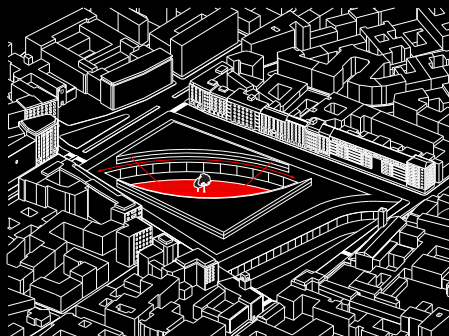
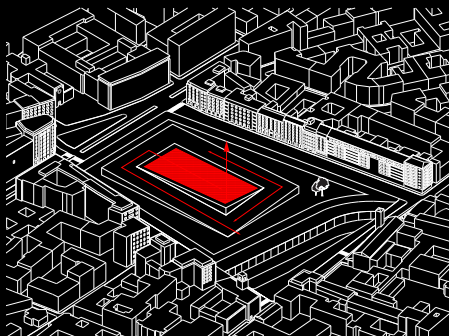
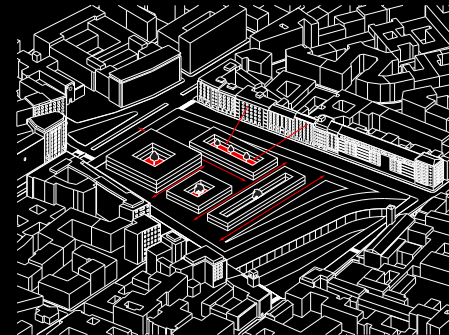
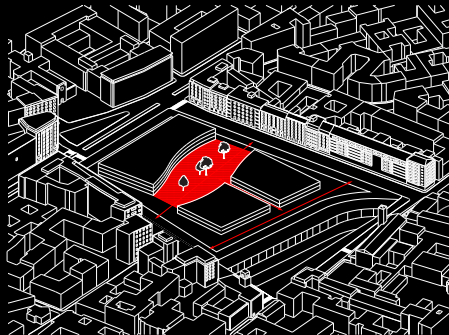
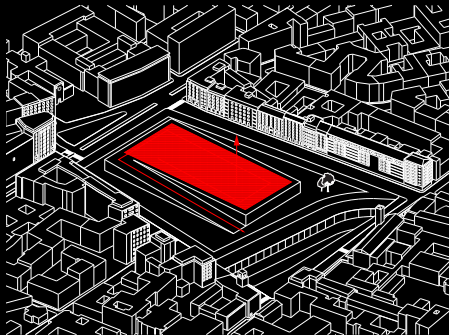
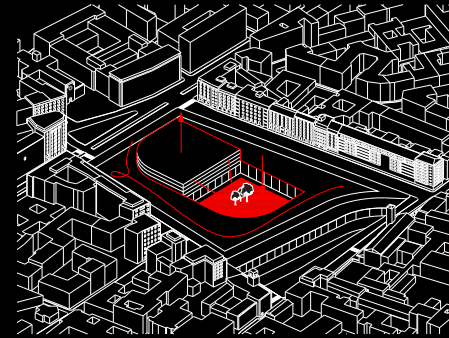
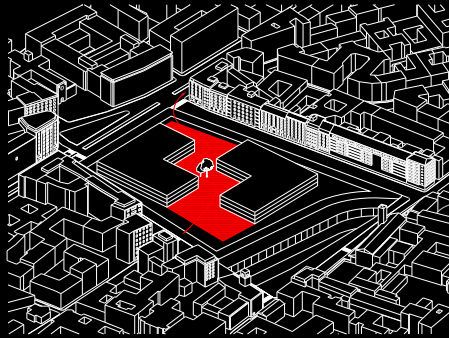
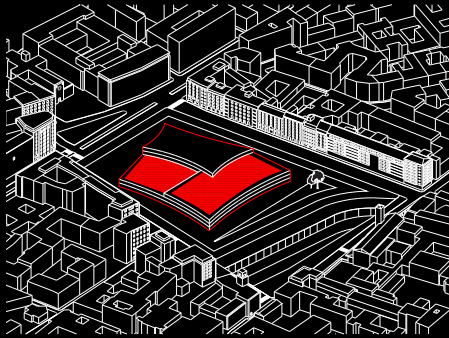
Defined by inward-curving walls, this massing creates a sense of shelter and containment. The soft geometry draws people in and holds space at the centre symbolizing the courthouse as a place of care, deliberation, and human-centred justice.

Clustered Courtyards

A fragmented cluster of blocks forms courtyards, promoting transparency and natural light. Each block could host different courtroom or administrative functions. The design fosters transparency while allowing for functional separation.

People's Threshold

A courthouse designed around an open, inviting threshold that bridges the public realm with institutional gravity. The carved entry plane guides visitors into a light-filled civic heart, symbolizing justice as approachable, inclusive, and grounded in community.

CONCLUSION

The early massing explorations began with the idea of a singular civic volume a centralised courthouse defined by monumentality and visual clarity. However, as the design process unfolded more considerations of accessibility, permeability, and public integration were introduced, the singular mass began to fragment. What emerged was not one dominant object, but a network of buildings: a distributed system of volumes arranged across the site in response to urban rhythms, human scale, and programmatic complexity. The decision to break the courthouse into multiple buildings reflects a conceptual move away from the image of justice as distant and monumental, toward one that is embedded, plural, and adaptive. The fragmented massing also opens up the site to light, air, and landscape, allowing outdoor spaces to be woven between the volumes plazas, gardens, and entry thresholds that soften the edge between civic architecture and daily life. Ultimately, the massing strategy is not only a spatial decision, but one that reflects openness rather than opacity, and a justice system physically distributed across the fabric of the city, rather than imposed from above.

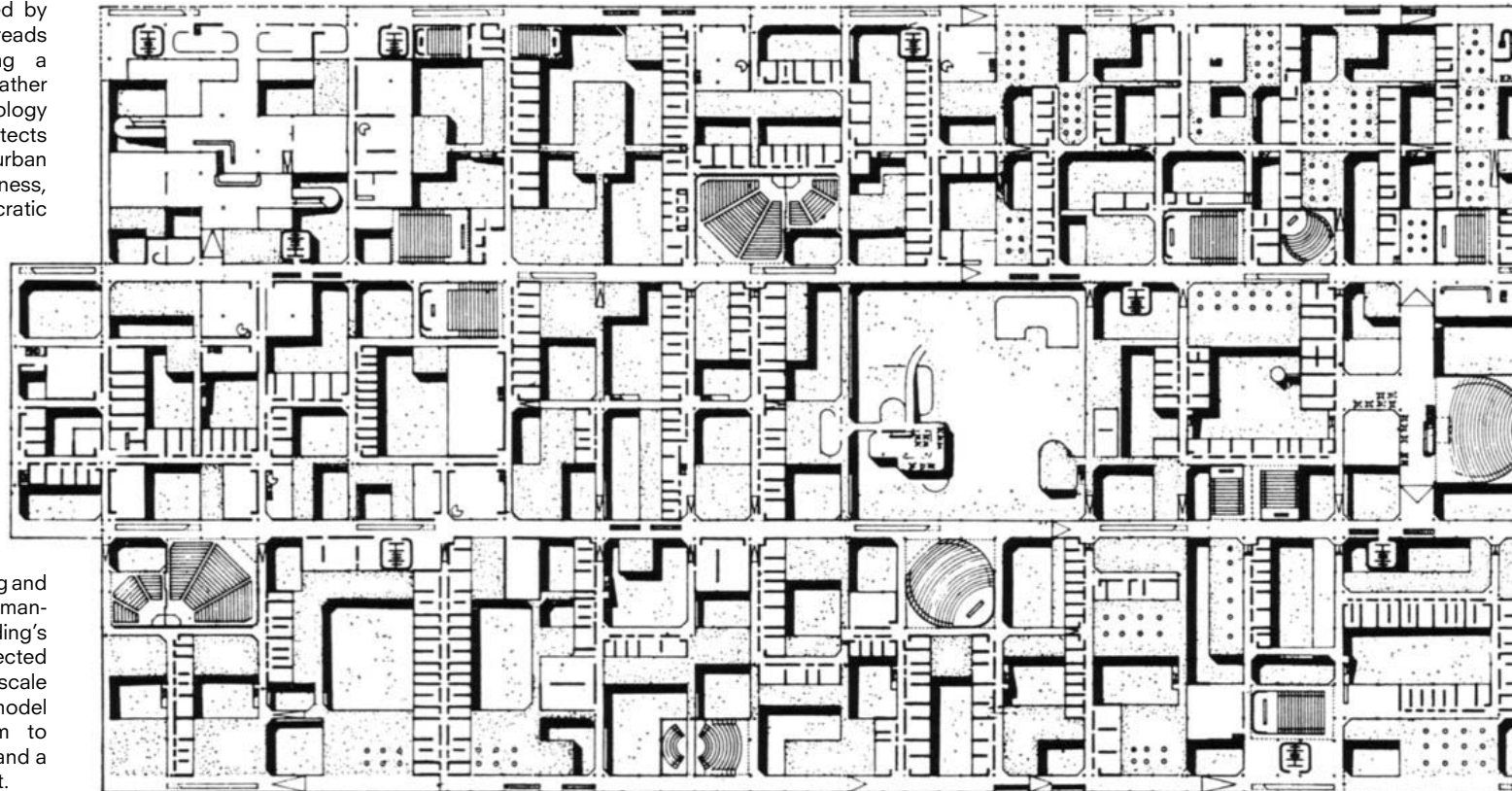


Den Haag Inauguration

The inauguration of The Hague's courthouse marked a significant moment for the justice system in the Netherlands. Designed to embody transparency, accessibility, and the rule of law, the building serves as a central hub for national and international judicial processes, including the International Court of Justice. Its modern architecture reflects a commitment to openness and fairness, fostering public trust in legal institutions. The courthouse's layout emphasizes clear circulation, security, and separation of functions to support efficient and dignified administration of justice. Since its opening, it has stood as a symbol of legal authority and a place where complex international and domestic cases are heard, reinforcing The Hague's role as a global centre for law and diplomacy.

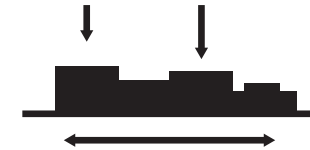
DELIBERATION

The **Mat Building** typology is defined by its expansive, low-rise form that spreads horizontally across a site, creating a network of interconnected spaces rather than focusing on verticality. The typology emerged in the mid-20th century as architects sought alternatives to dense, vertical urban developments and emphasises openness, permeability, and a more democratic spatial organization, making it particularly well-suited for civic centres, university campuses, and cultural institutions. Mat buildings often feature multiple access points and fluid circulation paths, encouraging movement and interaction throughout the complex. Their horizontal spread allows for greater programmatic flexibility, thereby creating a seamless relationship between interior and exterior spaces, often integrating courtyards, gardens, or plazas to blur the boundaries between the building and its surroundings, fostering a more human-scale environment despite the building's size. Its integration of open, interconnected spaces and emphasis on human-scale design make the mat building a key model for modern developments that aim to support both large-scale functionality and a more inclusive, accessible environment.

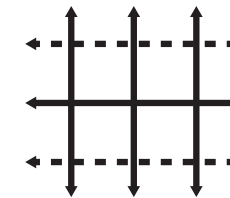


KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Mat buildings are characterized by their expansive horizontal footprint and low-rise form, favouring spread-out layouts over vertical construction. Central to their design is a flexible, modular grid system that supports adaptable and reconfigurable spaces, accommodating diverse and changing programmatic needs. This typology prioritizes strong integration with the surrounding context and community by seamlessly connecting interior spaces with outdoor elements such as courtyards, gardens, and plazas. The resulting openness and permeability foster social interaction, accessibility, and inclusivity. By promoting fluid circulation and multiple points of entry, mat buildings create dynamic environments that encourage engagement and evolve over time to serve both users and their broader urban or natural settings.



**HORIZONTAL EXPANSION
& LOW-RISE FORM**

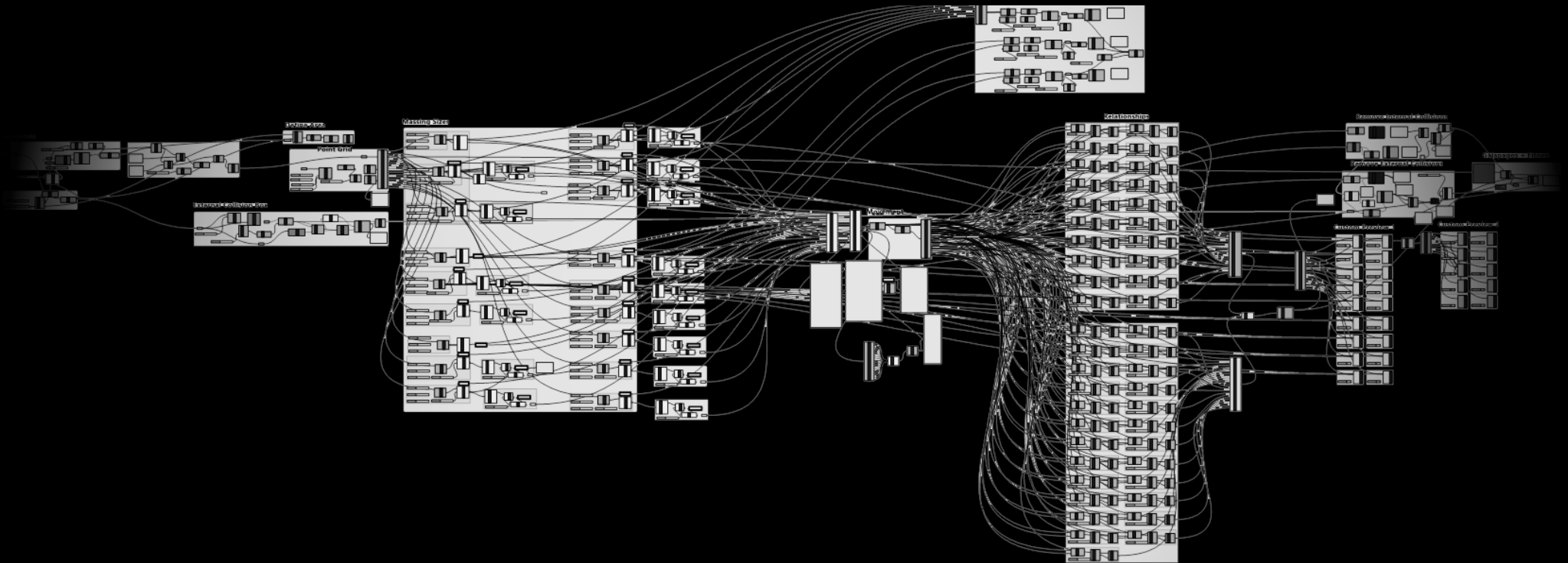


**FLEXIBLE, MODULAR
GRID SYSTEM**



**INTEGRATION WITH
CONTEXT AND
COMMUNITY**

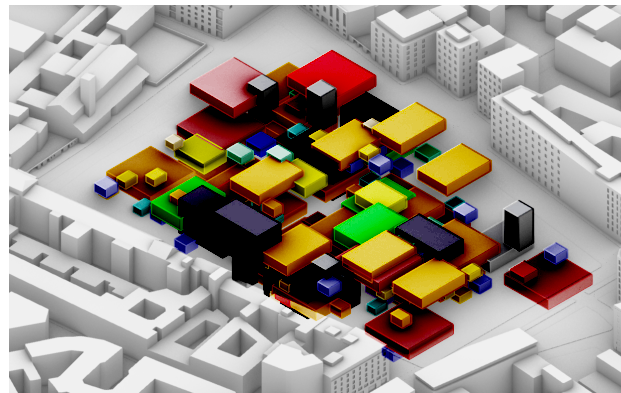
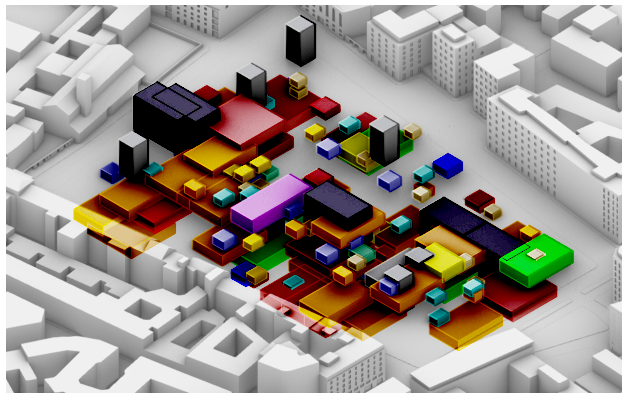
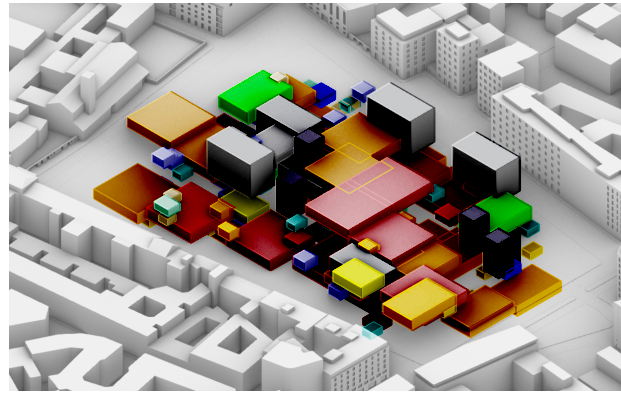
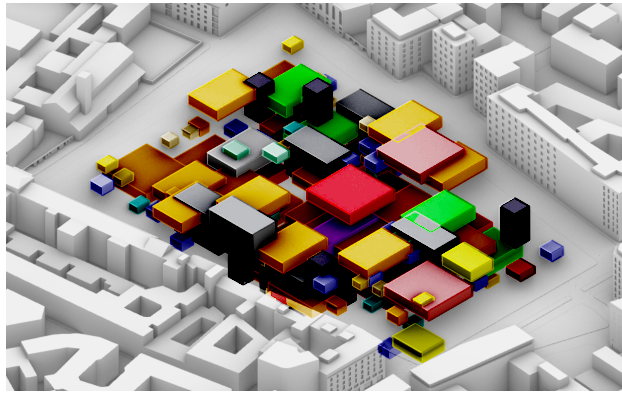
DIGITAL EXPLORATION



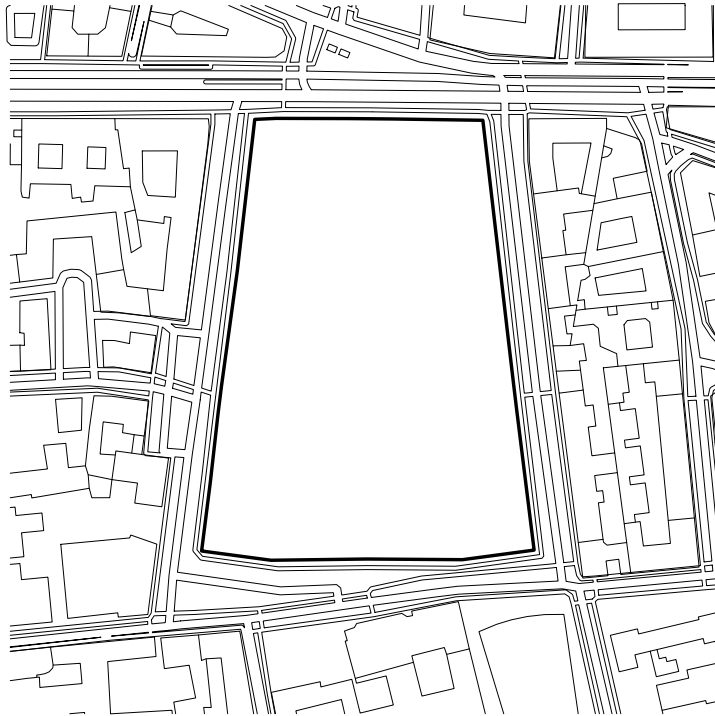
A Grasshopper script was employed to develop the initial strategy for the proposal by analysing spatial relationships within the program. The script evaluated proximity between different spaces both desirable and undesirable adjacencies and generated countless iterations to optimize layout configurations. As the script ran longer, it refined the arrangement further, progressively improving the programmatic efficiency and spatial organization based on predefined criteria. This computational approach enabled a data-driven and adaptable design process, giving the project a starting point based on objective spatial logic and performance.

The following Initial Adjacency Massings have been developed using a script (as displayed above) by James David Wilde, modified and extended for this project by Author.

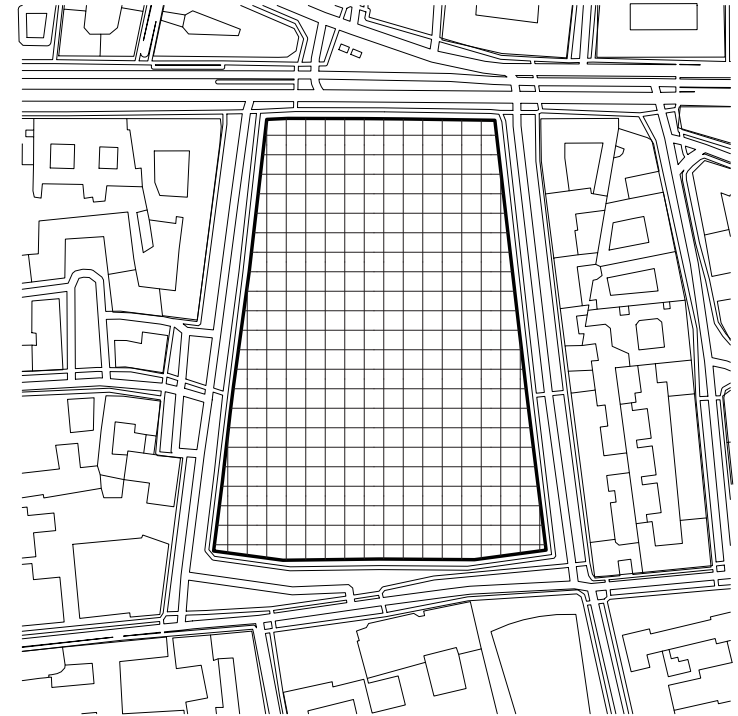




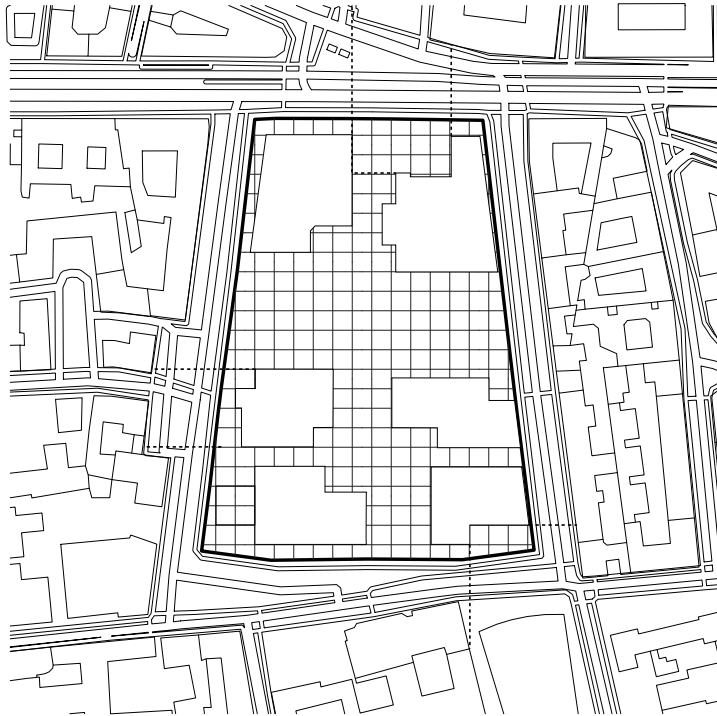
SITE INTEGRATION



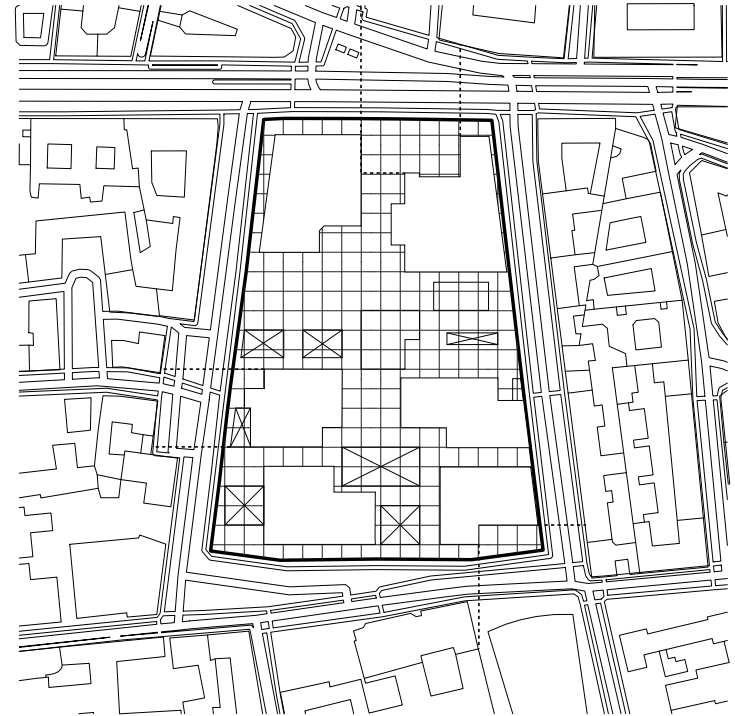
SITE



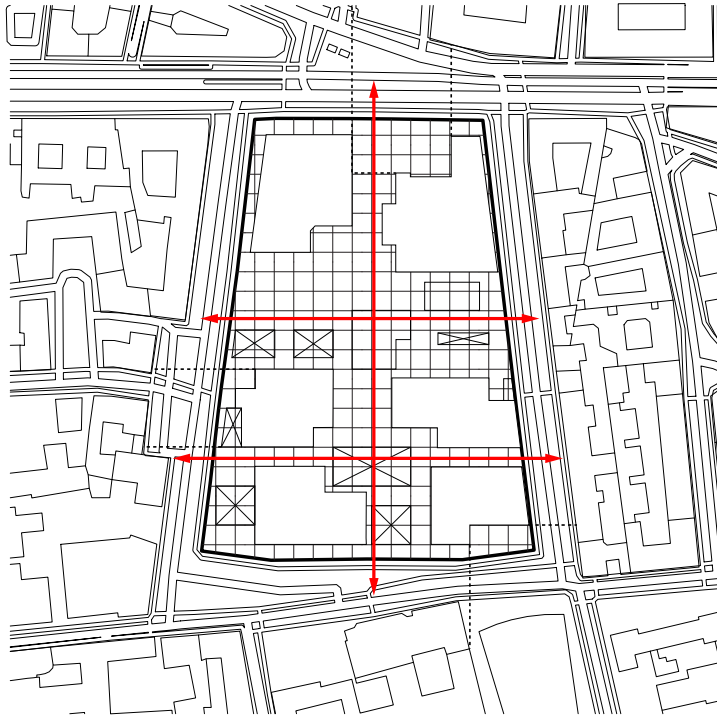
GRID | 6.5M



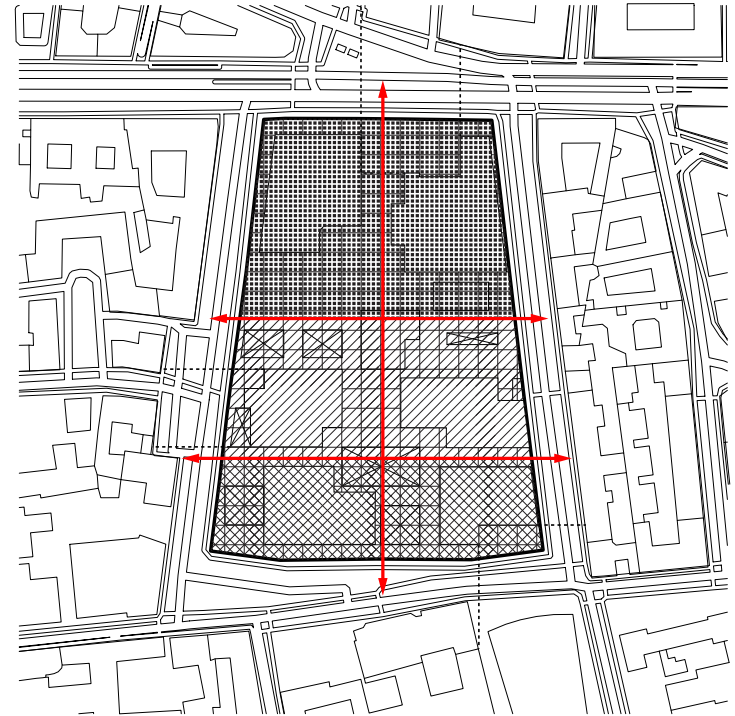
CONTEXT CONSIDERATION



VERTICAL CONNECTION



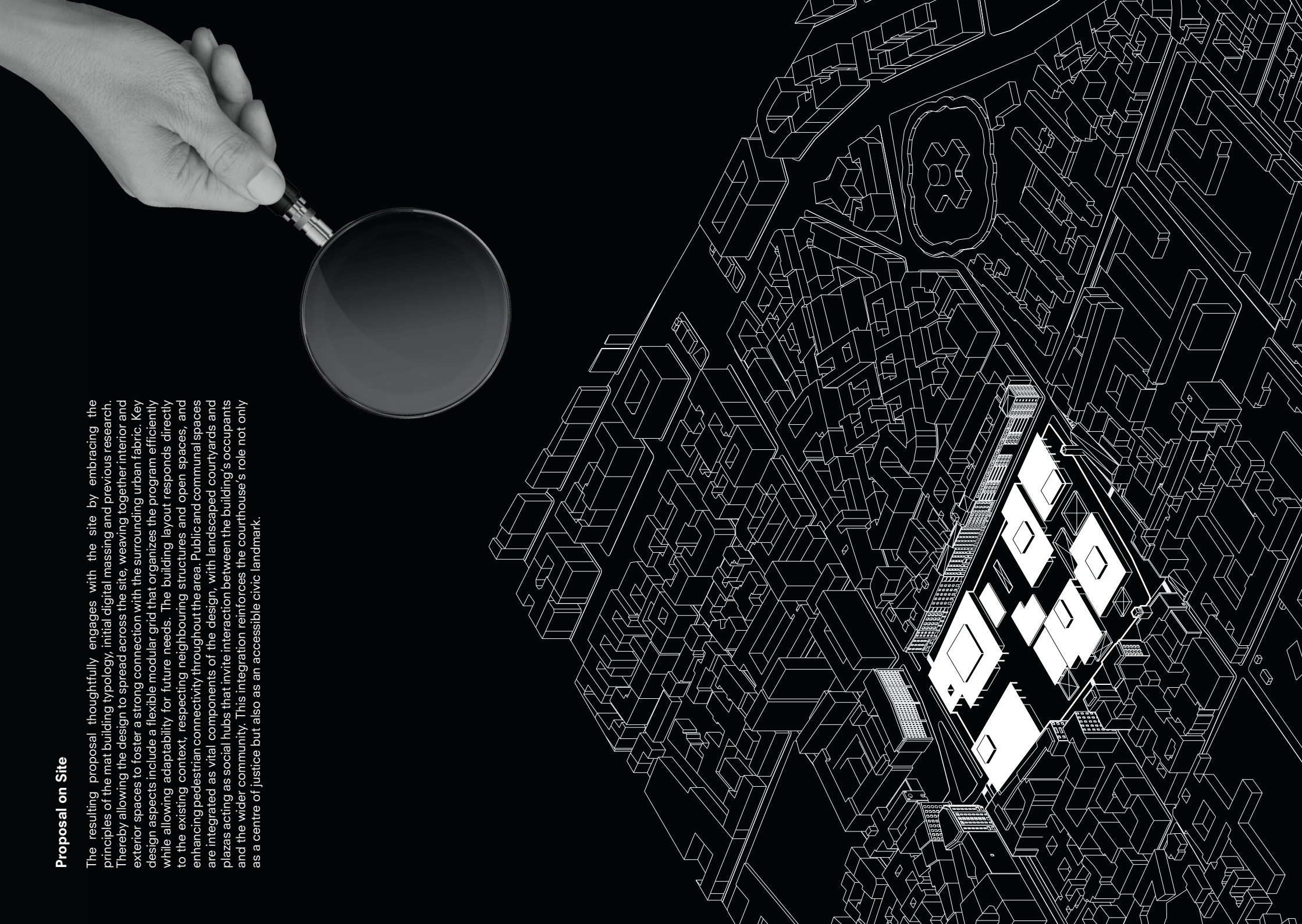
HORIZONTAL CONNECTION



ZONING

Proposal on Site

The resulting proposal thoughtfully engages with the site by embracing the principles of the mat building typology, initial digital massing and previous research. Thereby allowing the design to spread across the site, weaving together interior and exterior spaces to foster a strong connection with the surrounding urban fabric. Key design aspects include a flexible modular grid that organizes the program efficiently while allowing adaptability for future needs. The building layout responds directly to the existing context, respecting neighbouring structures and open spaces, and enhancing pedestrian connectivity throughout the area. Public and communal spaces are integrated as vital components of the design, with landscaped courtyards and plazas acting as social hubs that invite interaction between the building's occupants and the wider community. This integration reinforces the courthouse's role not only as a centre of justice but also as an accessible civic landmark.



First Floor | 1F

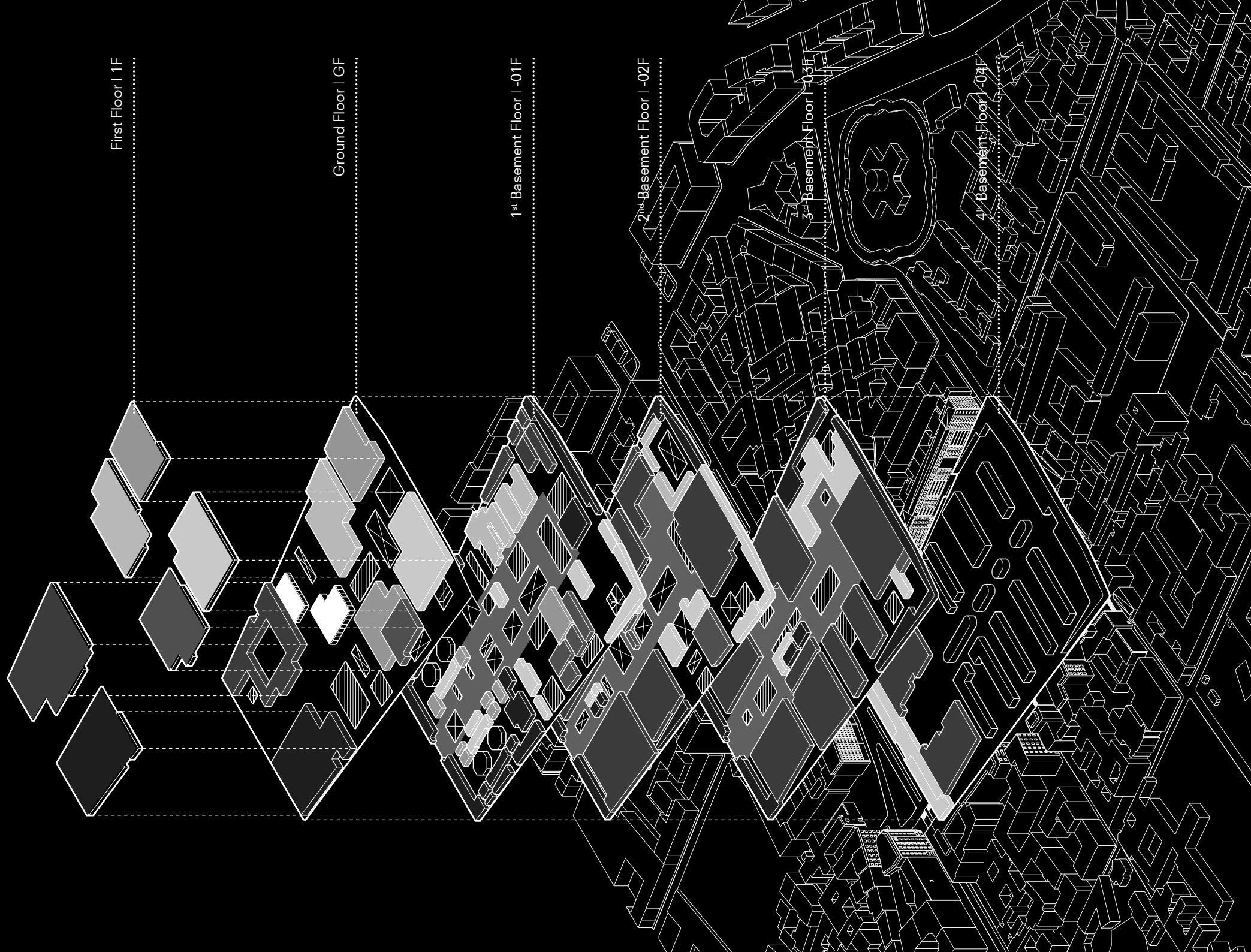
Ground Floor | GF

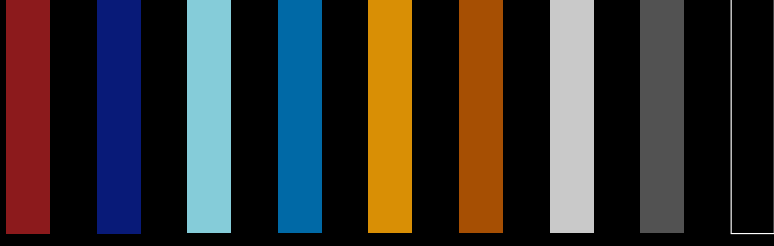
1st Basement Floor | -01F

2nd Basement Floor | -02F

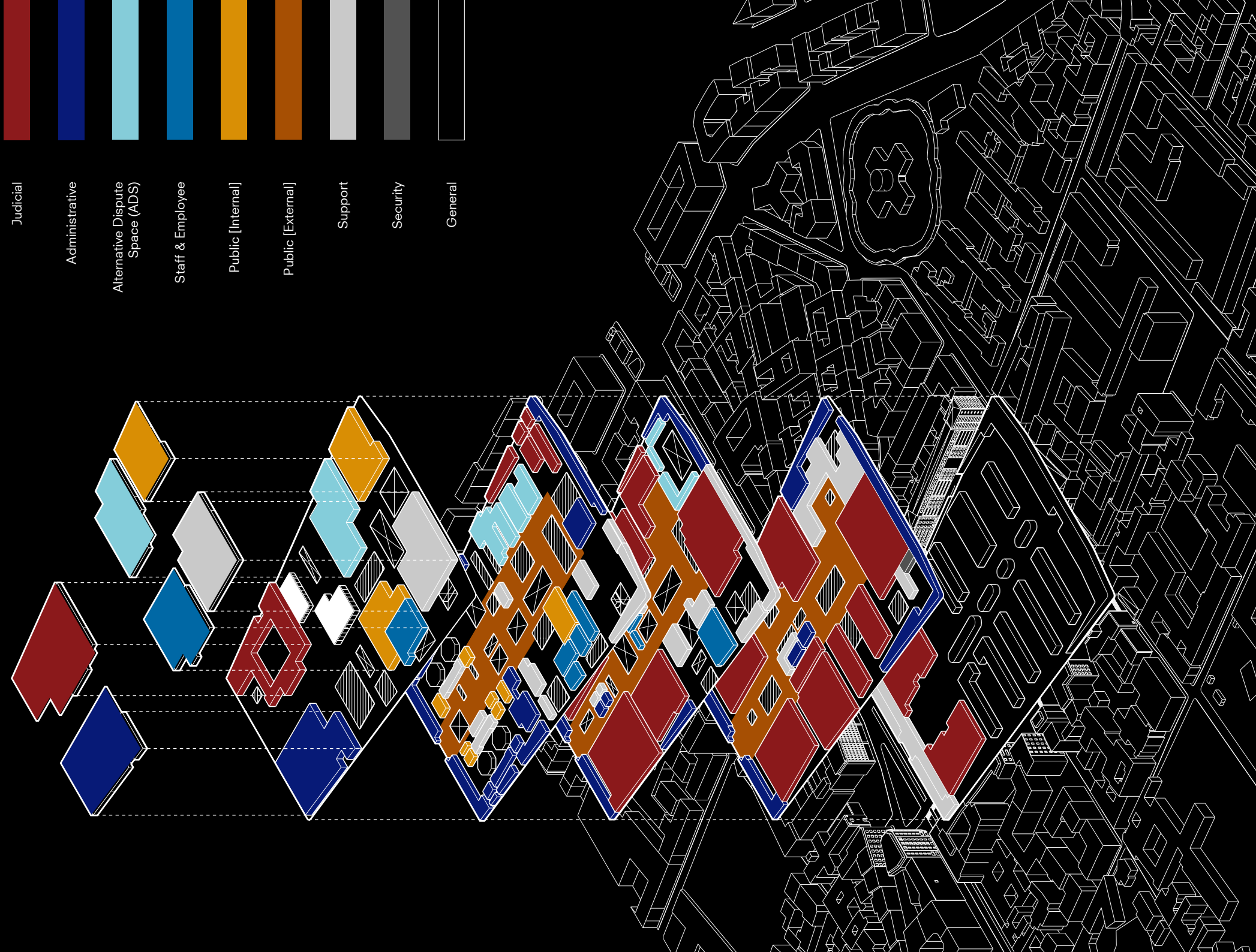
3rd Basement Floor | -03F

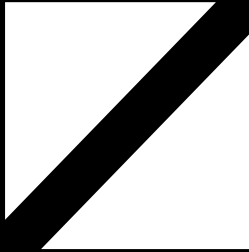
4th Basement Floor | -04F





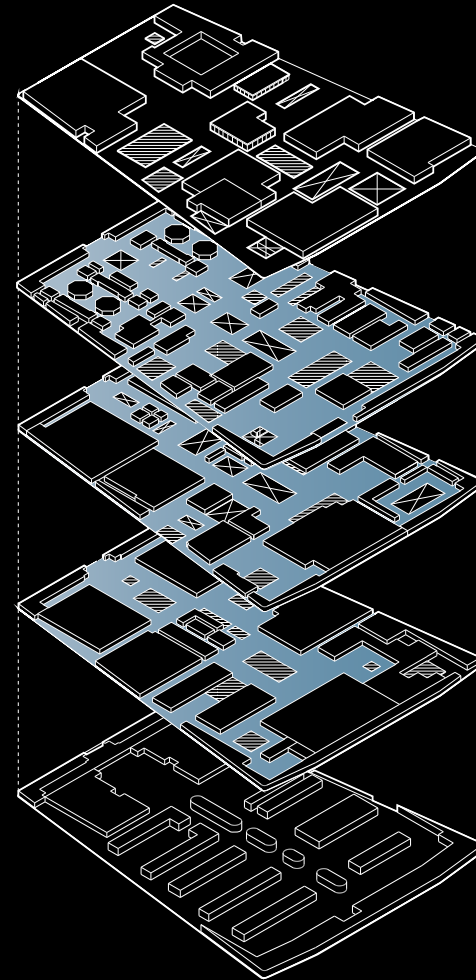
Judicial
Administrative
Alternative Dispute
Space (ADS)
Staff & Employee
Public [Internal]
Public [External]
Support
Security
General

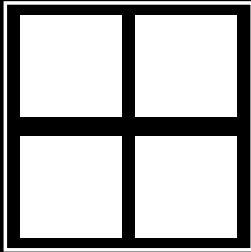




PASSAGE

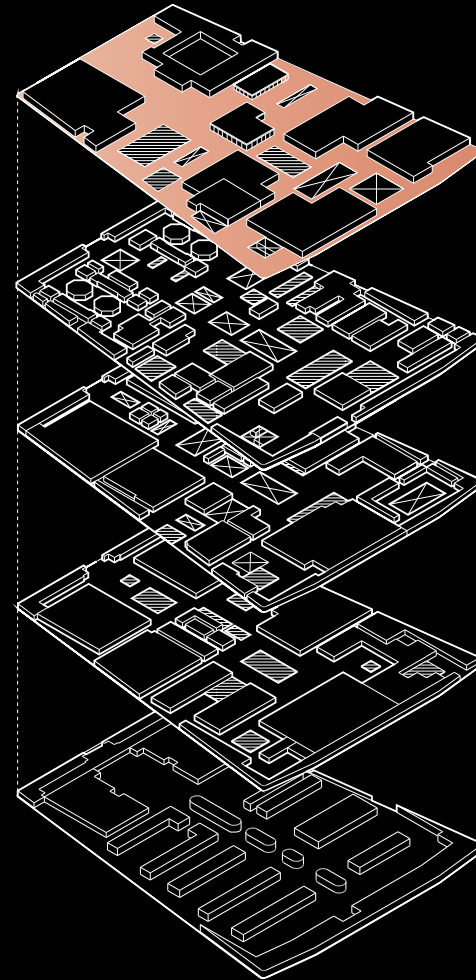
An underground passage is integrated as the main transit route within the building, providing secure, efficient circulation that connects key areas while minimizing surface-level congestion. This subterranean corridor enhances accessibility and privacy, streamlining movement for staff, visitors, and legal personnel throughout the complex.

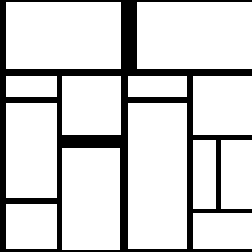




PIAZZA

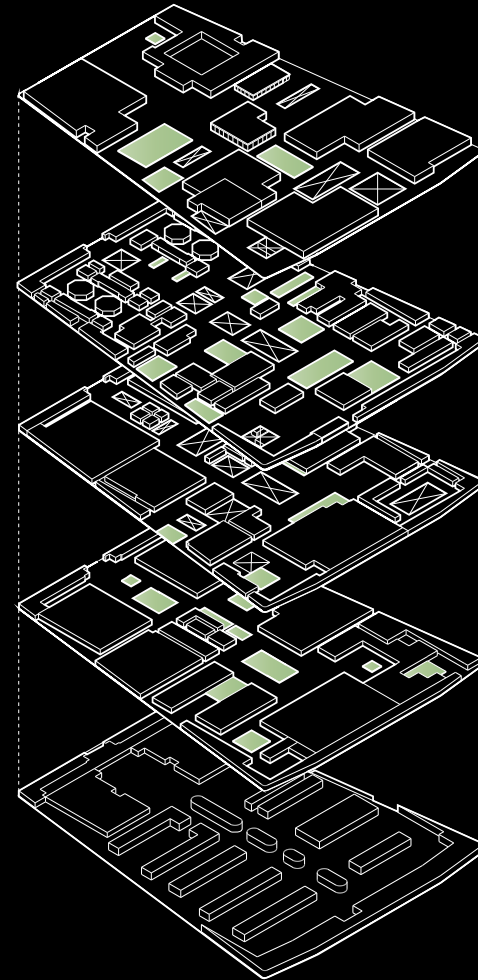
A ground floor piazza spans the entire site, serving as a unifying public space that fosters openness and community interaction. This expansive, accessible area connects different building entrances and outdoor zones, creating a vibrant civic heart that invites gathering, movement, and engagement throughout the day.





PATIOS

Smaller patios are thoughtfully distributed throughout the building, both above and below ground, providing pockets of light, ventilation, and moments of respite. These intimate outdoor spaces enhance the internal environment, creating visual and physical connections that break down scale and promote well-being across the complex.



PROPOSAL ON SITE

The new landscaping on site introduces an expansive park area that significantly enhances green space and public amenity within the surrounding urban environment. The park area takes into account the family court, located in the southern section of the site thereby providing a peaceful and inviting setting, and contributing to the well-being of both courthouse users and the wider community. Vehicle access is carefully managed with an underground parking entrance located on the south side, which helps reduce surface-level traffic and preserve the site's pedestrian-friendly qualities. To the north, the site is defined by a main street that serves as a vital urban axis, connecting the courthouse to the broader city fabric while emphasizing its civic importance. This clear northern boundary strengthens the building's presence and accessibility. A key design focus is the enhanced permeability throughout the site, achieved through a network of interconnected pathways, plazas, and green spaces that invite free and intuitive movement for pedestrians. Thereby encouraging the public to engage and ensures the courthouse feels accessible and integrated, rather than isolated, within the urban context



- **Offices & Gallery**

This area combines internal administrative functions with a public-facing gallery. The gallery provides space for exhibitions on legal history, public art, or civic education, inviting transparency and cultural dialogue. It serves as a soft interface between institutional authority and public curiosity, encouraging ongoing engagement with the justice system.

- **Staff Offices & Café**

A dedicated workplace zone for courthouse staff, this area includes focused office environments alongside an informal café. It fosters a sense of workplace community, providing opportunities for rest, informal meetings, and social interaction essential in a high-stress legal environment.

- **Safe and Victim Support Spaces**

Located with discretion and care, this zone offers protected environments for vulnerable individuals navigating the justice process. Waiting rooms, consultation spaces, and quiet areas are designed with sensitivity, ensuring dignity, privacy, and psychological safety.

- **Study Spaces and Meeting Rooms**

These flexible, multipurpose rooms support case preparation, legal research, and educational activities. They are accessible to legal professionals, students, and visiting researchers, reinforcing the courthouse's role as a space for knowledge and professional development.

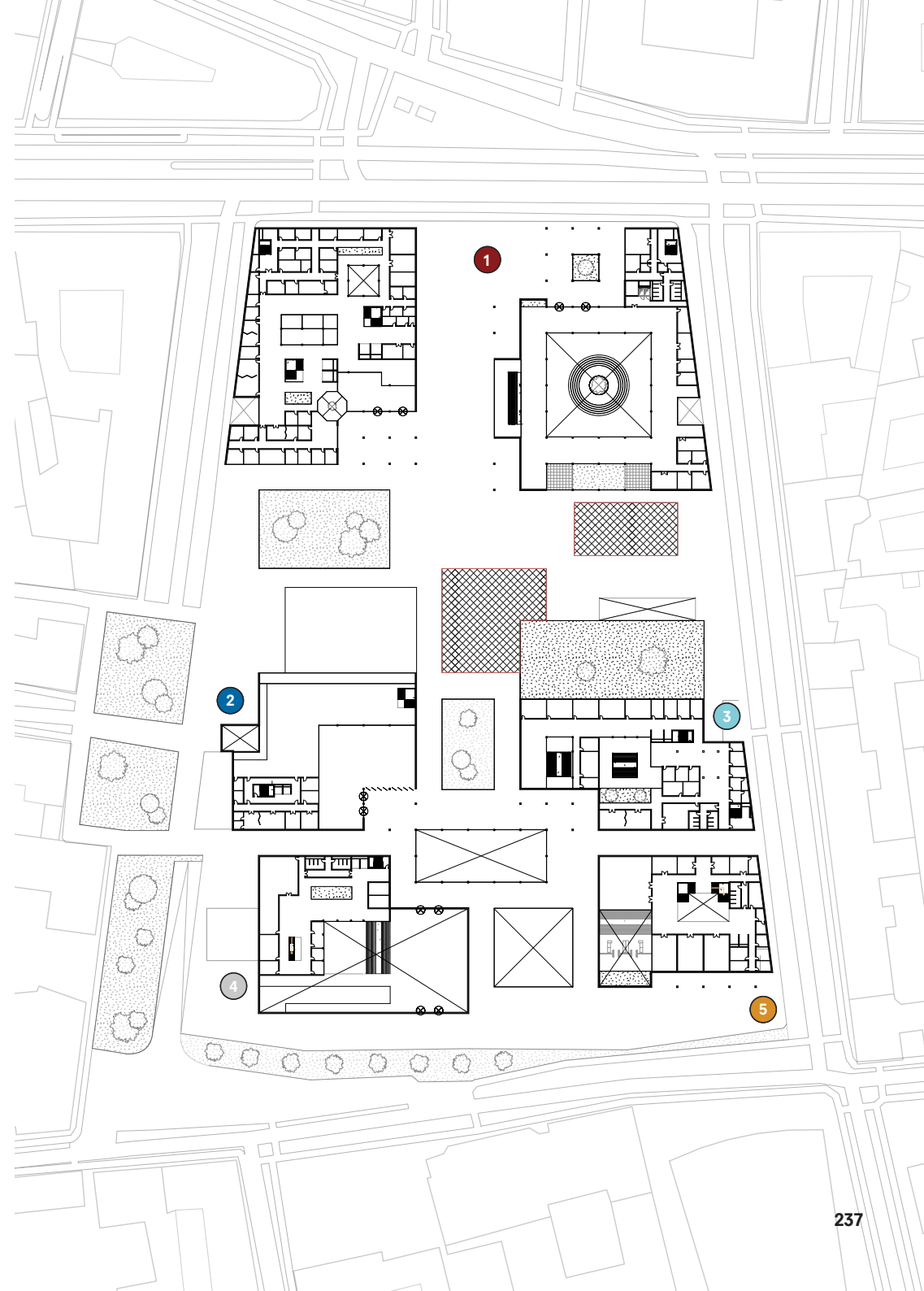
- **Offices and Community Rooms**

This hybrid zone blends administrative office functions with adaptable community-oriented spaces. Workshops, outreach events, and public programmes can be hosted here, reflecting a justice system that values inclusion, participation, and service beyond the courtroom.

Level 01 builds upon the civic foundation established at ground level, offering a mix of public, professional, and supportive spaces that extend the courthouse's role beyond formality into care, collaboration, and community connection. This floor is designed as a quieter, more reflective zone a place for dialogue, support, and civic engagement.

- ① Offices & Gallery
- ② Staff Offices & Café
- ③ Safe & Victim Support Spaces
- ④ Study Spaces & Meeting Rooms
- ⑤ Offices & Community Rooms

- Judicial
- Administration
- Alternative Dispute Space [ADS]
- Staff & Employee
- Public [Internal]
- Judicial [External]
- Support
- Security
- General



- **Administration and Trial Centre**

At the core of the plan, this zone houses courtrooms and legal administration. It is the operational engine of the building, designed to support the formal delivery of justice.

- **Culture and Staff Centre**

Providing essential support for those who work within the justice system, this area includes staff rest areas, workspaces, and spaces for cultural programming and internal events as well as an art gallery. It reinforces community, well-being, and professional dignity, offering moments of pause and connection within the working day.

- **Safe Spaces and Alternative Dispute Centre**

Set apart for privacy and calm, this centre offers a quieter, more personal alternative to formal litigation. It includes mediation rooms, restorative justice spaces, and supportive environments for vulnerable individuals. The spatial quality here is warm and welcoming, encouraging resolution over confrontation.

- **Education Centre**

This zone is open to students, researchers, and the broader public. With classrooms, archives, and seminar rooms, it transforms the courthouse into a place of learning and engagement. It supports civic understanding of the legal system, reinforcing transparency and trust.

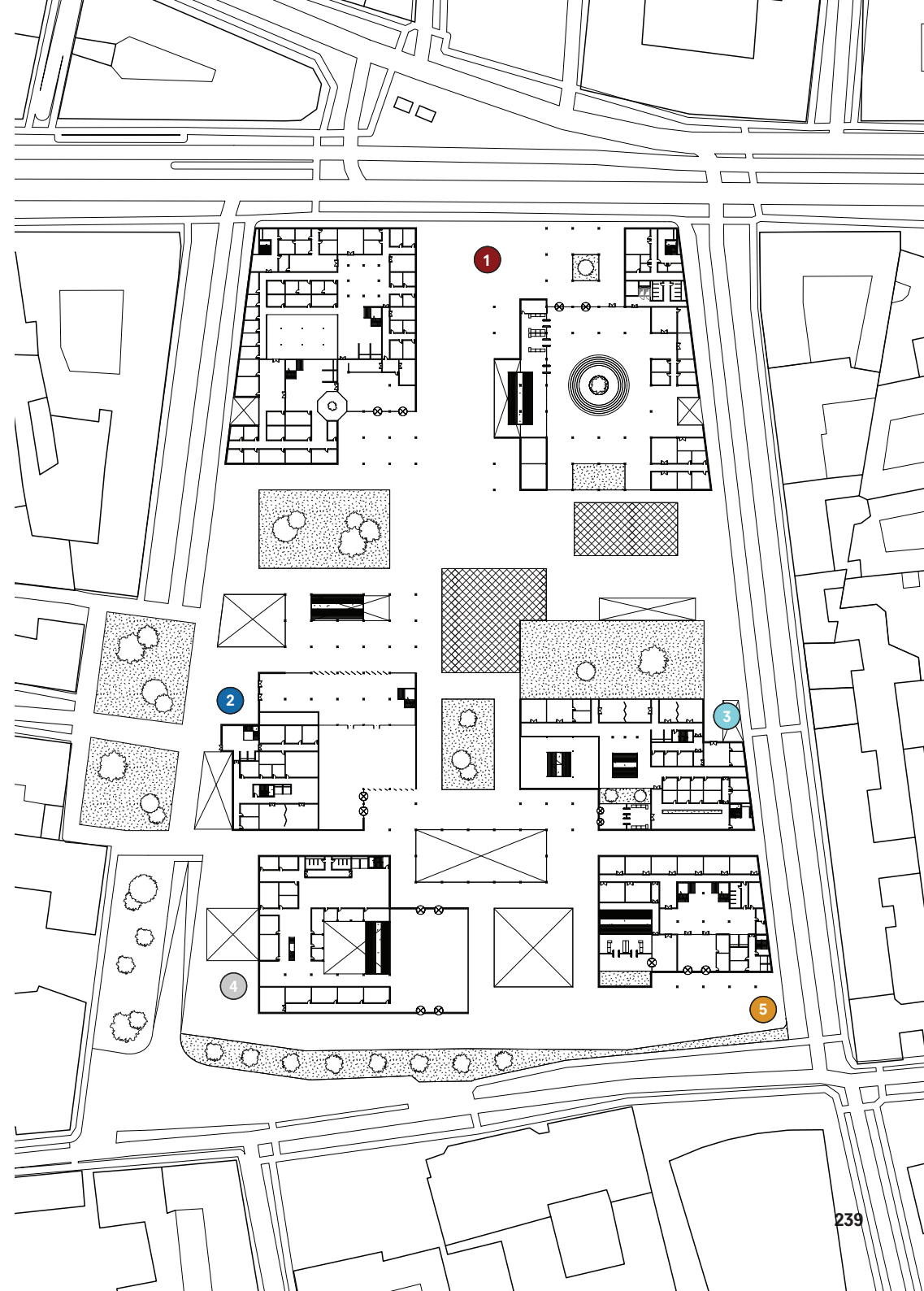
- **Community and Information Centre**

Located at the most public-facing edge of the building, this centre offers legal aid services, community rooms, and flexible event spaces. Designed for accessibility, it invites people in whether they are seeking support, information, or simply orientation. It is the courthouse's most inclusive face, bridging the gap between institution and community

Level00 is conceived as a civic threshold a space where the institution of justice meets the public it serves. Organised into five distinct yet interconnected zones, this level balances formal judicial functions with accessibility, education, and care, offering a holistic approach to justice as both process and public service.

- ① Administration & Trial Centre
- ② Culture & Staff Centre
- ③ Safe Space & Alternative Dispute Centre
- ④ Education Centre
- ⑤ Community & Information Centre

- Judicial
- Administration
- Alternative Dispute Space [ADS]
- Staff & Employee
- Public [Internal]
- Judicial [External]
- Support
- Security
- General



LEVEL | -01

- **Main Atria:**

Placed on the northern end, the main atria create visual connections and distinct wayfinding points and transform the underground space into a bright, open environment.

- **Main Transit Passage:**

This primary circulation spine links all key functions below ground, allowing for smooth and intuitive movement between public, semi-public, and restricted zones.

- **Support Spaces & Administration**

Offices:

Centrally located for operational efficiency, these areas house essential back-of-house functions, including case management, clerical work, and internal coordination.

- **Staff Spaces:**

Private areas for courthouse staff provide amenities such as changing rooms, rest areas, and quiet zones, offering comfort and retreat from the formal public-facing roles above.

- **Art Gallery:**

Positioned near public circulation routes, the underground gallery offers a cultural moment, a contemplative space that fosters engagement, reflection, and connection within the judicial environment.

- **Alternative Dispute Spaces/Conference Rooms:**

These quieter, more intimate rooms support mediation, negotiation, and restorative justice processes, offering flexible environments that reduce confrontation and promote resolution.

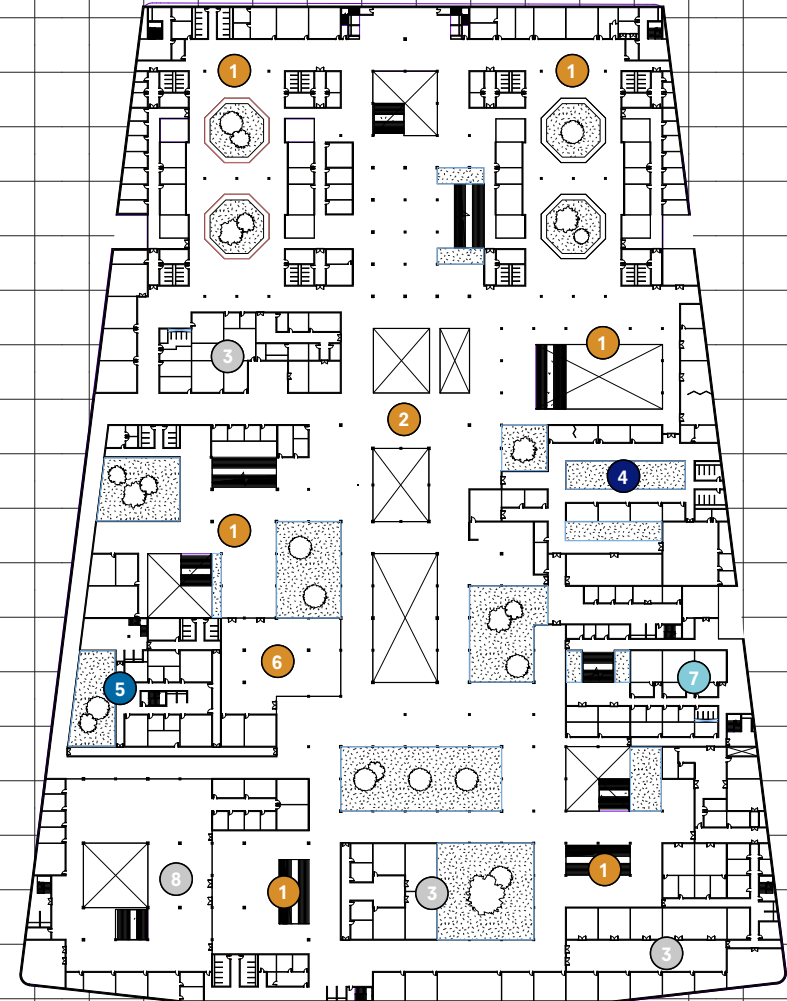
- **Library and Meeting Rooms:**

A dedicated zone for study, research, and discussion. Adjacent meeting rooms provide space for group work, case preparation, and educational activities.

Level -01 located below ground is conceived as a connective and supportive layer a foundation not only in structure but in function. It accommodates key programmes that require privacy, controlled access, or quiet focus, while also allowing for generous public movement through light-filled atria and transitional spaces.

- 1 Main Atria
- 2 Main Transit Passage
- 3 Support Spaces [Administration]
- 4 Administration
- 5 Staff Spaces
- 6 Art Gallery
- 7 Alternative Dispute Spaces
- 8 Library & Meeting Rooms

- Judicial
- Administration
- Alternative Dispute Space [ADS]
- Staff & Employee
- Public [Internal]
- Judicial [External]
- Support
- Security
- General



LEVEL I -02

- **Main Atria:**

Smaller atrias mark each entrance of each centre, thereby serving as wayfinders and gathering points, ensuring the space feels accessible and coherent.

- **Main Transit Passage:**

Acting as the spine of the level, this passage links all major zones from courtrooms to study spaces enabling clear, intuitive movement for both staff and visitors.

- **Support Spaces & Administration Offices:**

Strategically located near circulation hubs, these areas house the operational heart of the institution clerical teams, case coordination, scheduling, and administrative support.

- **Staff Spaces:**

Dedicated amenities such as rest areas, lockers, and quiet rooms support the courthouse workforce, offering comfort and retreat in a high-stakes environment.

- **Specialised Courtroom:**

Designed for complex or high-sensitivity cases, this courtroom includes advanced security measures, enhanced acoustic treatment, and adaptable layouts to meet diverse procedural needs.

- **Regular Courtrooms:**

A series of standard courtrooms support the daily rhythm of hearings and proceedings. Positioned for efficient circulation and controlled access, connected but acoustically separated to preserve privacy and focus.

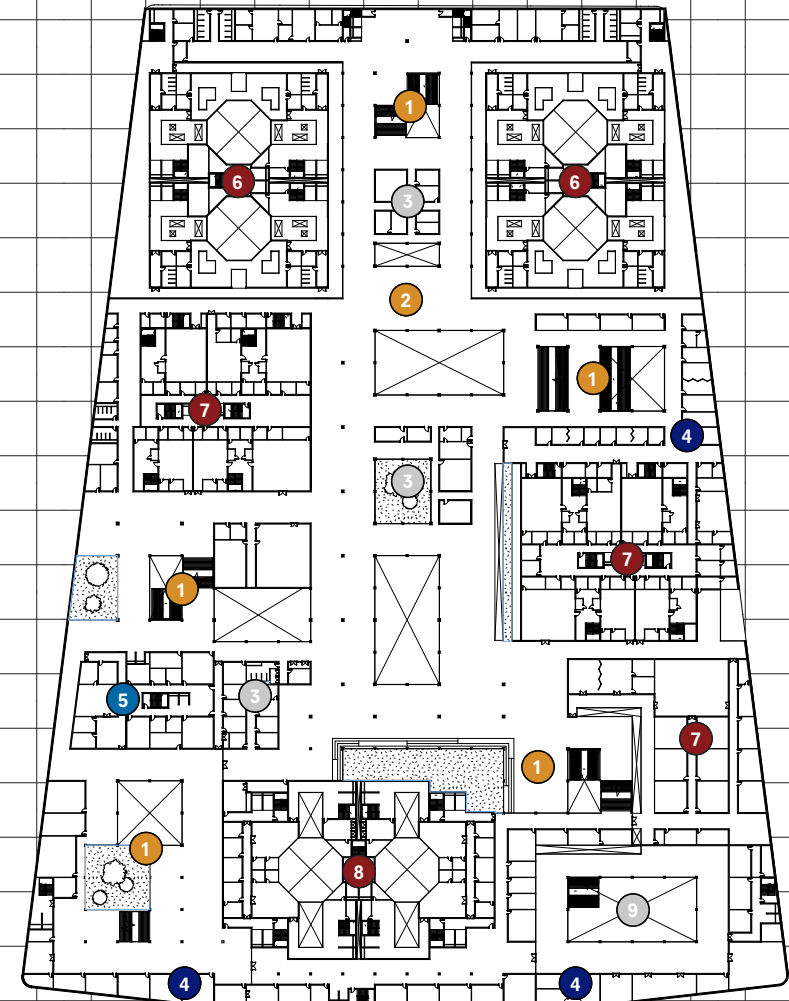
- **Mock Courtroom (Educational Use):**

Adjacent to public and study zones, used for legal education, student training, and community engagement. It mirrors the design of real courtrooms to simulate authentic procedural environments.

Level -02 is designed as a functional and symbolic foundation of the judicial complex a space where circulation, support, learning, and adjudication coexist. Though situated beneath the surface, it is far from secondary; daylight-filled atria and spatial hierarchy ensure a sense of openness and dignity throughout.

- 1 Main Atria
- 2 Main Transit Passage
- 3 Support Spaces [Administration]
- 4 Administration
- 5 Staff Spaces
- 6 Specialised Courtroom
- 7 Regular Courtroom
- 8 Mock Courtroom
- 9 Study Space

- Judicial
- Administration
- Alternative Dispute Space [ADS]
- Staff & Employee
- Public [Internal]
- Judicial [External]
- Support
- Security
- General



LEVEL I -03

- **Traditional Courtrooms (High Density):**

Organised in a compact, repeatable grid, these courtrooms follow a classical layout judge's bench, counsel tables, and are designed for consistent, day-to-day hearings.

- **Specialised Courtroom:**

A larger, more flexible courtroom remains integrated on this level to host complex, high-profile, or multi-party cases. Enhanced security, adaptable spatial arrangements, and support rooms are key features.

- **Main Transit Passage:**

A linear, central corridor efficiently connects all courtrooms and adjacent programmatic spaces.

- **Support Spaces (Administration):**

Closely linked to the courtrooms, these rooms house clerical staff, case managers, and scheduling officers who support the fast-paced procedural flow on this level.

- **Staff Spaces:**

Amenities for staff are positioned to provide quick access to courtrooms while allowing moments of respite. These include lounges, lockers, and internal meeting points.

- **Mock Courtroom (Educational Use):**

Maintained on this level for law students or professional training, this room mimics traditional courtroom layouts and allows real-time observation of adjacent working courts.

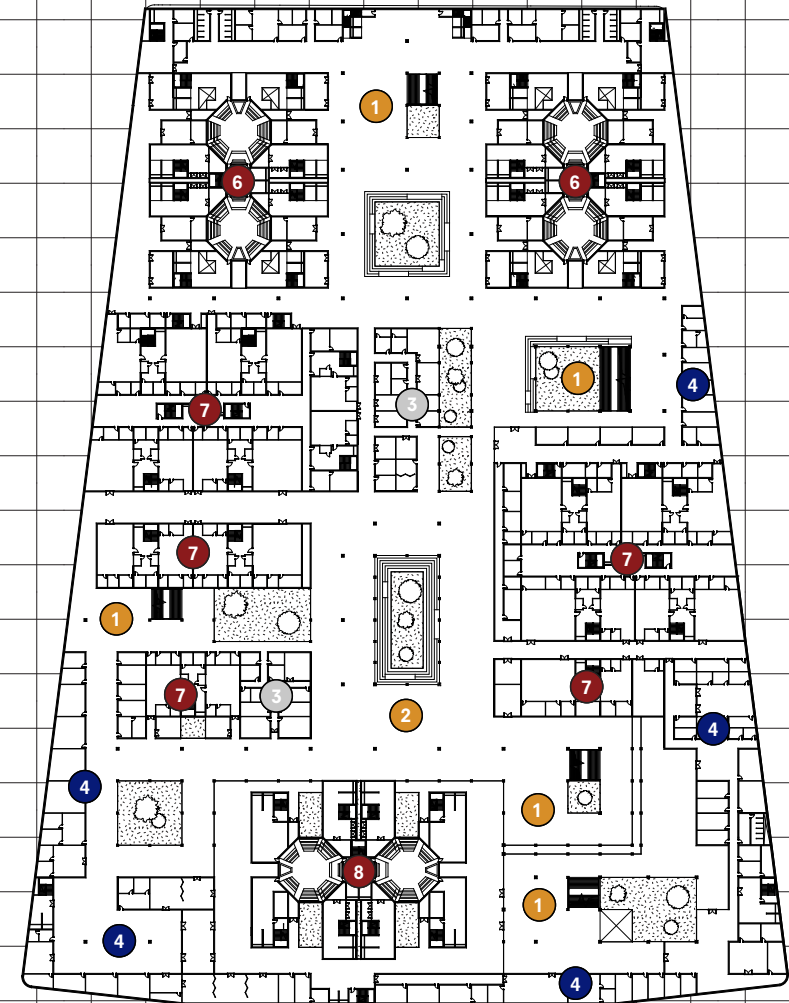
- **Study Spaces:**

Though more limited here due to the formal nature of the level, compact study zones and preparation rooms are available for legal professionals and students needing close proximity to proceedings.

Level -03 representing the operational core of the judicial complex a high-density layer focused on delivering justice at scale. Located beneath the more open and educational functions of the level above, it prioritises clarity, security, and efficient movement while maintaining the dignity and gravitas expected of judicial architecture.

- 1 Main Atria
- 2 Main Transit Passage
- 3 Support Spaces [Administration]
- 4 Administration
- 5 Staff Spaces
- 6 Specialised Courtroom
- 7 Regular Courtroom
- 8 Mock Courtroom
- 9 Study Space

- Judicial
- Administration
- Alternative Dispute Space [ADS]
- Staff & Employee
- Public [Internal]
- Judicial [External]
- Support
- Security
- General



LEVEL I -04

- **Administration and Storage:**

This zone houses long-term archives, evidence storage, and back-office administration that doesn't require public interface. Located away from public circulation, it ensures the secure handling of sensitive materials and the efficient organisation of internal workflows.

- **Specialised Courtrooms:**

Discreetly located on this level, these courtrooms are reserved for high-security or confidential cases. Direct connections to secure circulation routes including holding areas and restricted entries allow for the movement of protected individuals or sensitive materials without crossing public zones.

- **Restricted Parking (Judges):**

A secure and direct-access parking area is provided exclusively for judges and senior legal personnel. Its proximity to private circulation cores ensures safe, efficient entry and exit from the building without exposure to public areas.

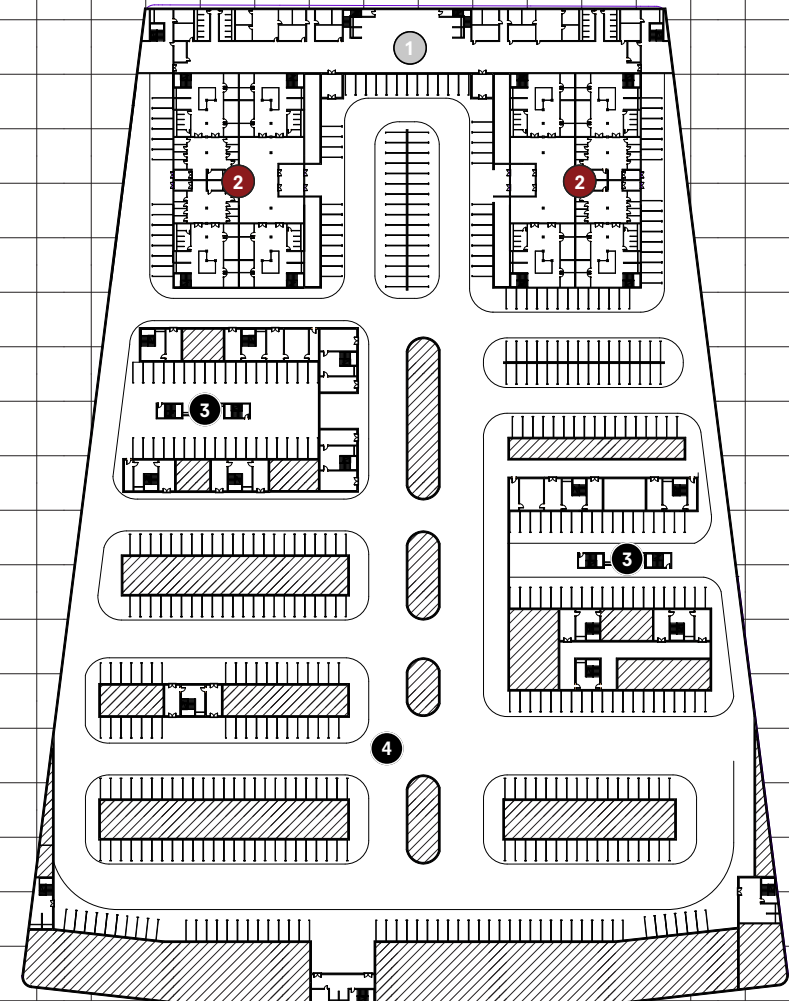
- **General Parking (Jury & Court Staff):**

A separate parking zone accommodates jury members, court staff, and other authorised personnel. Clear zoning and access control maintain separation between roles while ensuring smooth daily operation.

Level -04 as the lowest level of the complex serves as the logistical and infrastructural foundation of the justice system. Designed for controlled access and operational support, this floor is primarily dedicated to secure circulation, storage, and specialised functions that require spatial separation and discretion.

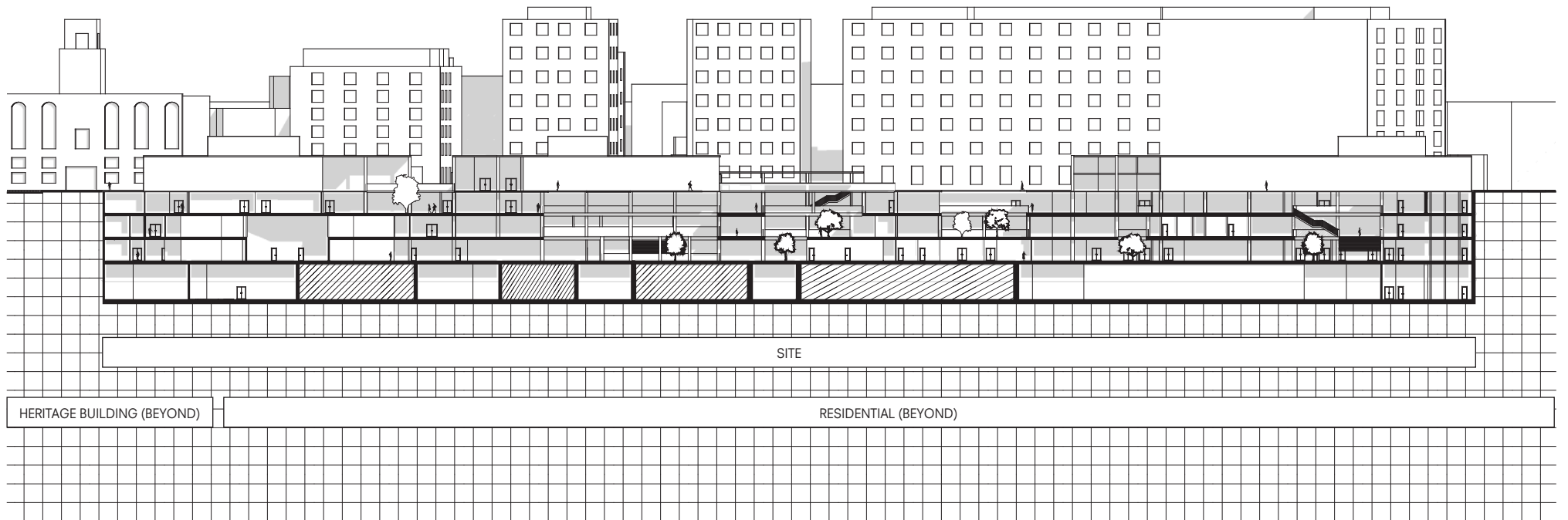
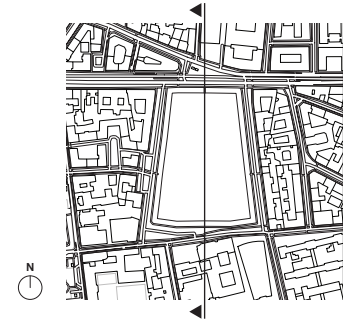
- 1 Administration & Storage
- 2 Specialised Courtrooms
- 3 Restricted Parking [Judges]
- 4 General Parking [Jury & Court Staff]

- Judicial
- Administration
- Alternative Dispute Space [ADS]
- Staff & Employee
- Public [Internal]
- Judicial [External]
- Support
- Security
- General

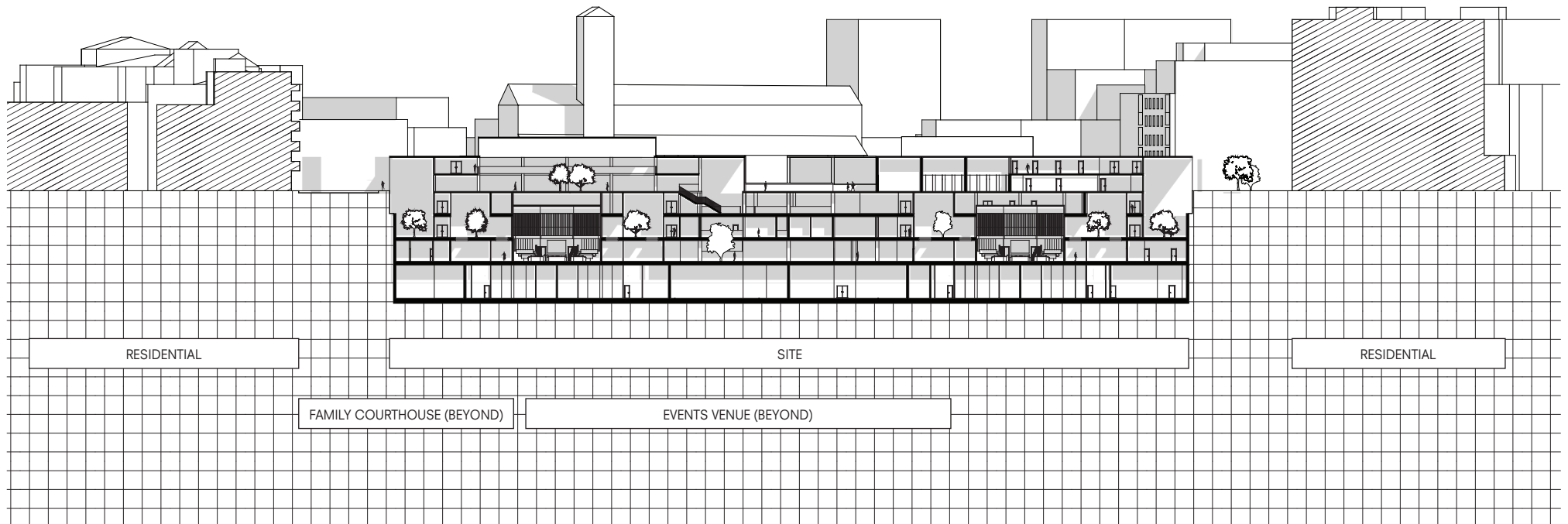


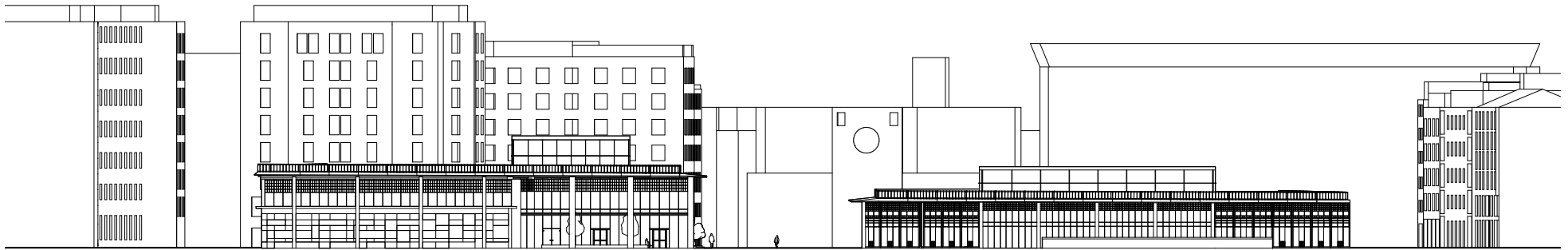
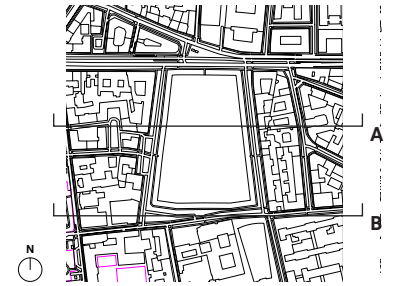
Deliberation

LONG SECTION

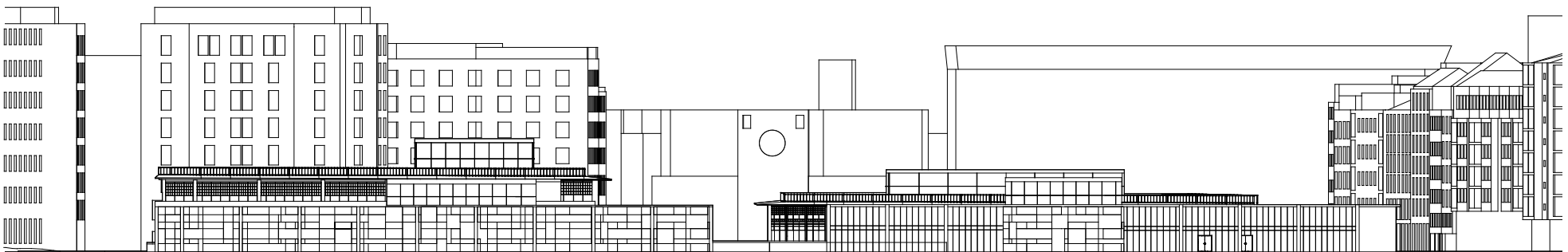


CROSS SECTION





Elevation A | Formal Space

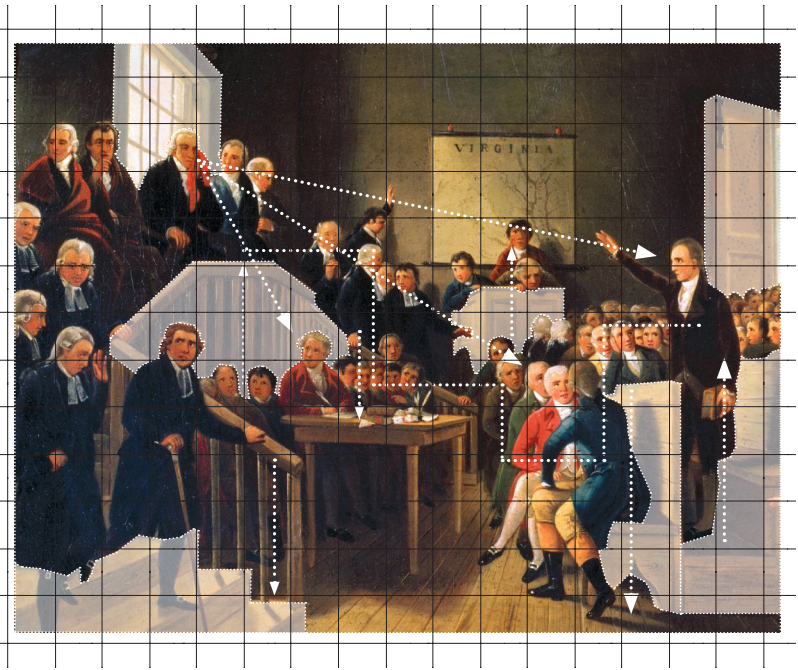


Elevation B | Informal Space

THE COURTROOM

The Courtroom

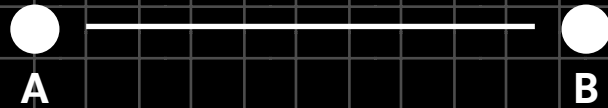
SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS



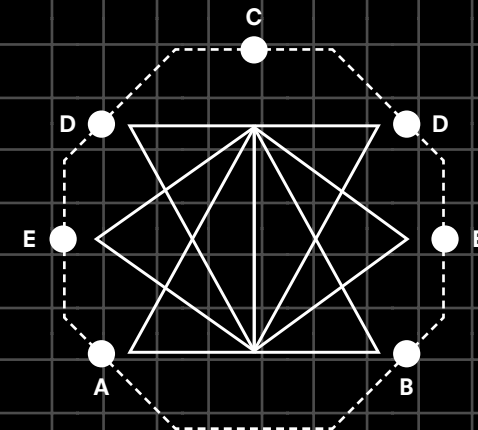
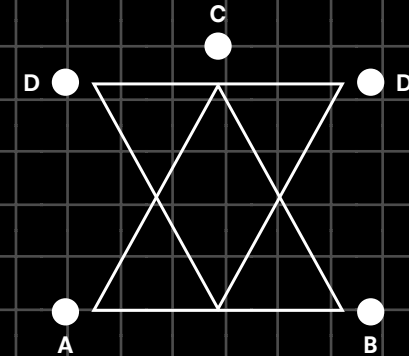
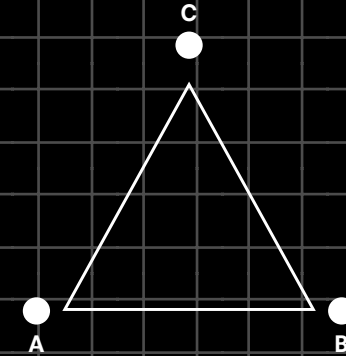
SPATIAL MANIFESTATION WITHIN THE COURTROOM

ENCLOSURE	PROXIMITY	INDEPENDANCE	MATERIALITY
ARRANGEMENT	ACCESSIBILITY	PROGRESS	DESIGN
VISIBILITY	PROTECTION	STABILITY	HEIGHT
PROPORTIONS	OPENNESS	EQUALITY	SCALE
FLEXIBILITY	SECURITY	SEGREGATION	FLOW
POSITIONING	POWER	ACCOUSTICS	LEVELS

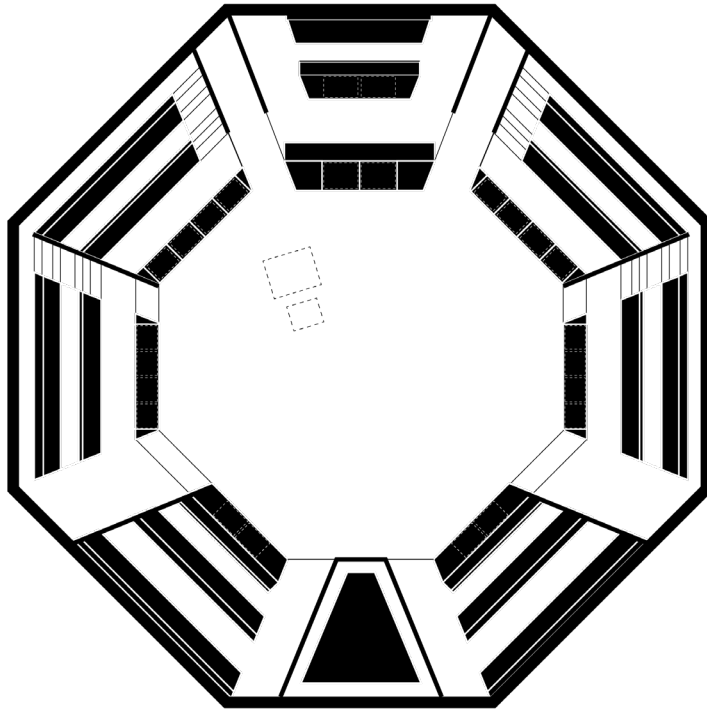
CONCEPT



A legal dispute begins as a tension between two opposing sides: Party A and Party B the plaintiff and the defendant. Their interaction forms a single axis of conflict. When the judge enters, a third point is introduced, transforming the line into a triangle. This simple shift changes the nature of the space: from direct confrontation to structured deliberation. The judge, positioned centrally, becomes a neutral anchor enabling dialogue rather than division. As more roles enter the space, the geometry evolves. The lawyers, as advocates, flank their respective parties, guiding and framing the narrative. The jury, as impartial listeners, form a collective conscience. The public, observers of transparency, and the press, conveyors of accountability, add layers of visibility and scrutiny. With these roles present the courtroom expands into an octagonal structure. Each facet represents a function, and the responsibility that comes with it. No longer a binary arena, the courtroom becomes a space of complex balance, where each side is held in check not only by the judge, but by the shared presence of others. The octagon, in this sense, is not just a diagram it's a spatial principle. It creates a room where justice is not imposed from above, but emerges through interaction, visibility, and shared responsibility. A space where conflict is contained, voices are heard, and the shape of truth is pursued collectively.



THE SPACE



Designed to feel like a **space of negotiation** and **conversation**.

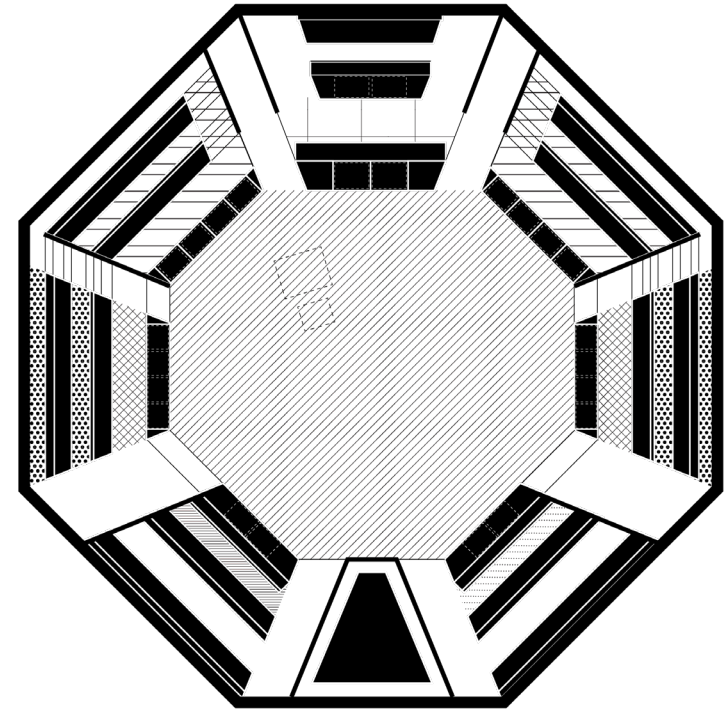
Limited physical boundaries.

Open sightlines and **enhanced acoustics**.

All actors are placed at the **same height** with distance from each other as a security measure.

No clearly defined **"front"** and **"back"**.

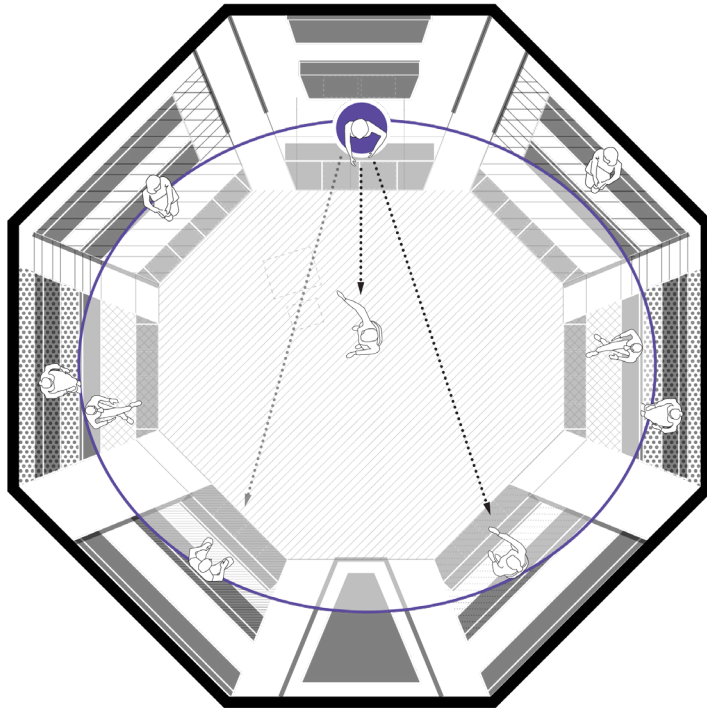
THE ACTORS SPACES



Actor arrangement is **balanced** through a **side by side** circular nature giving a better impression of **unity** and **open conversation**.

Each actor's spatial position in the courtroom is **relative to each other**, with the judge and jury sitting **side by side** opposite to the Plaintiff and Defendant, with the public on both sides.

THE JUDGE



Equal height in relation to the other actors.

Still **positioned centrally** within the courtroom to **oversee the entire process**.

Surrounded by the jury which can be seen as an **extension of the public**.

Acting as **part of the whole**, instead of being its own individual entity.

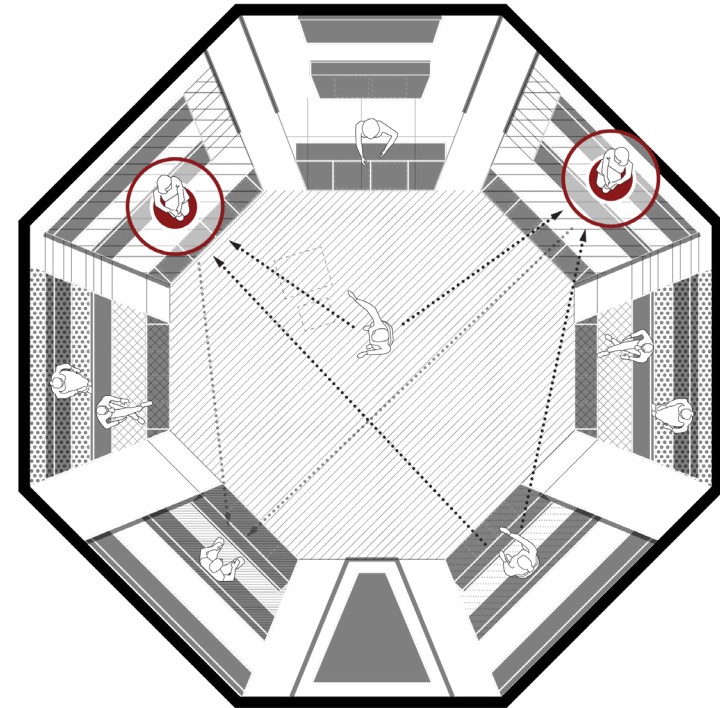
Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

THE JURY



Seated next to the judge, creating a **balanced exposure** to both sides. Thereby **reducing perceived bias** from **positioning**.

Better note taking and **observation** for **enhanced credibility**.

Reduced psychological distance making the jury feel **more connected** to the **process** and less like outsiders.

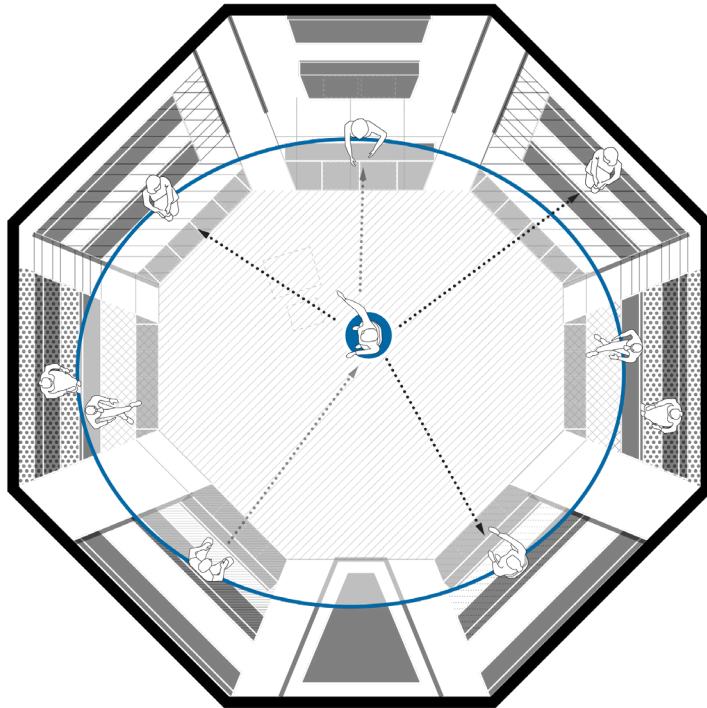
Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

The Courtroom
THE LAWYER



Positioned in **balanced proximity** to Judge & Jury as well as Plaintiff and Defendant.

Visibility for all parties, getting a clear view of exhibits and demonstratives.

Lawyers **'take to the floor'** and are otherwise seated next to or behind their clients.

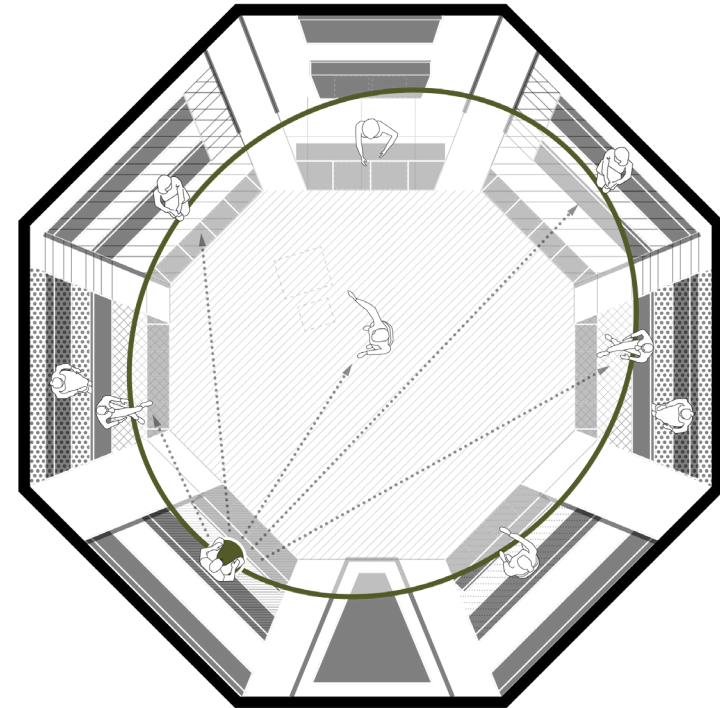
Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

The Courtroom
THE DEFENDANT



More integrated, less stigmatizing positioning within the courtroom.

Visual equality upholding the presumption of innocence.

Less intimidating atmosphere, reducing stress and intimidation.

Non-obvious safety measures that protect all without prejudicing the jury.

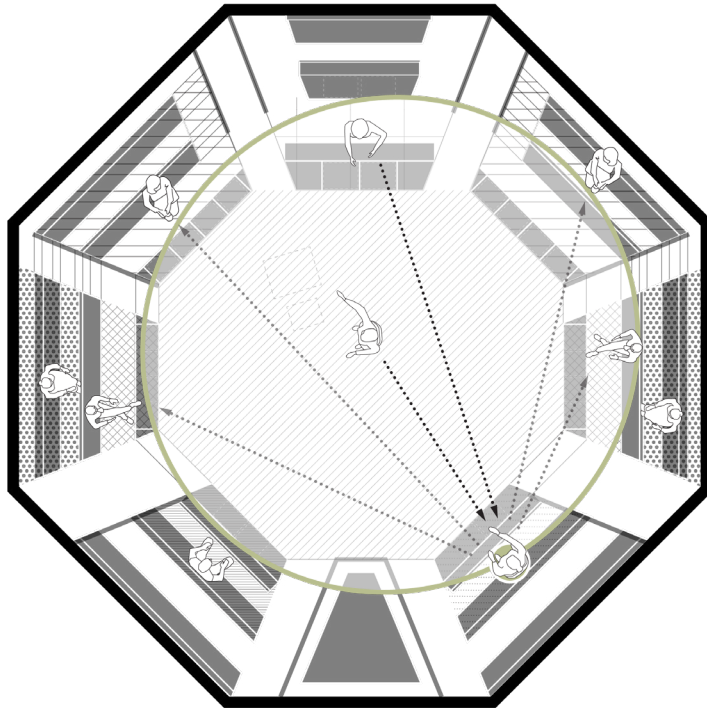
Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

The Courtroom
THE PLAINTIFF



Allows for strategic placement to **limit direct eye contact** with the defendant to **avoid intimidation**.

Public visibility without exposure where the plaintiff can feel **seen** and **acknowledged** without being made a spectacle.

Enhanced credibility towards the Jury and Judge.

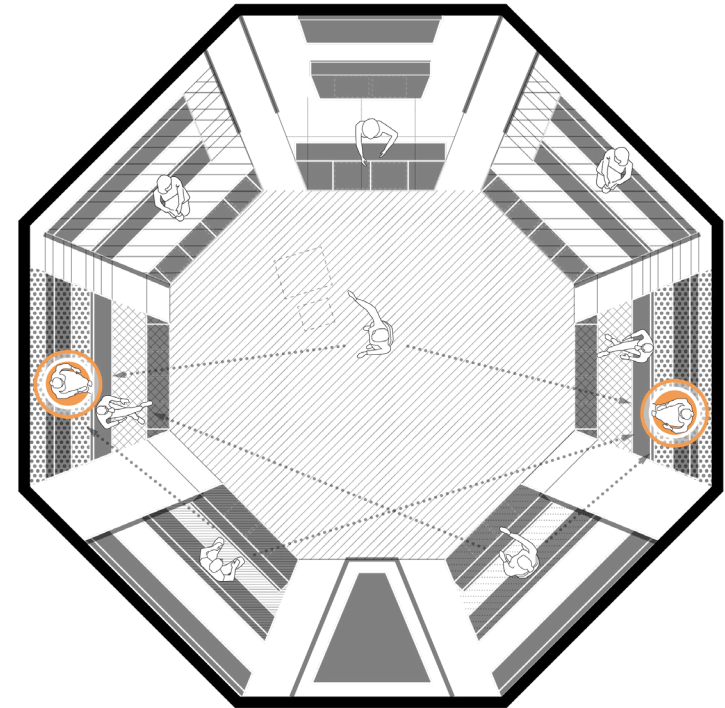
Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]

The Courtroom
THE PUBLIC



More inclusive view of all involved actors thereby enabling a **more accessible** and **transparent trial** to follow.

Reflecting democratic values: Justice is **not hidden**, it's **visible, balanced, and open to all**.

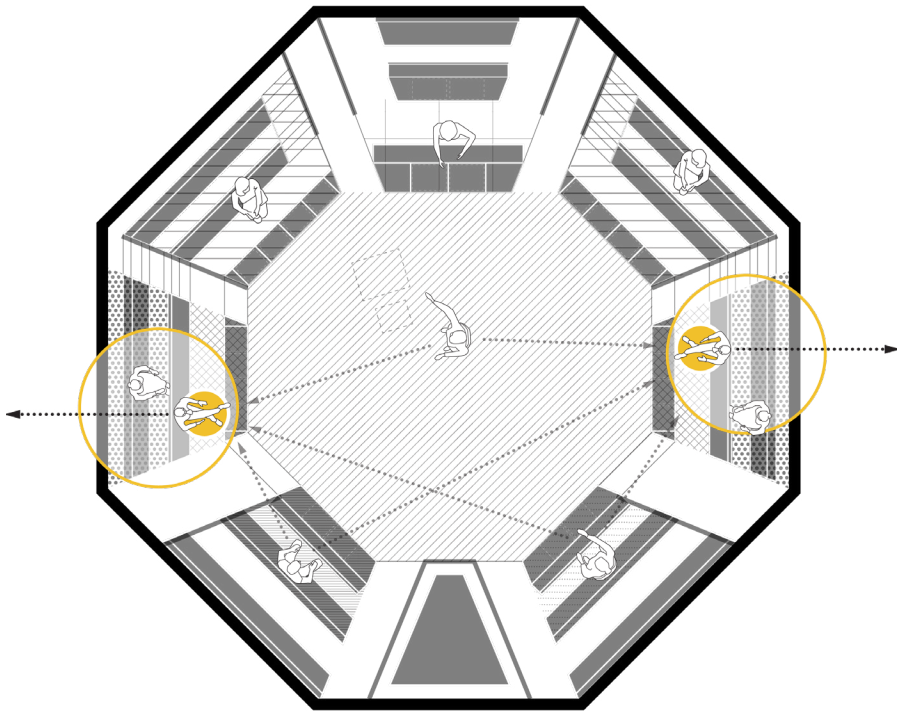
Reflects **fairness, shared authority, and community-oriented values**.

Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]



Fewer obstructed views, help ensure **journalistic integrity** and a **more balanced media coverage.**

Greater contextual awareness leading to a **more comprehensive reporting** to the outside.

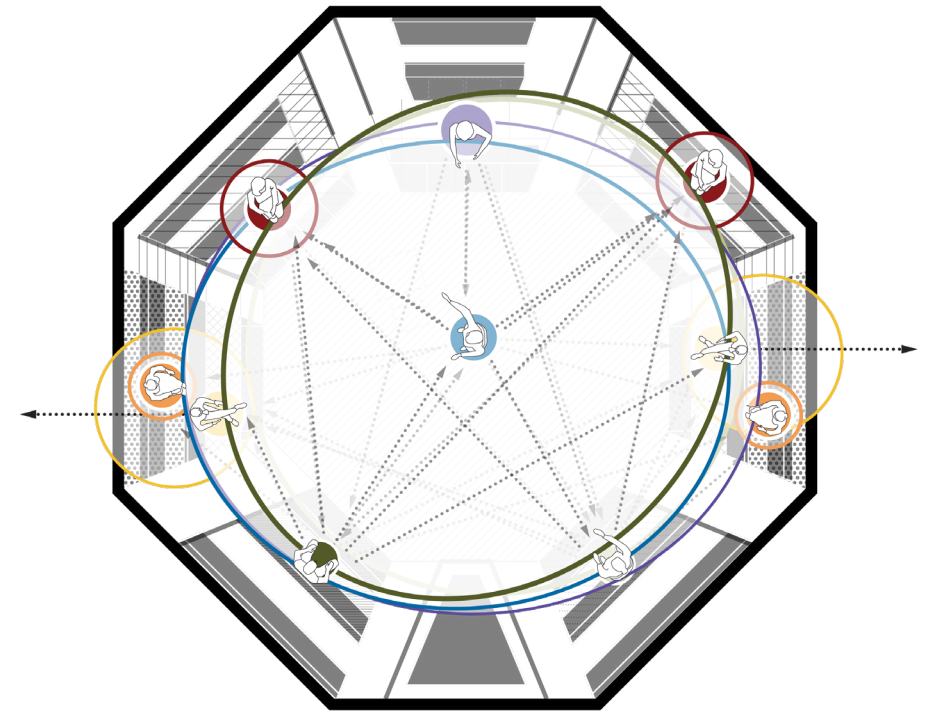
Reinforcing the idea that justice should be **open** and **observable.**

Arrow of Influence▶

[transparency indicates the level thereof
high transparency - low level of influence]

Circle of Control ○

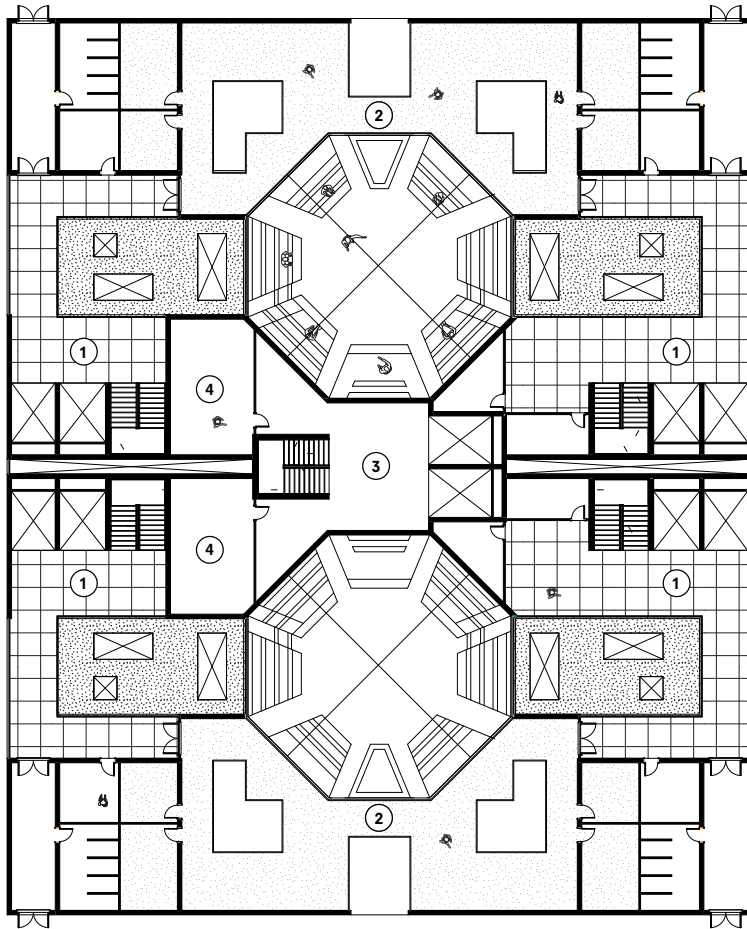
[indicates the level of control, both internal
& external]



The octagonal courtroom layout redefines traditional spatial hierarchies by arranging all participants judge, jury, plaintiff, defendant, lawyers, press, and public in a shared geometric space. This configuration distributes control and influence more evenly, reducing rigid front-facing dominance and encouraging dynamic interaction. The judge remains a central figure, but their authority is balanced by increased visibility and proximity of other actors, fostering transparency. The surrounding placement of stakeholders blurs boundaries between active and passive roles, while the shape itself creates a sense of inclusivity and dialogue. However, subtle spatial cues such as proximity, lighting focus, and materials continue to guide power dynamics, signalling who holds decision-making authority. This layout challenges traditional courtroom control by promoting engagement and reducing hierarchical fragmentation, yet retains necessary order through carefully calibrated design elements.

The Courtroom

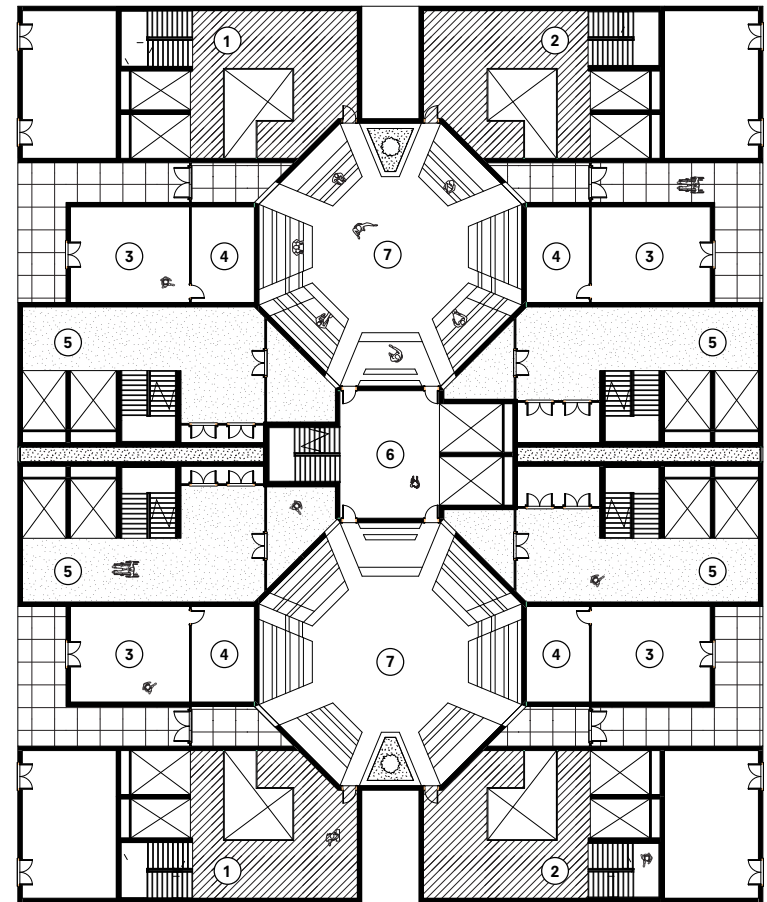
LEVEL | -02



- 1 Jury Circulation
- 2 Jury Deliberation Space
- 3 Judge Circulation
- 4 Judge's Deliberation Chambers

The Courtroom

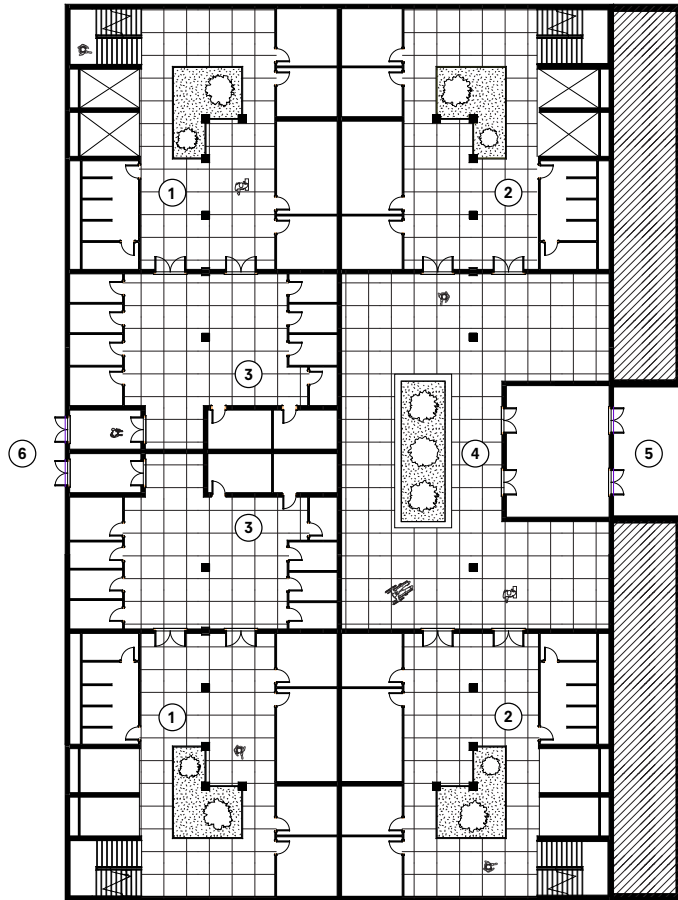
LEVEL | -03



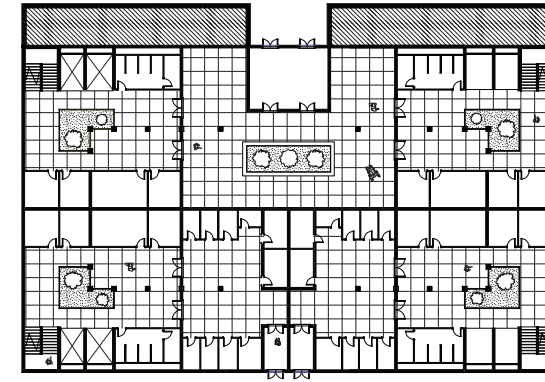
- 1 Plaintiff Circulation Area
- 2 Defendant Circulation Area
- 3 Public Waiting Area
- 4 Secluded Waiting Area (Public)
- 5 Jury Circulation
- 6 Judge Circulation
- 7 Courtroom

The Courtroom

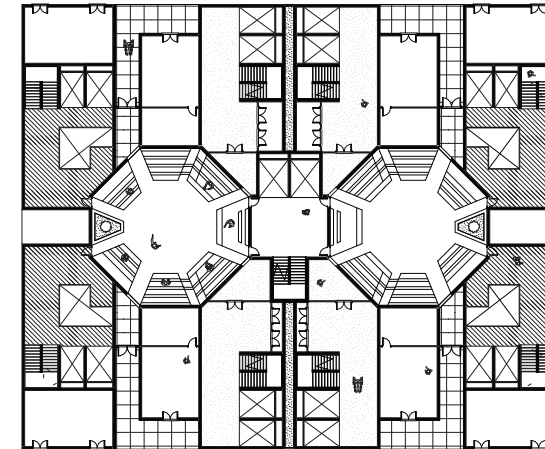
LEVEL I -04



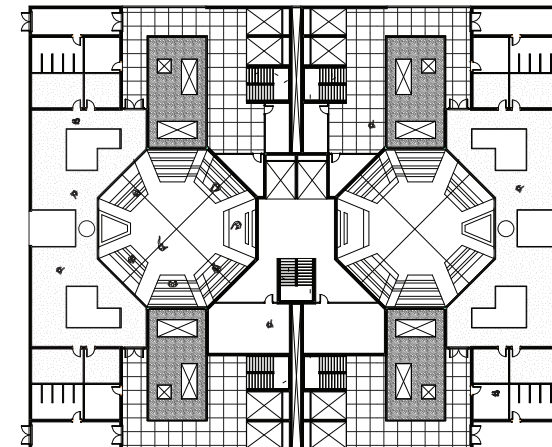
- 1 Plaintiff Circulation Area
- 2 Defendant Circulation Area
- 3 Holding Cells
- 4 Plaintiff Waiting Area
- 5 Parking Access [Plaintiff]
- 6 Parking Access [Defendant]



Level -04

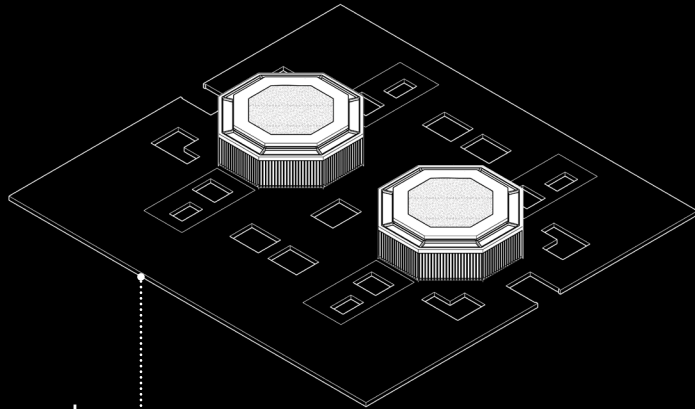


Level -03



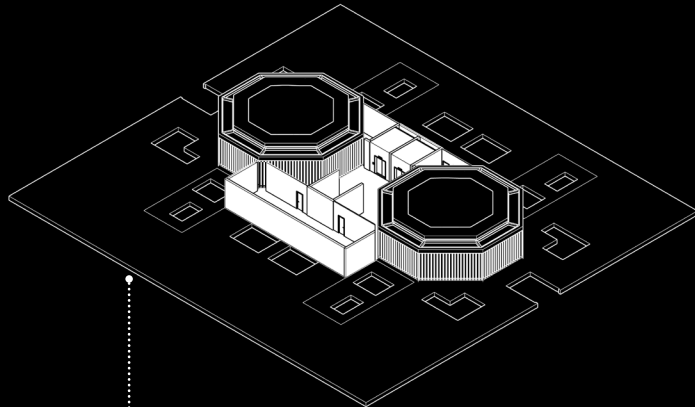
Level -02

COURTROOM CLUSTER | LEVEL -02



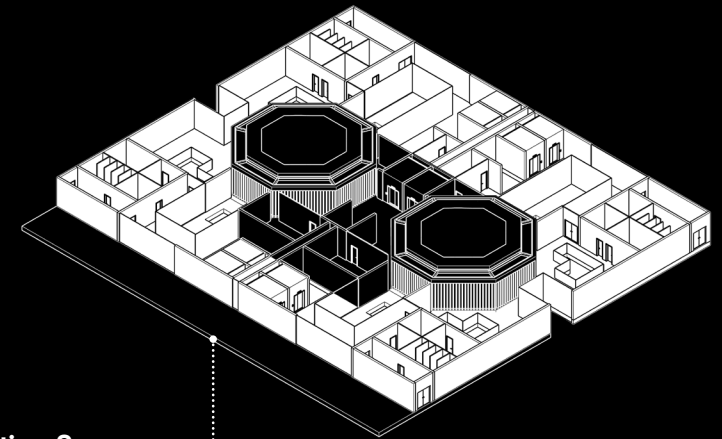
Observation Space |

The observation space is a discreet, elevated area that allows jury members to observe proceedings without disrupting court protocol. It is designed for both visibility and discretion, with frosted glass panels or apertures providing vague sightlines to the judge's bench, witness stand, and counsel tables, while ensuring privacy. Acoustic treatments allow voices to be heard without disturbing the formal courtroom environment, keeping the space isolated from the courtroom's activity.



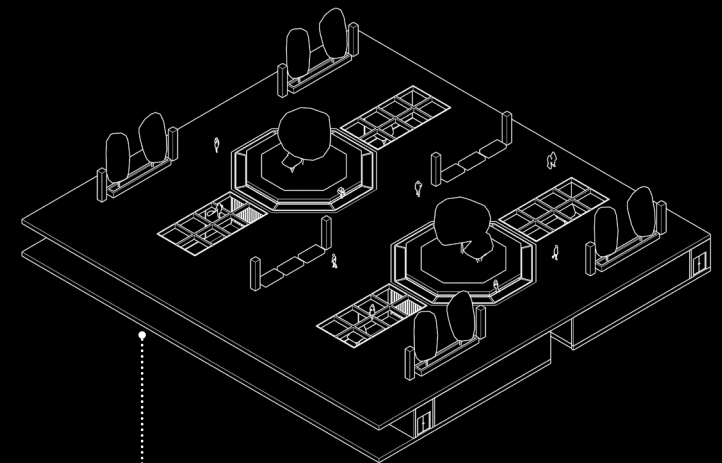
Judges Chambers

Judges' chambers serve as private sanctuaries within the courthouse, where judges review case materials, deliberate, and prepare for hearings. These spaces provide a secure and confidential environment essential for thoughtful decision-making, free from courtroom distractions.



Jury Deliberation Space

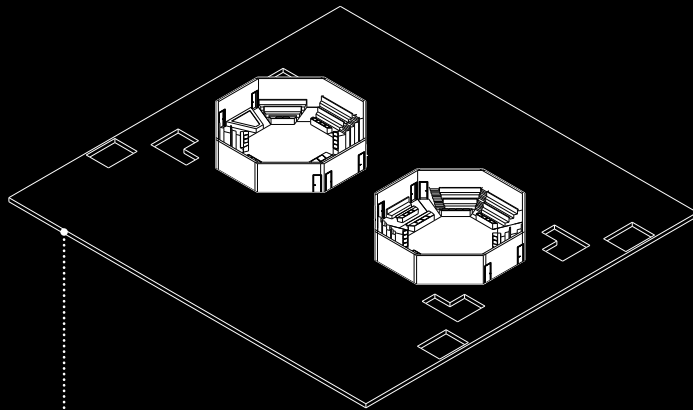
The jury deliberation space is a secure, neutral environment where jurors gather to discuss evidence and reach a collective verdict. Designed to promote clear communication, privacy, and comfort, it supports thoughtful, unbiased decision-making away from external influences.



Public Square

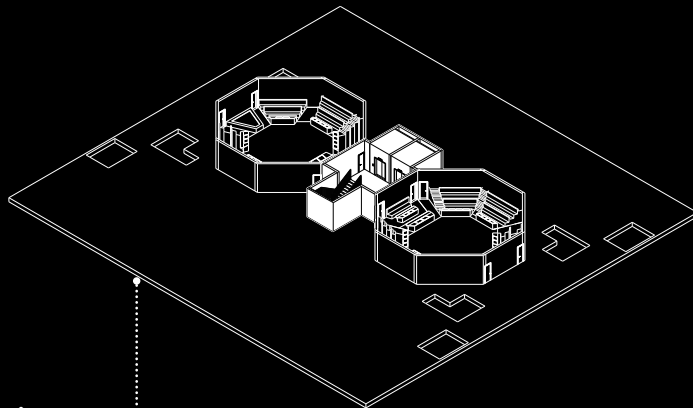
The public space, situated above the courtroom, is designed to be an open and welcoming area that fosters a connection between the public and the judicial process. Integrated skylights in the floor allow natural light to filter down into the lower levels, creating a sense of openness and visual continuity.

COURTROOM CLUSTER | LEVEL -03



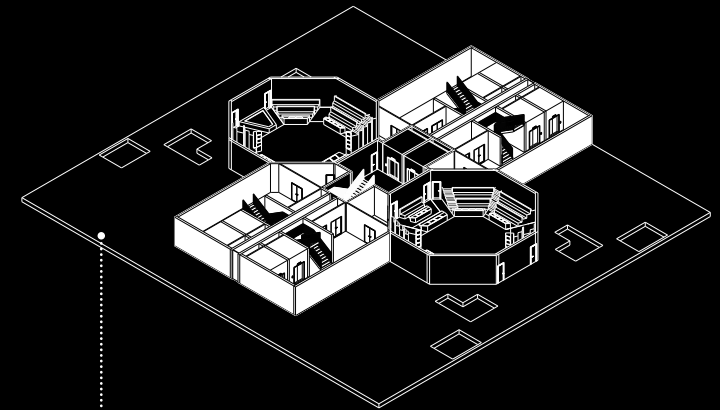
Courtrooms |

The courtroom is a formal space where justice is administered through public hearings and legal proceedings. It is designed to facilitate clear communication between judges, lawyers, defendants, plaintiffs, and the public, while ensuring order and fairness.



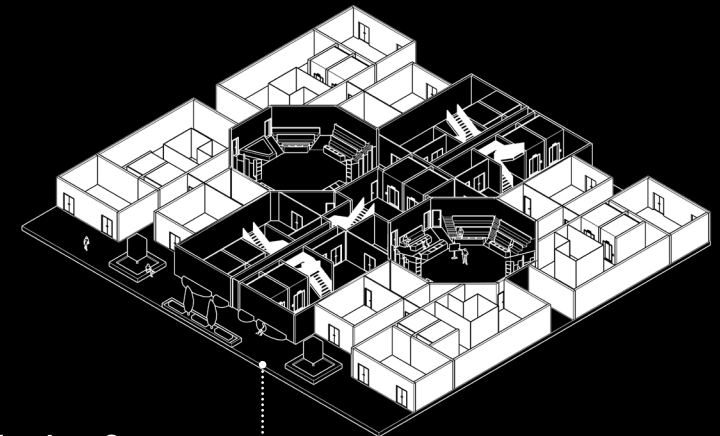
Judges Circulation

Judge circulation refers to the dedicated pathways and access routes within a courthouse that allow judges to move securely and efficiently between courtrooms, chambers, and other facilities. Designed to maintain privacy and safety, these separate circulation routes minimize contact with the public and other courthouse users, supporting smooth and discreet transitions.



Jury Circulation

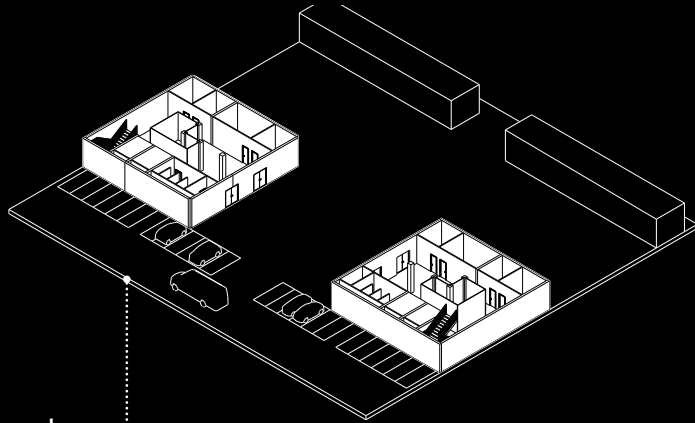
Jury circulation consists of controlled and secure routes that guide jurors safely and discreetly between courtrooms, deliberation rooms, and waiting areas. These pathways are designed to protect juror privacy and ensure impartiality by minimizing contact with defendants, witnesses, and the public, while providing clear, efficient movement within the courthouse.



Plaintiff & Defendant Spaces

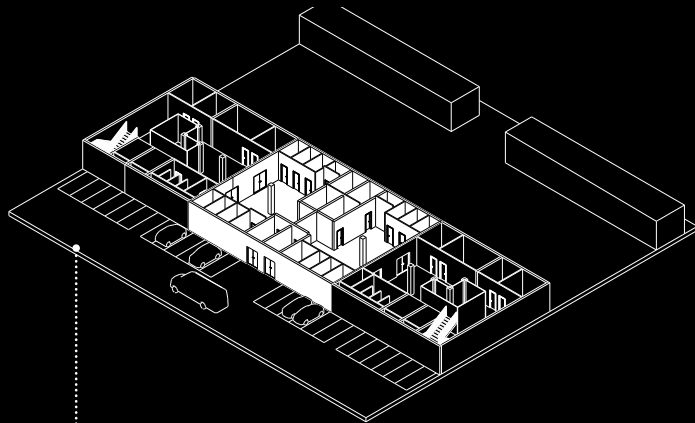
These areas provide dedicated waiting and preparation zones for plaintiffs and defendants within the courthouse. Designed to ensure privacy, comfort, and security, they allow individuals involved in legal proceedings to gather, consult with legal counsel, and prepare before entering the courtroom. Clear separation between these spaces helps maintain order and reduce tension during the judicial process.

COURTROOM CLUSTER | LEVEL -04



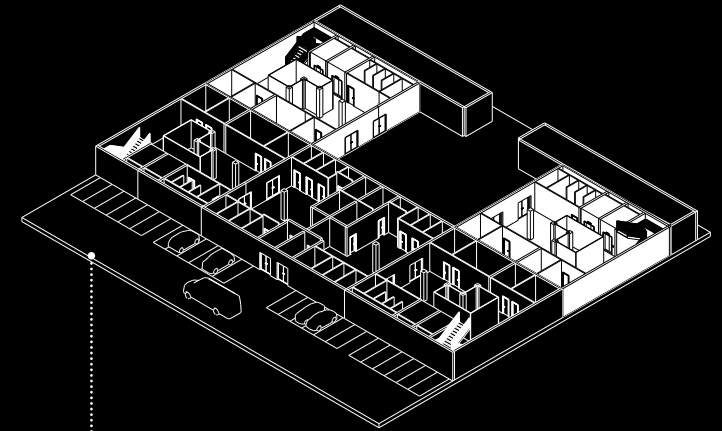
Defendant Space I

The defendant waiting space is a secure, controlled area where defendants wait before court appearances. Designed to ensure safety and privacy, it provides a calm environment that balances security with dignity. These spaces allow for legal consultation and preparation.



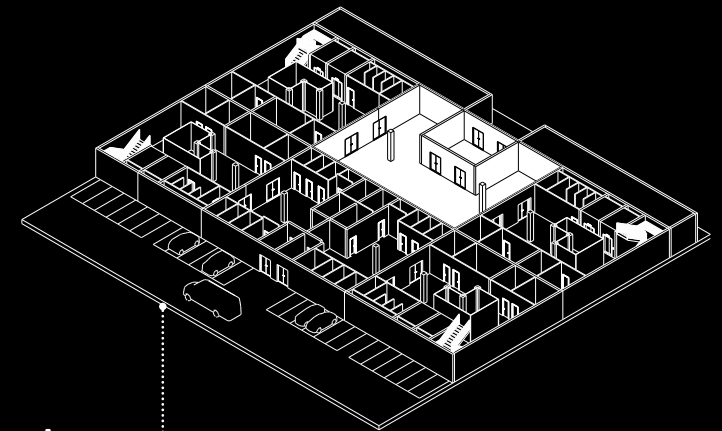
Holding Cells

Holding cells are secure, temporary detention spaces within or adjacent to the courthouse where defendants are held before and after court appearances. Designed to ensure safety and control, these cells provide basic accommodation while maintaining clear separation from the public and court staff. They support orderly proceedings by facilitating the secure transfer of individuals in custody.



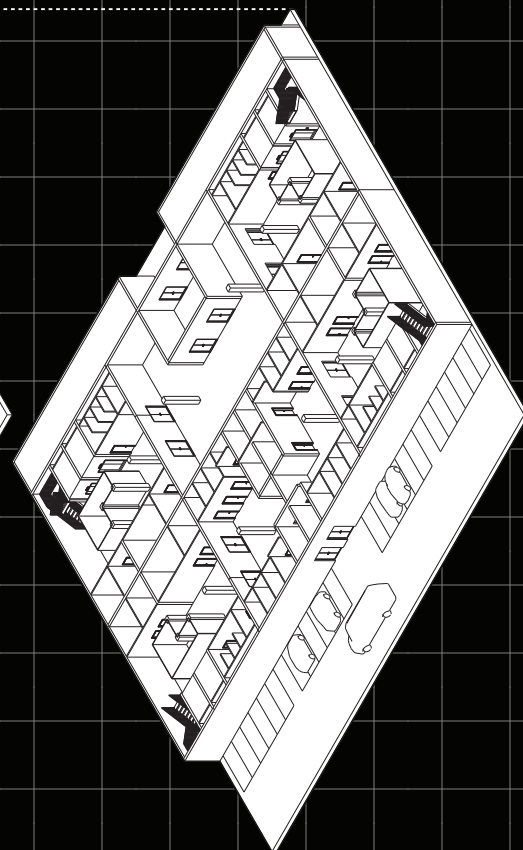
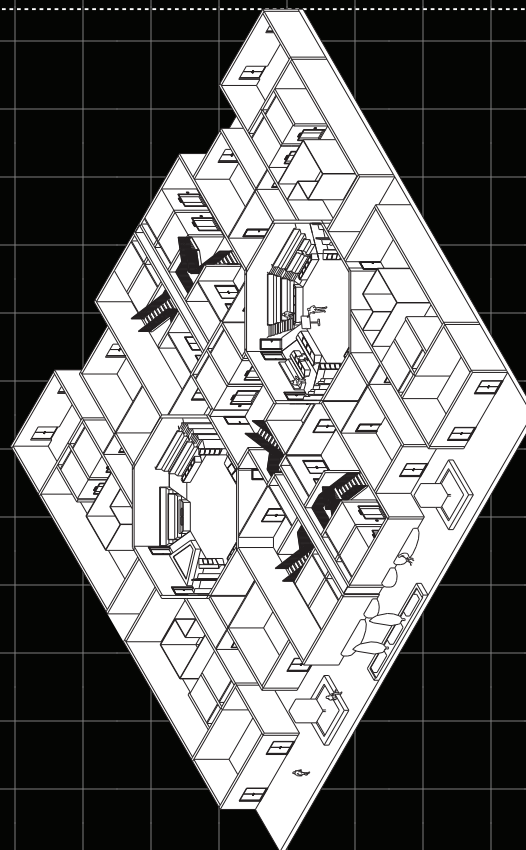
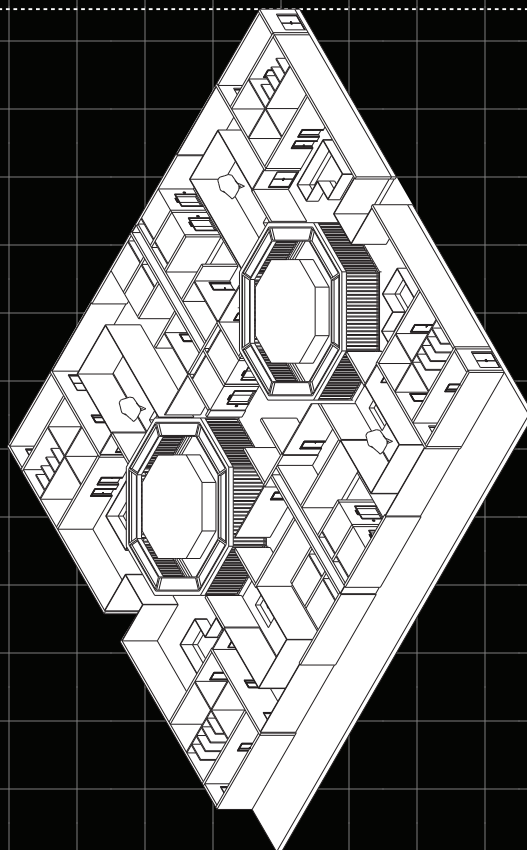
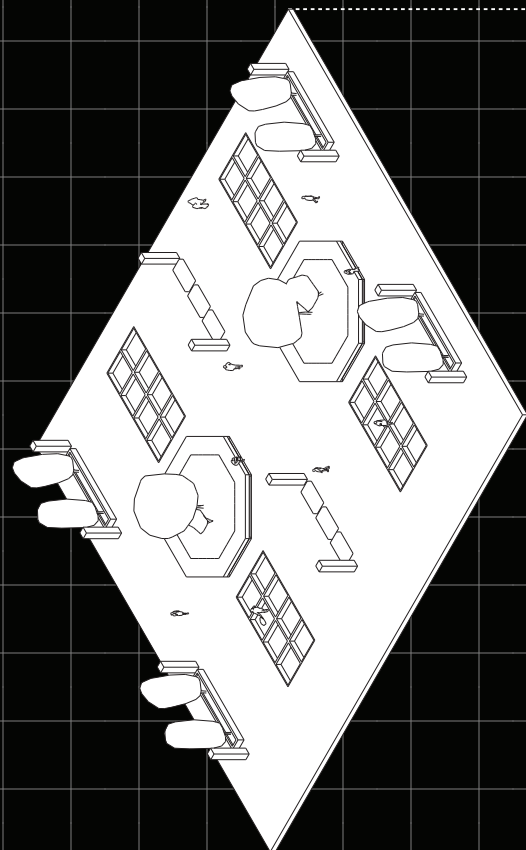
Plaintiff Space

Plaintiff spaces are designated areas within the courthouse where plaintiffs can wait, meet with legal counsel, and prepare for their cases. These spaces prioritize privacy and comfort, providing a supportive environment that respects the often stressful nature of legal proceedings.



Plaintiff Waiting Area

The plaintiff waiting area is a private, secure space designed to offer comfort and calm before court proceedings. It provides a place for plaintiffs to consult with their legal team, gather their thoughts, and prepare for hearings.



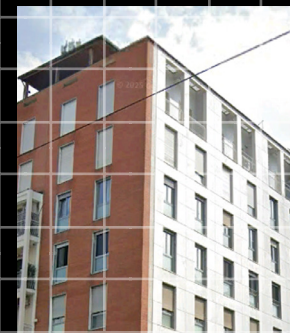
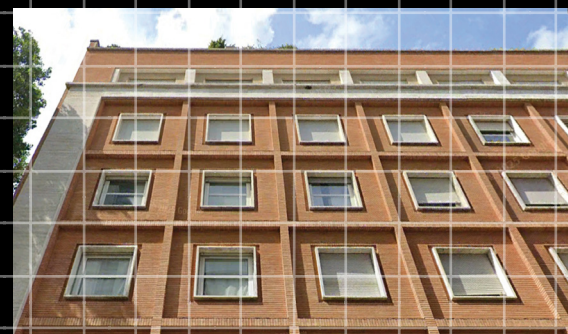
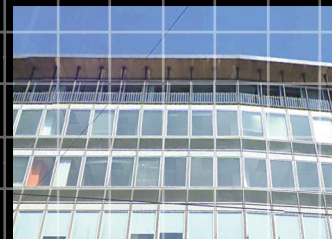
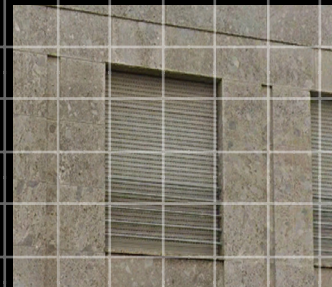
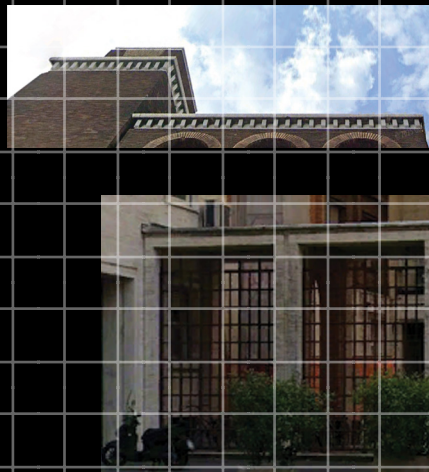
THE DETAILS

SITE | MATERIALITY & DETAILS

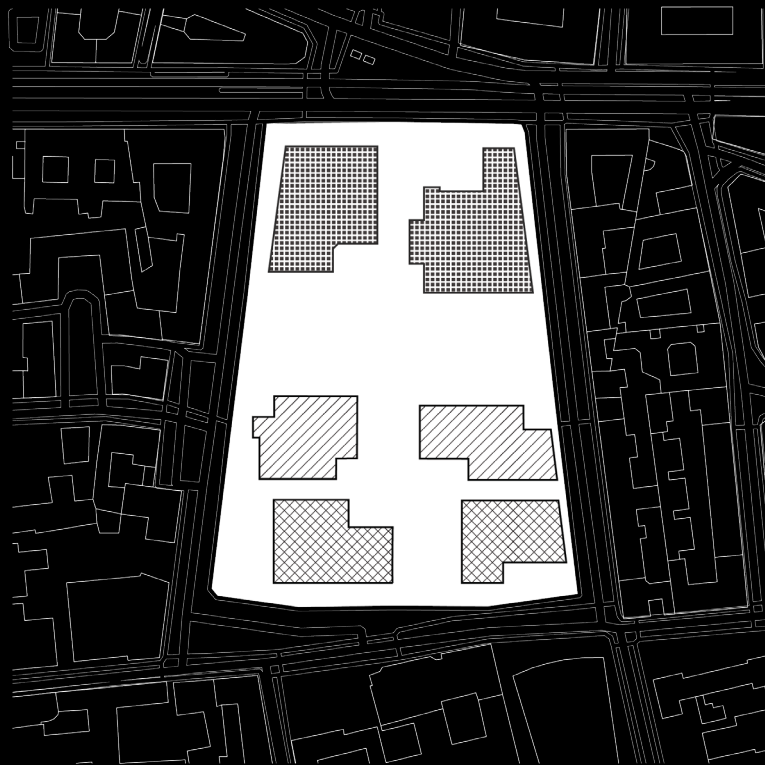
The Porta Vittoria district, is an area marked by a rich blend of architectural styles that reflect both historical and contemporary influences.

Surrounding the Palazzo di Giustizia, the architectural character of the Porta Vittoria area is defined by a mix of Art Nouveau and Eclectic-style buildings. These often feature stone base courses and plastered upper façades, with decorative cornices, wrought-iron balconies, and ornate frescoes or friezes. Metal frames in wood and metal combinations, often painted steel or wrought iron, are a common feature in the older buildings, alongside terracotta or ceramic tiles used for ornamental detailing.

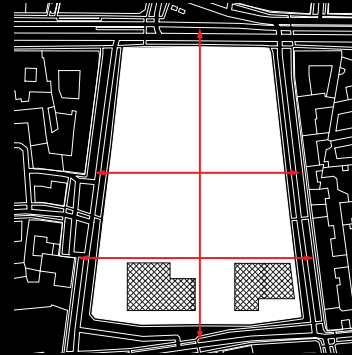
More recent constructions, such as the New Biblioteca Europea Di Informazione E Cultura (BEIC), contrast this historical aesthetic with modern materials, employing metal panels and glass façades. These newer buildings integrate industrial-style elements, blending metal and glass for both efficiency and modernity, while still maintaining a visual connection to the area's evolving urban landscape.



GRADIENT OF SPACE

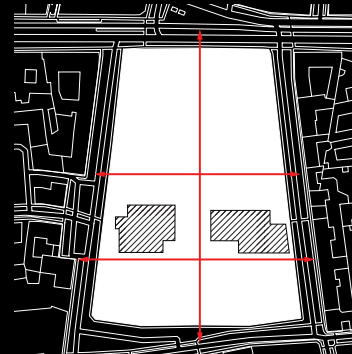


The site is organized along a clear spatial gradient that reflects a shift in formality and hierarchy. To the north, formal buildings dominate, housing official courtrooms and administrative functions. These structures exhibit a strong sense of authority and order, marked by solid materials, controlled access, and defined edges, reinforcing the highest level of institutional hierarchy. Moving southward through the site, transition spaces create a buffer zone areas that blend formal and informal qualities. Here, open plazas, landscaped courtyards, and flexible communal areas foster interaction and circulation, softening the rigid boundaries between authority and the public. These zones act as mediators, encouraging engagement while maintaining a sense of order. Further south, informal spaces emerge, characterized by more relaxed uses such as community rooms, family courts, and public parks. This area invites openness and accessibility, emphasizing inclusivity over hierarchy, with softer materials and more permeable boundaries.



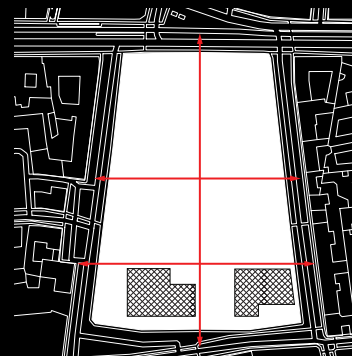
Formal Space

The formal space at the northern edge of the site forms the institutional core of the project, housing courtrooms, judges' chambers, and legal administration. Defined by solid materials, symmetry, and controlled access, it conveys authority and order. This zone embodies the ceremonial and performative aspects of justice, setting a tone of seriousness and control that contrasts with the more open, informal spaces to the south.



Transition Space

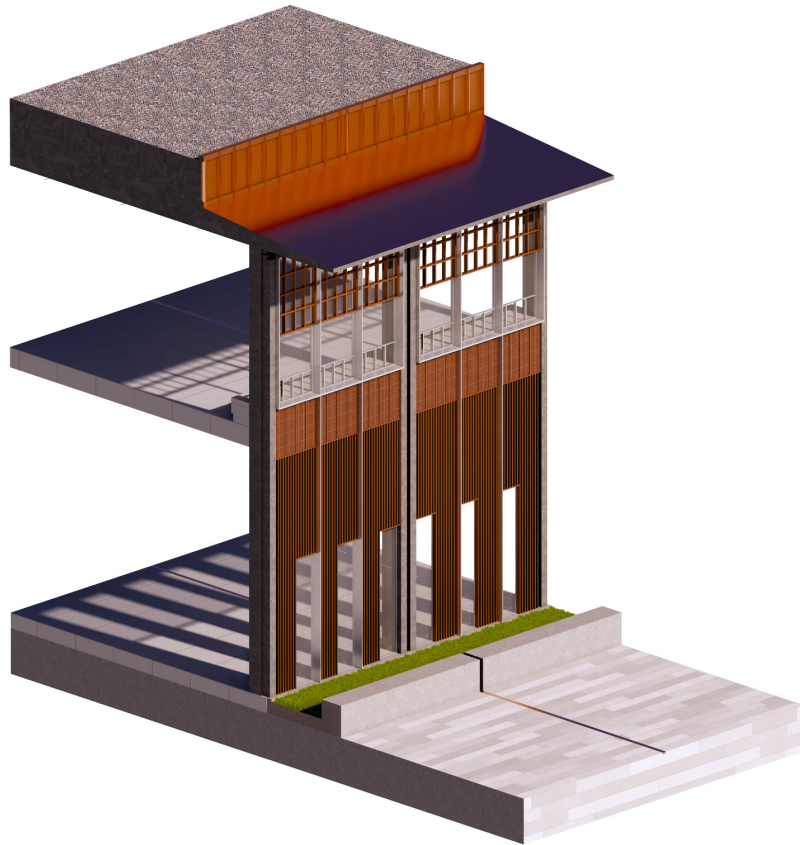
The transition space, located at the centre of the site, acts as a mediator between the formal institutional core to the north and the informal civic areas to the south. These spaces soften rigid boundaries, encouraging interaction between users legal professionals, visitors, and the public while maintaining functional clarity. Architecturally lighter and more porous, the transition space gradually shifts the spatial tone from formality to openness.



Informal Space

The informal space at the southern end of the site prioritizes openness, accessibility, and community engagement. Unlike the rigid hierarchy of the formal zone, this area fosters comfort and dialogue, supporting restorative justice, social services, and civic participation. Its atmosphere is approachable and human-scaled, positioning the justice system as inclusive, empathetic, and connected to everyday life.

FORMAL SPACE



Concrete | Metal

The façade of the formal space combines copper, metal, concrete, and terracotta tiles to express solidity, dignity, and permanence. Concrete anchors the building with a sense of weight and seriousness, while metal and copper introduce refinement and durability, evoking institutional authority. Terracotta tiles add warmth and texture, referencing traditional craftsmanship within a contemporary composition. Together, these materials form a restrained yet powerful façade ordered, robust, and ceremonial reflecting the formal character of the justice system and the gravity of the functions housed within.



FORMAL FACADE | MATERIALITY



1

Copper: The roof of the formal building is clad in untreated copper plating, chosen for its durability and symbolic presence. Over time, the copper will naturally weather to a rich patina, marking the passage of time and reinforcing the building's institutional permanence. It's reflective surface contrasts the solidity of the stone and concrete below.



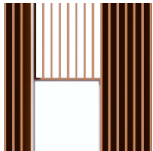
2

Concrete: Marbled concrete is used as a key interior and exterior finish, offering the refined appearance of natural stone with the durability of modern construction. Through controlled mixing and finishing techniques, subtle veining and tonal variation give the concrete a rich, stone-like character. This material reinforces the building's formal atmosphere while allowing for continuity across surfaces.



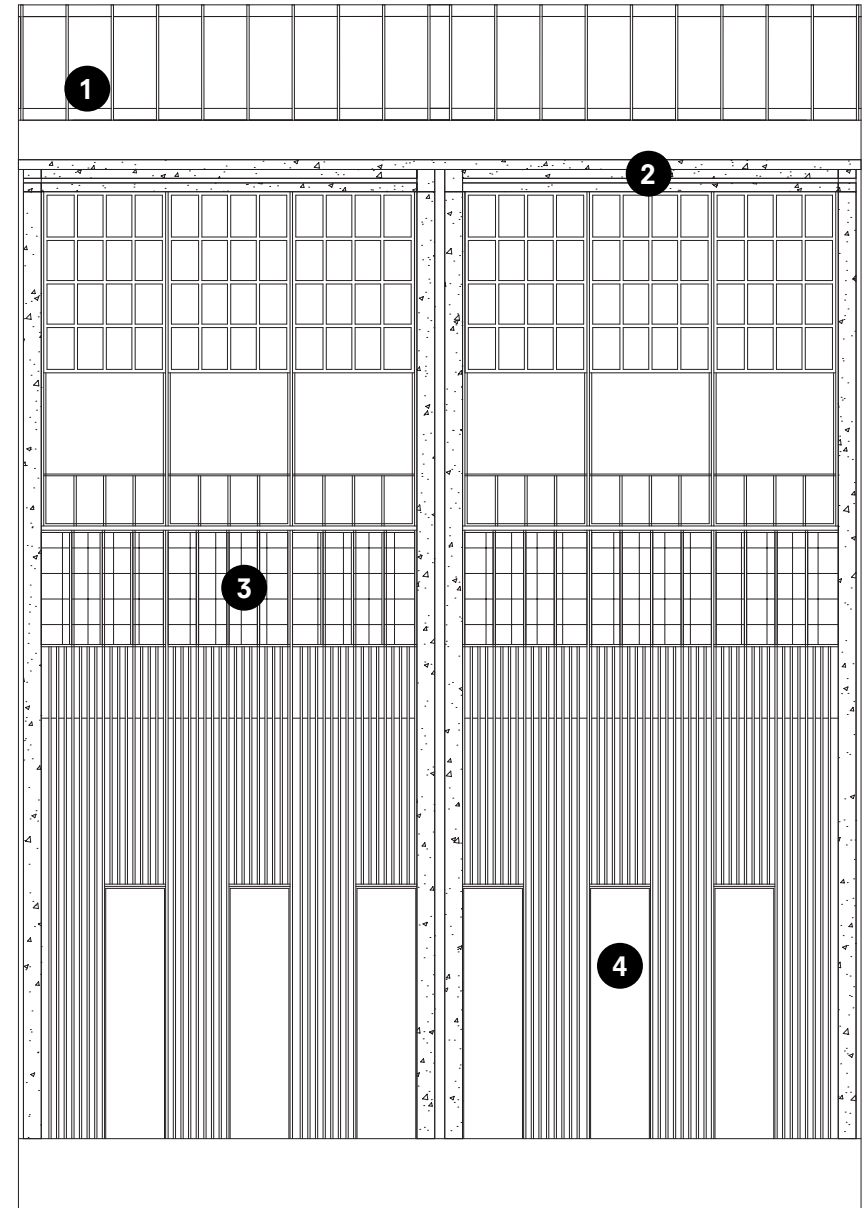
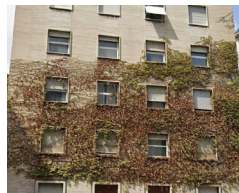
3

Terracotta Tiles: Terracotta tiles articulate the façade with a rhythmic pattern that introduces depth and texture through their modularity and natural variation. The tiles' inherent porosity and matte surface respond dynamically to light and shadow, enhancing the building's tactile quality and grounding it within its urban context through a contemporary reinterpretation of traditional masonry.

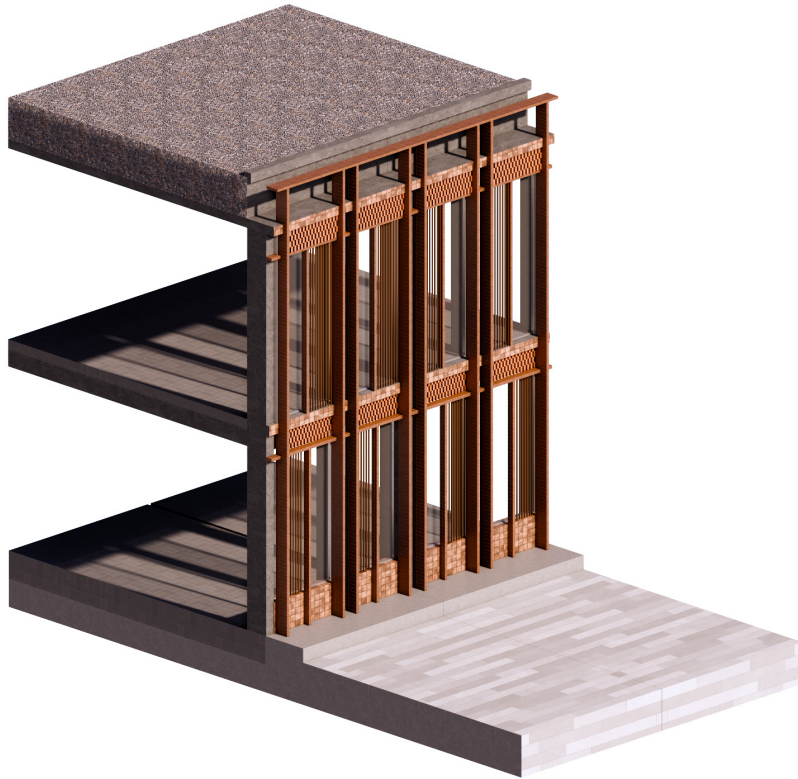


4

Metal Detailing: Metal detailing, such as lattices, plays a crucial role in articulating the building's façade by introducing precision and rhythm. These elements provide functional control over light, privacy, and ventilation, while their sleek, engineered surfaces contrast with more textured materials like terracotta and concrete.

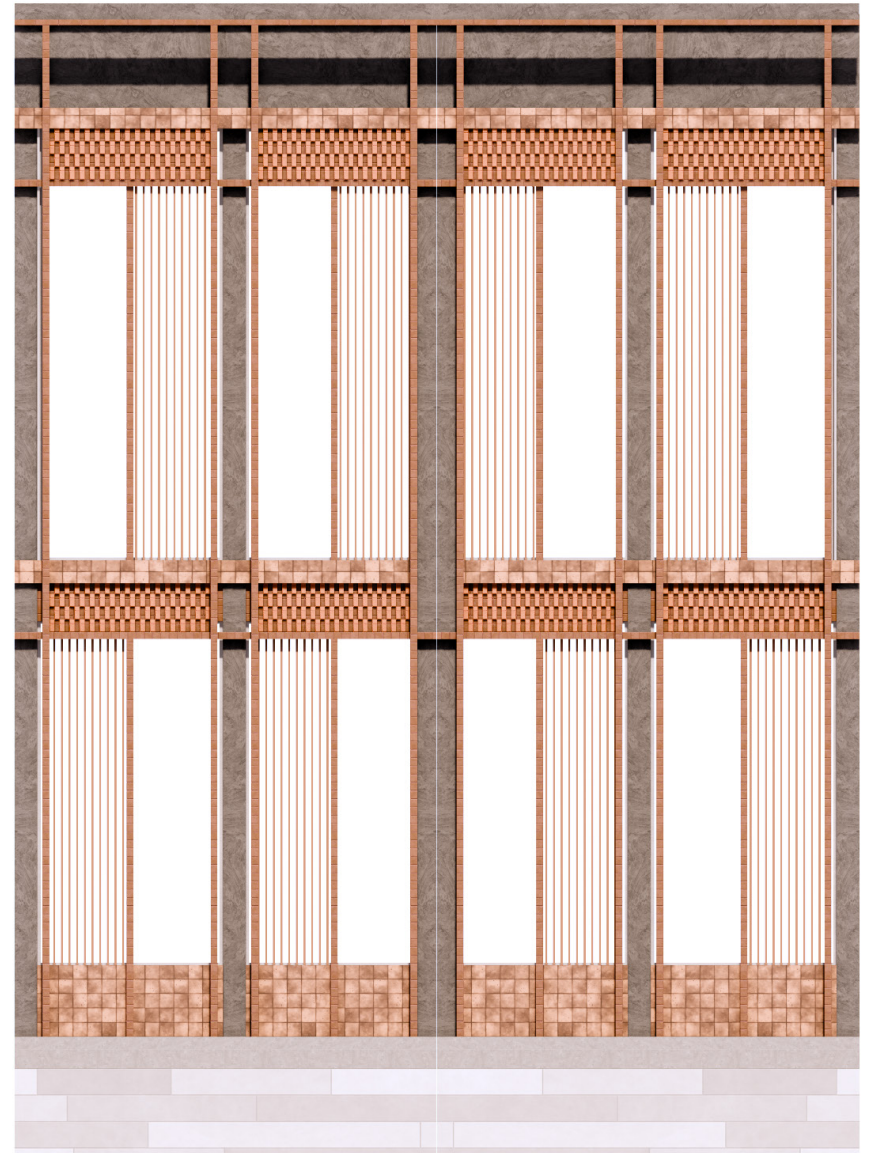


TRANSITION SPACE



Concrete | Brick

The façade of the transition space uses a mix of concrete, brick, and natural stone to mediate between the formal and informal zones of the building. These materials create a balanced architectural language solid yet approachable, structured yet textured. Together, they signal a shift in tone: from institutional formality to civic openness. The composition reflects the transitional role of this zone inviting, adaptable, and rooted in the human scale.

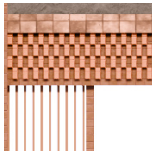


TRANSITION FACADE | MATERIALITY



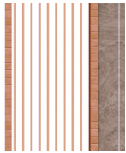
1

Concrete: Exposed aggregate concrete is especially well-suited for the transition space as it embodies the balance between formality and informality. Its textured, natural surface offers tactility that softens the shift from the rigid, formal areas to more relaxed, informal zones. The material's robustness creates a sense of structure and order perfectly reflecting the transitional nature of this space.



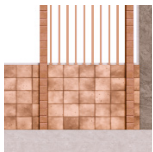
2

Brick: The use of **patterned brick** in the transition space introduces a dynamic, textural element that enhances the spatial experience through depth and rhythm. The bricks are laid in a pattern that subtly protrudes and recedes from the surface, creating a play of light and shadow that shifts throughout the day. This sculptural approach adds a tactile quality, softening the formal edge of the surrounding spaces.



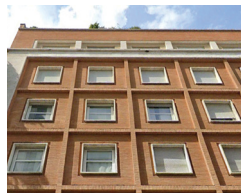
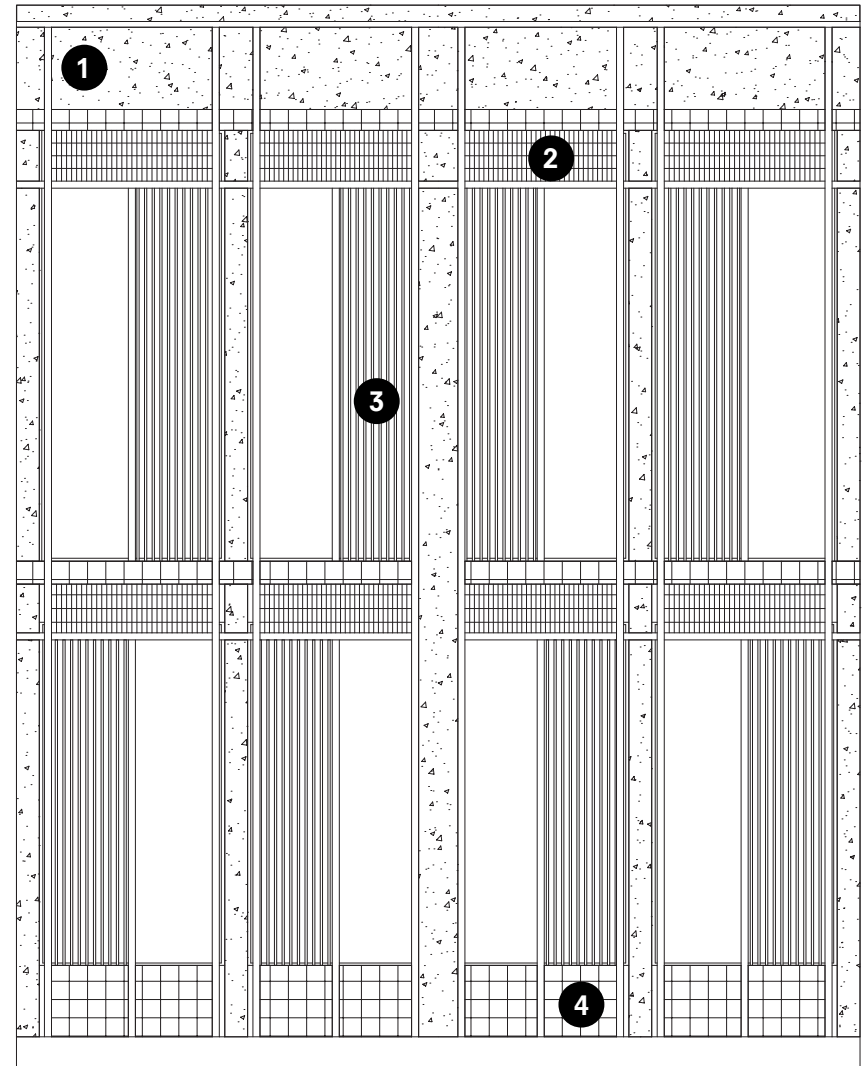
3

Metal: The use of **metal lattices** in the transition space serves as a design element that ties back to the formal space while introducing a sense of lightness and permeability. The interplay between the solid mass of the formal space and the openness of the lattices creates a balanced spatial dialogue, ensuring a seamless progression from one zone to the next while maintaining a sense of continuity and hierarchy.

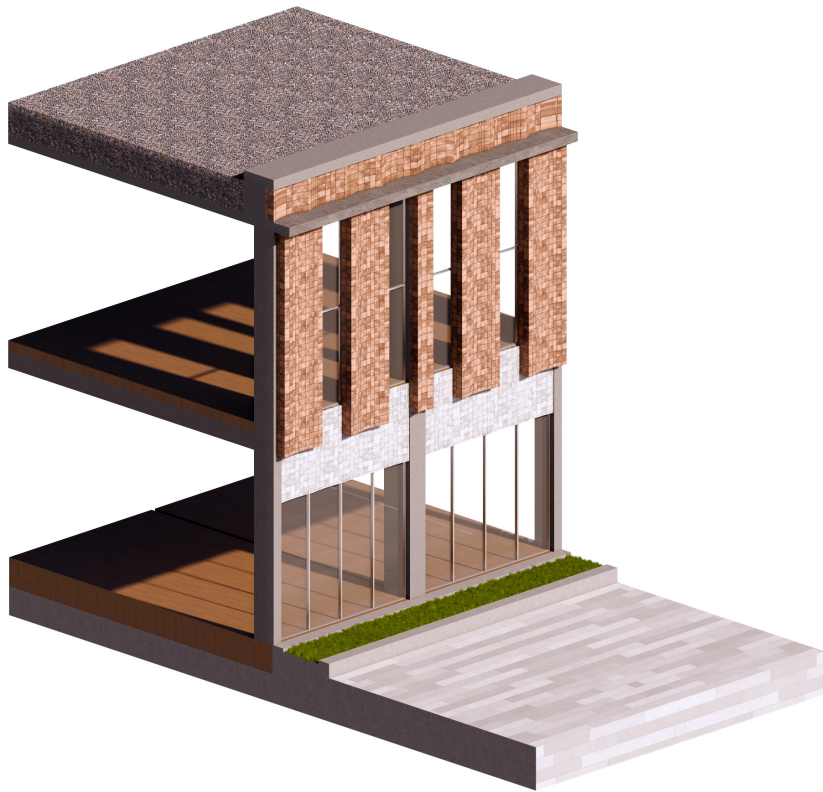


4

Stone: The use of local **Brescian stone** as a material of transition, defines the spatial shift from the formal northern zones to the informal southern areas. The warm, neutral tones and refined texture provide a tactile continuity, softening the architectural contrast between the structured, hierarchical volumes to the north and the more fluid, open spaces to the south.

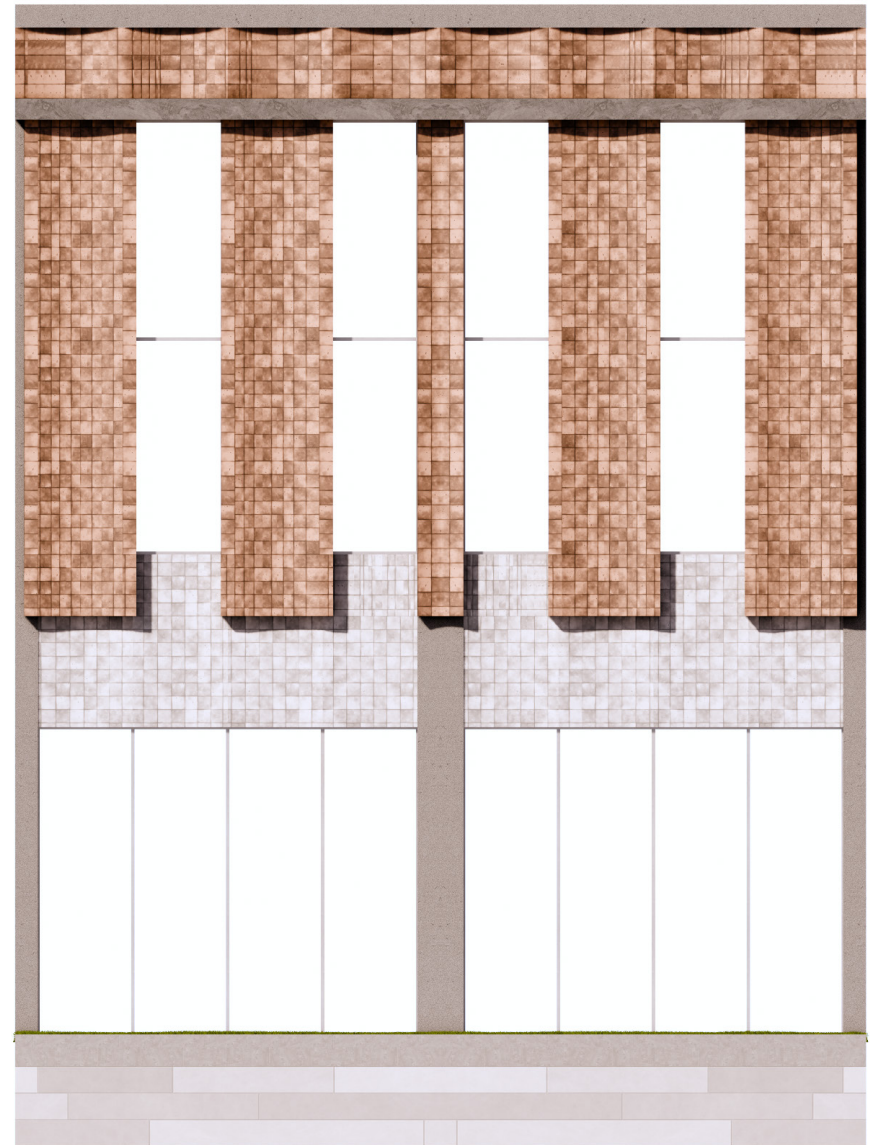


INFORMAL SPACE

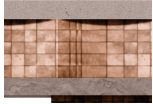


Concrete | Stone

The façade of the informal space features a light and open material palette of natural stone, concrete, and expansive glass. This combination reflects the zone's accessible and inclusive character. As the most open façade type, it softens institutional boundaries and supports the informal zone's focus on community, support, and restorative justice.

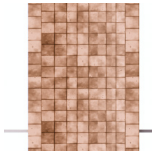


INFORMAL FACADE | MATERIALITY



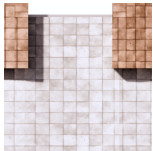
1

Concrete: Using **Terrazzo finish concrete** on the building facade adds texture and richness to the concrete, with its speckled surface reflecting light. The irregular patterns and natural materials in terrazzo contribute to a relaxed, informal aesthetic, avoiding the rigidity of traditional cladding.



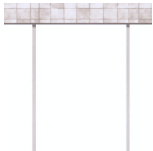
2

Stone [...]: The use of **Brescian Stone** is continued in the informal facade to soften the transition from the north. The spatial qualities orchestrate a seamless progression, subtly guiding movement and perception of passerbys through the varying degrees of formality.



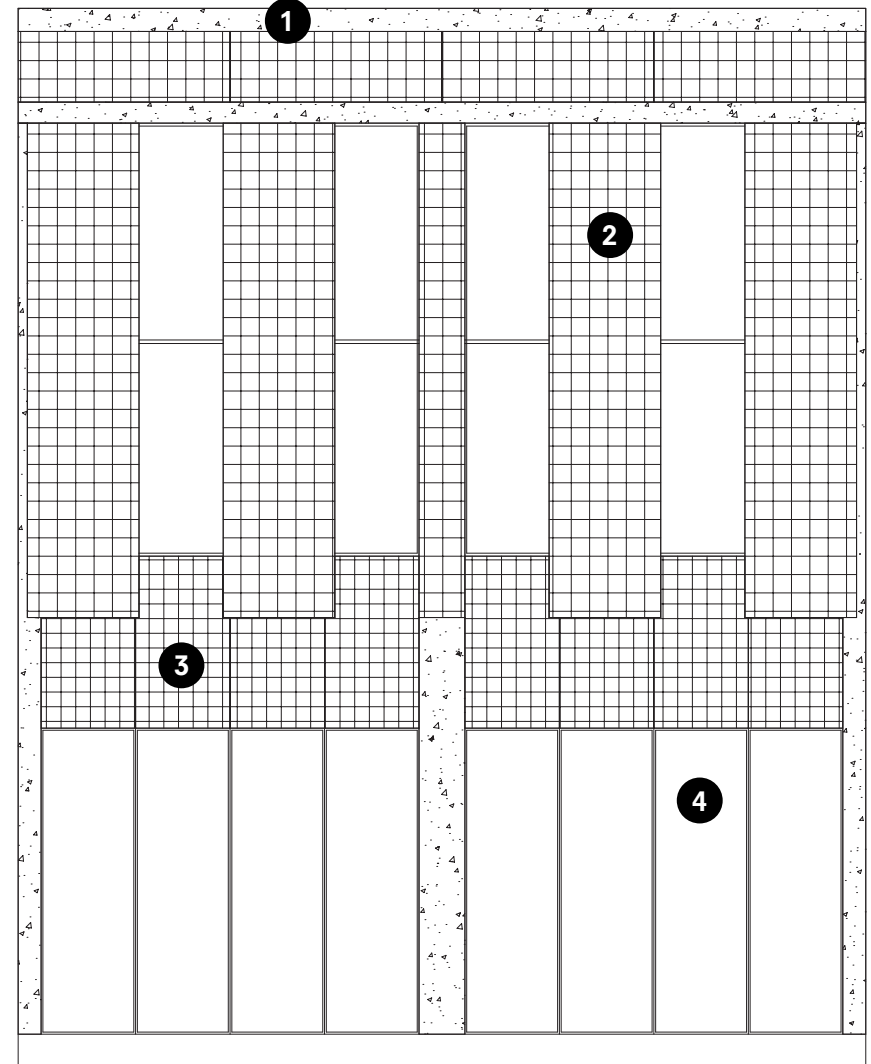
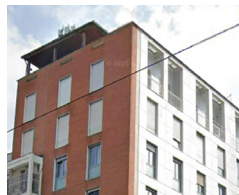
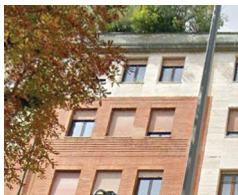
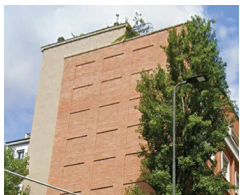
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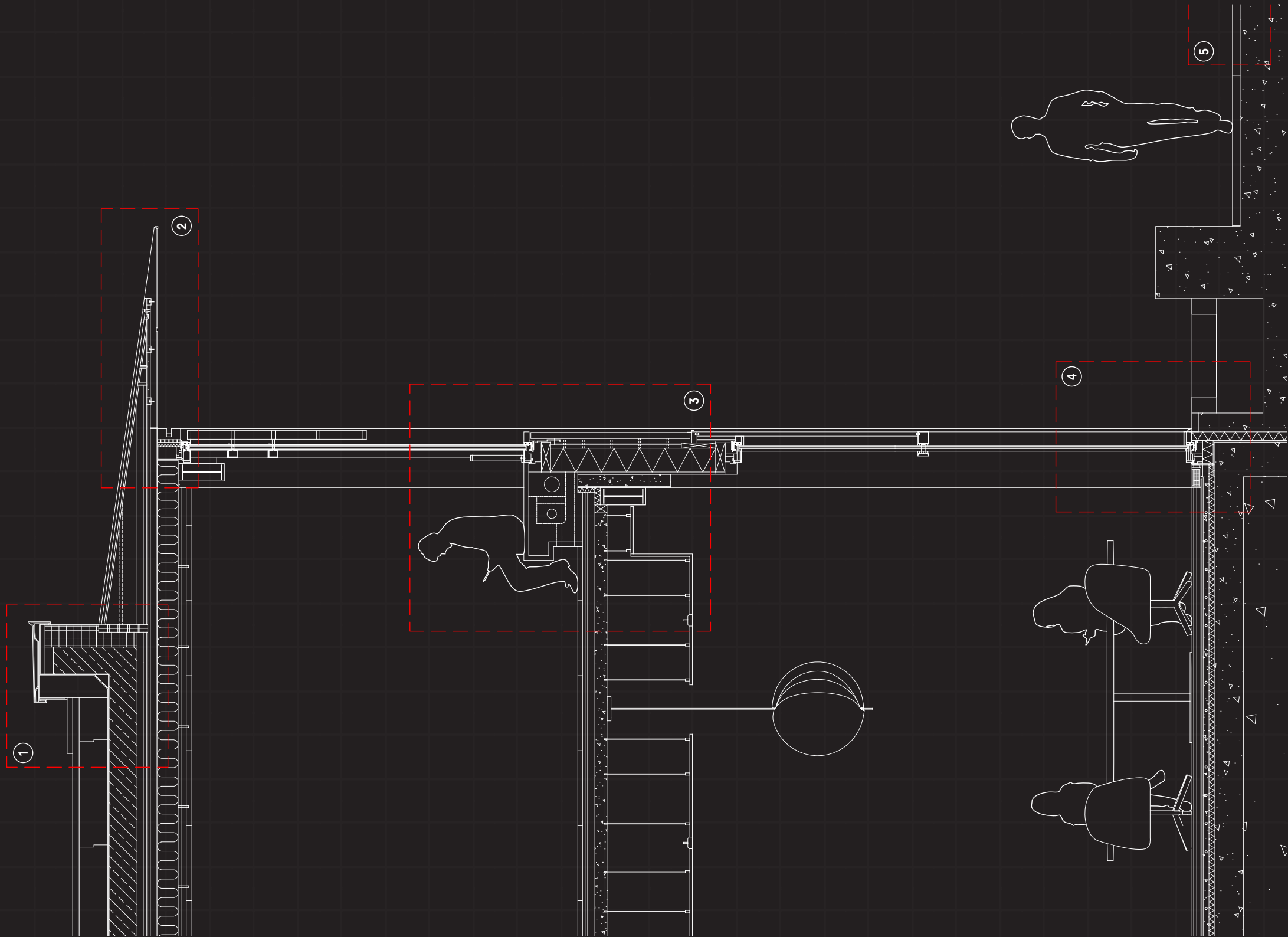
Stone [...]: The use of cut **Limestone blocks** for the informal facade provides a clean, structured look with a timeless, natural appeal. Limestone is durable, weather-resistant, and low-maintenance, with its natural grain and precise cuts it offers both aesthetic and structural contrast, allowing it to complement both modern and traditional designs.



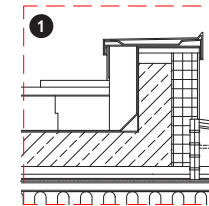
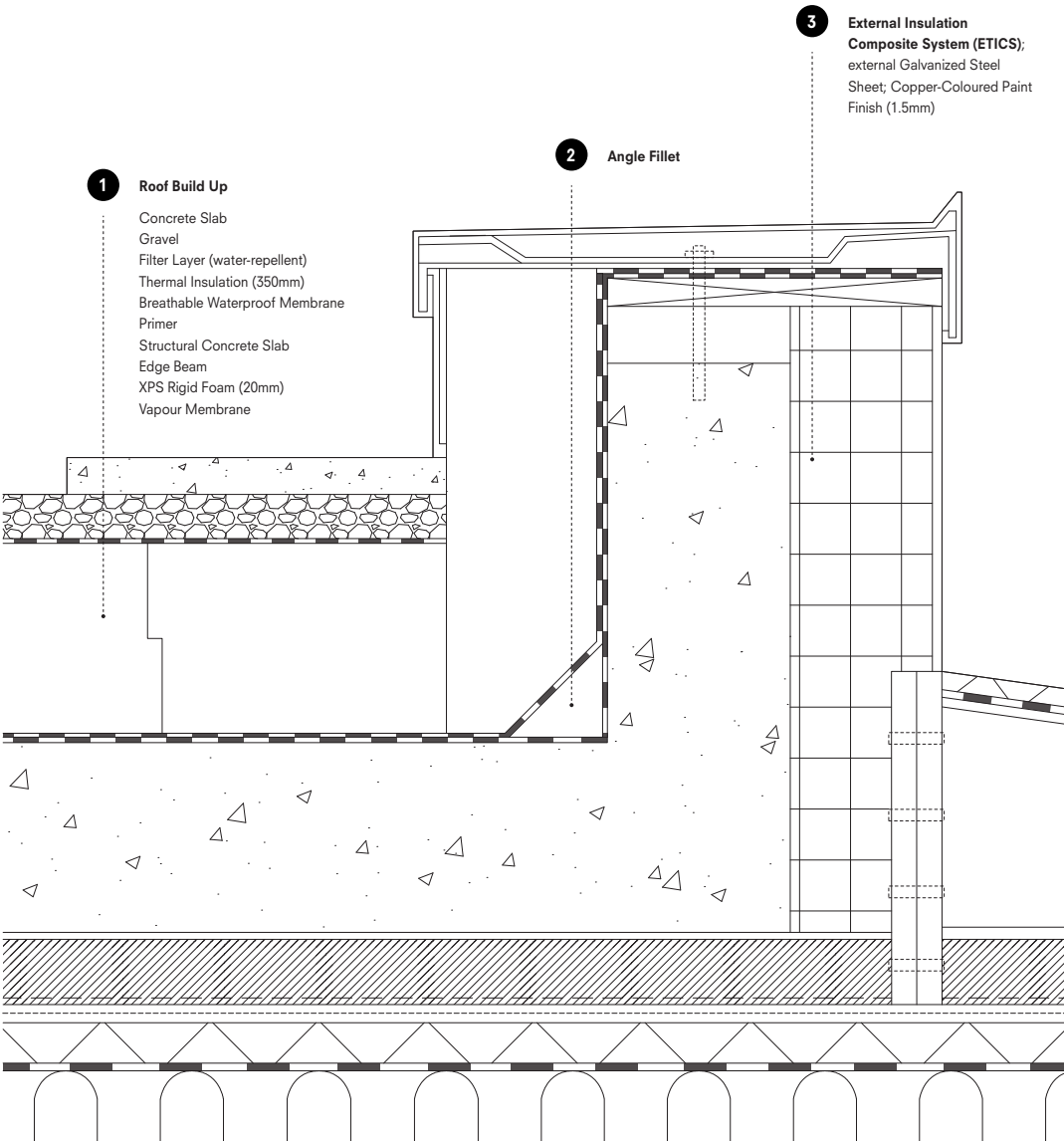
4

Glass: The use of **Full-height windows** promotes a sense of openness, reducing any sense of enclosure, making the interior feel more expansive and open. In this context, the openness conveyed by the windows enhances the informal nature of the building, encouraging movement, socializing, and an overall sense of freedom and ease.



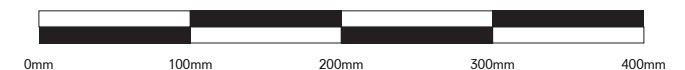


PARAPET

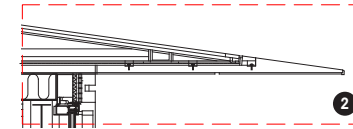
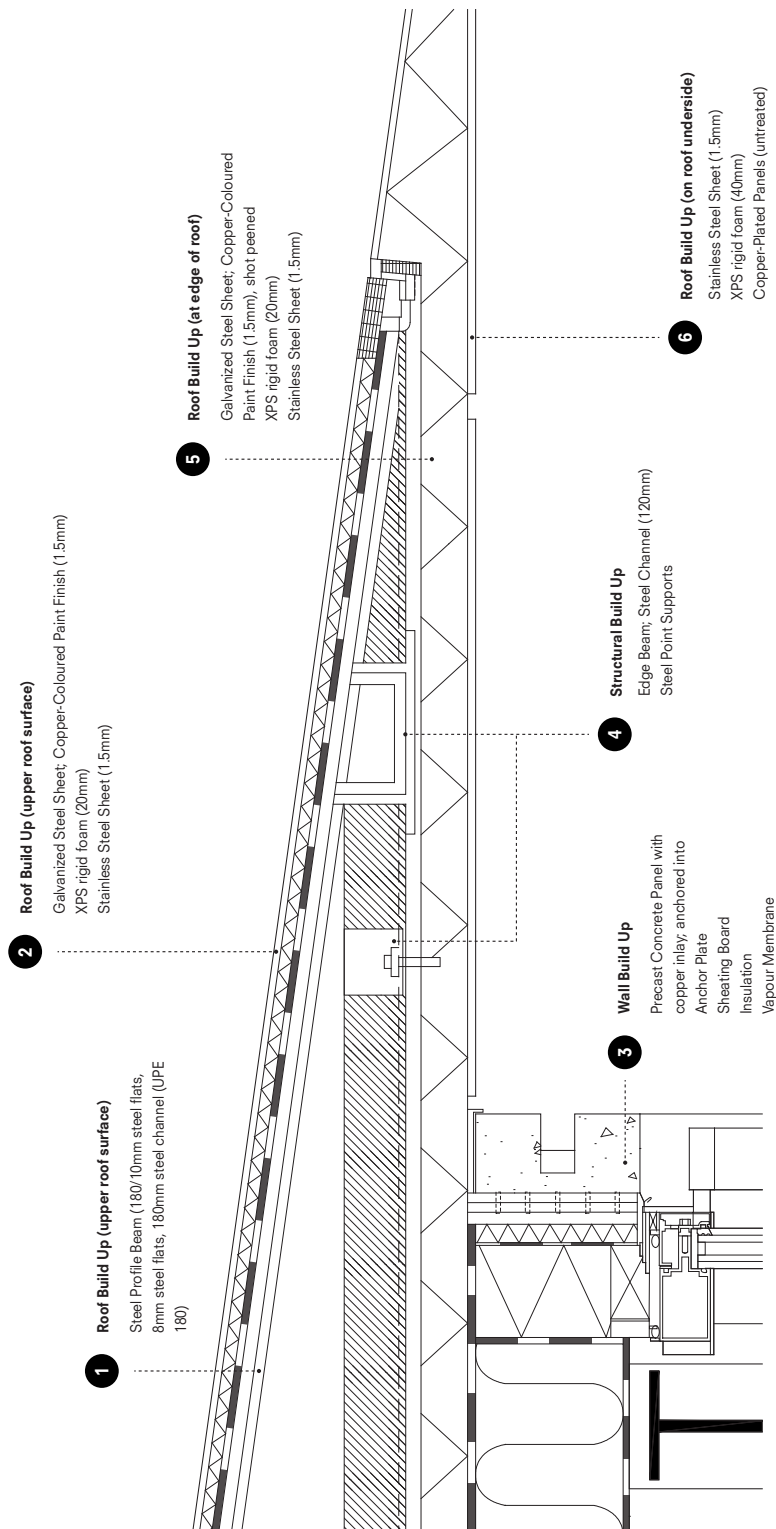


The parapet detail articulates a restrained yet deliberate material composition, integrating a gravel roof surface with a vertically expressed upstand finished in copper-coloured paint. The use of loose gravel provides a robust, low-maintenance roofing strategy that ensures effective drainage and thermal performance, while its coarse texture introduces a tactile, landscape-like quality to the roofscape. This material condition establishes a visual continuity with the broader architectural context, reinforcing a grounded and natural aesthetic. In contrast, the upstand finished in a copper-toned coating operates as both a functional and formal element. Its metallic surface introduces a refined chromatic variation that offsets the muted tonality of the gravel, enhancing the perceptual clarity of the parapet line. The finish is designed to weather over time, developing a patina that embeds temporal depth into the architectural expression. This assembly balances performative efficiency with a calibrated material sensibility. The juxtaposition between the rough, organic aggregate and the smooth, metallic surface of the upstand supports a contemporary architectural language that is at once informal and intentional, aligning with the building's broader ethos of openness, material honesty, and civic approachability.

1:10@A5

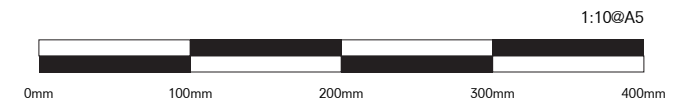


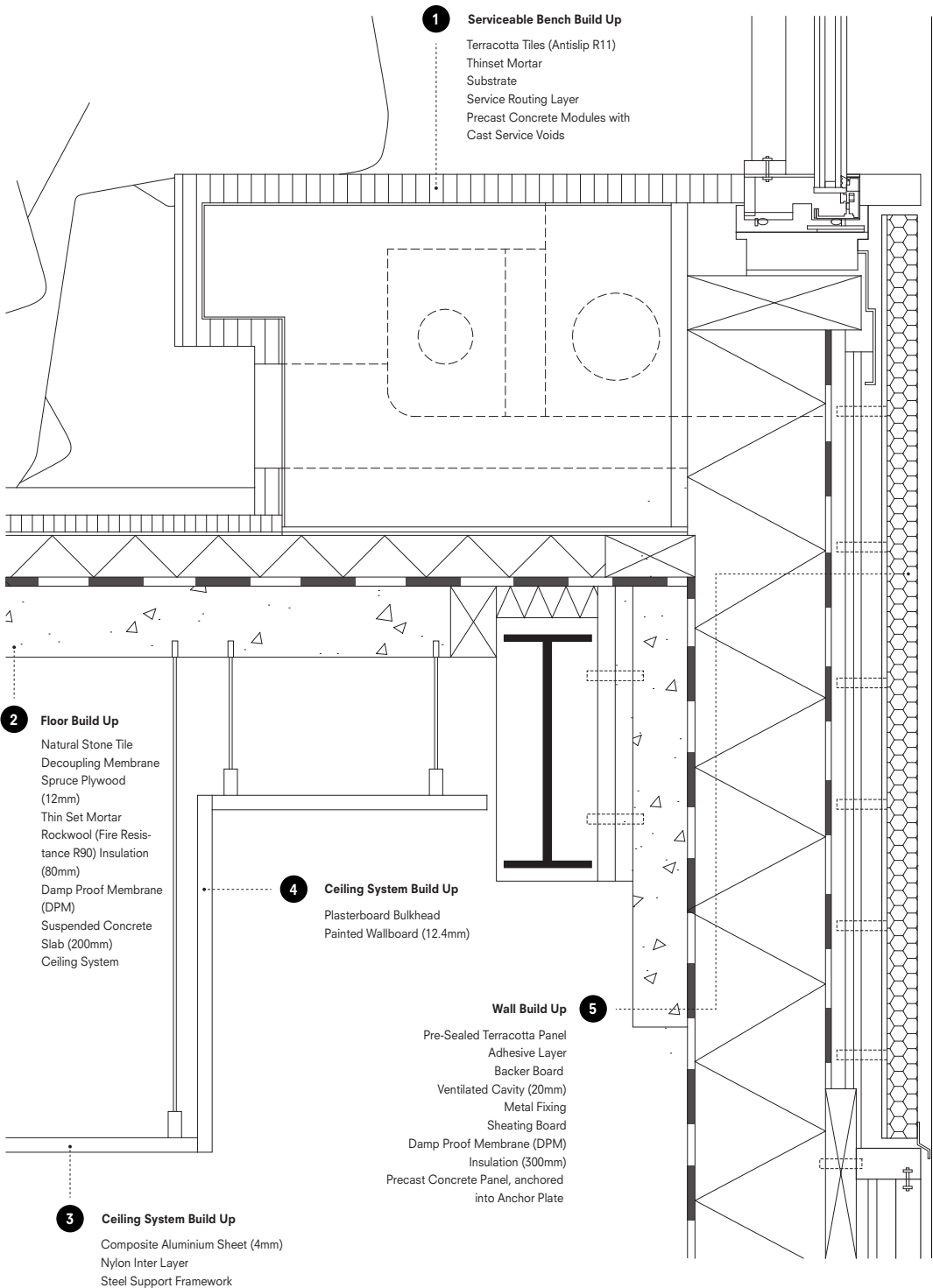
ROOF OVERHANG



Internally supported by concealed steel profile beams, the system achieves a clean, cantilevered expression without exposing its

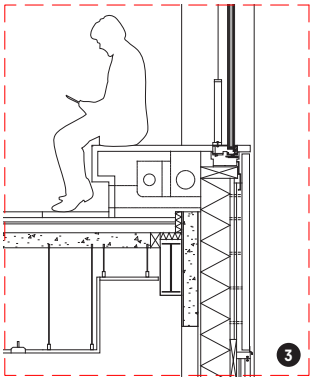
structural logic. The roof surface is clad in galvanized steel sheets, finished with a copper-coloured coating that lends a refined metallic character while providing robust protection against the elements. The finish offers a subtle reflectivity, enhancing the roof's visual presence without dominating the architectural composition. On the underside, the roof is lined with untreated copper-plated panels, deliberately left exposed to natural weathering. Over time, these panels develop a rich patina, transitioning from their initial bright tone to deeper, oxidized hues. This gradual transformation introduces a dynamic temporal quality, allowing the roof to register the passage of time and environmental conditions directly on its surface. The interplay between the industrial precision of the galvanized steel and the organic aging of the copper soffit establishes a layered material dialogue. The result is an overhang that is not only functionally performative providing shelter, shading, and weather resistance but also formally expressive, contributing to the building's evolving identity and its connection to place.





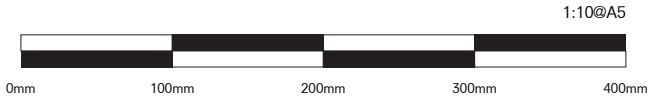
The Details

FLOOR

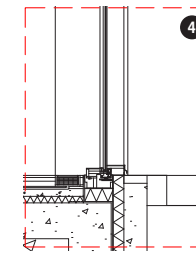


The floor and wall assembly articulates a refined integration of material expression and technical performance, foregrounding both durability and spatial clarity. At its core, a suspended concrete slab provides the structural base, allowing for the concealed routing of MEP services within a layered floor build-up. Above, the finish layer consists of natural stone tiles, selected for their tactile quality and material

permanence, offering a visually cohesive and hardwearing walking surface. Alongside the floor plane, a serviceable bench is incorporated, functioning as a discreet technical element that houses essential infrastructure while maintaining architectural continuity. The ceiling system adopts a similarly layered strategy. Fully suspended, it integrates MEP services into its framework, ensuring that functional requirements are met without disrupting the interior’s spatial coherence. Acoustic panels are embedded within the system to mitigate ambient noise and enhance acoustic comfort, particularly in shared or public zones. Vertical surfaces feature pre-sealed terracotta panels, anchored onto precast concrete backings. This assembly allows for both structural stability and expressive surface articulation. The terracotta introduces a warm, textured finish, contributing to a material palette that balances natural tactility with formal restraint.



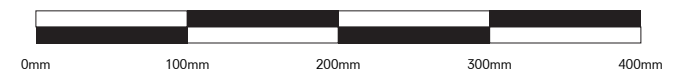
WINDOW



The window detail is conceived as a dual-performance element, integrating both environmental comfort and high-security requirements within a cohesive architectural assembly. At the base, radiant floor heating is embedded within the screed layer of the ground floor, providing even, low-temperature heat distribution. This system offers thermal comfort without visual disruption, allowing the space to remain functionally

clear and materially uninterrupted. The window unit itself is engineered as a multi-layered ballistic glazing system, combining annealed glass, laminated polycarbonate, and additional glass layers to form a high-resistance security envelope. The outermost layer of annealed glass provides initial impact absorption, while the laminated polycarbonate core delivers superior flexibility and penetration resistance. A hard-coated polycarbonate layer further reinforces the assembly, offering long-term durability and enhanced protection against forced entry or ballistic impact, all while preserving optical clarity. Together, the integration of concealed radiant heating and bullet-resistant glazing achieves a balance between interior environmental quality and occupant safety. This approach allows for robust security without sacrificing spatial openness or visual transparency, supporting the building's broader architectural intent: a secure yet accessible environment.

1:10@A5

**1 Ground Floor Build Up**

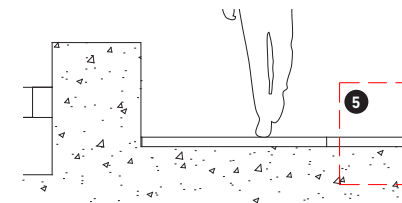
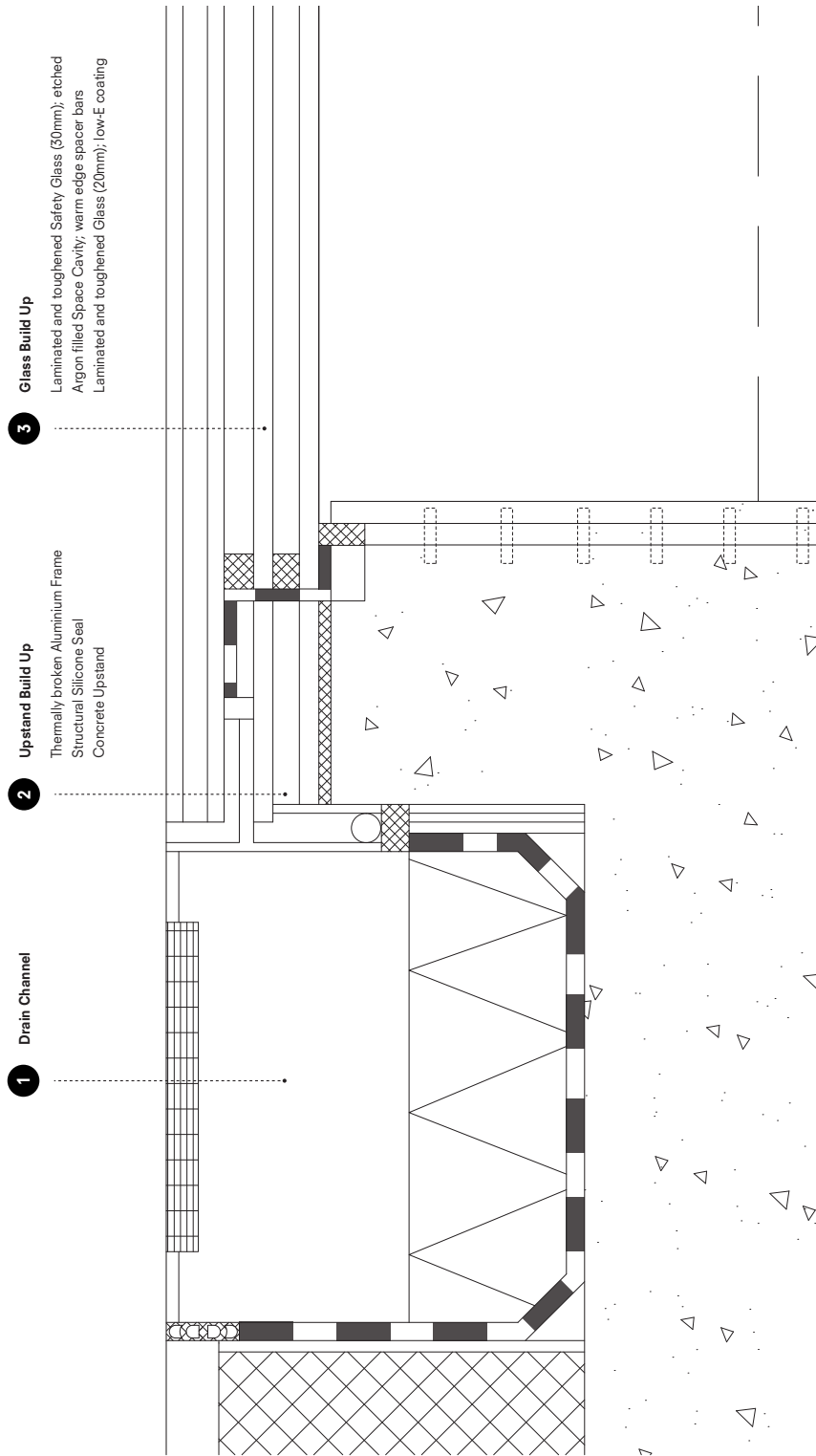
Natural Stone Tile
Decoupling Membrane
Thin Set Mortar
Underfloor Heating Pipework laid within Screed
Insulation (80mm)
Damp Proof Membrane (DPM)
Concrete Slab (300mm)

2 Window Build Up

Steel Frame
Annealed Glass
Laminated Polycarbonate
Glass Layers
Hard-Coated Polycarbonate
Factory Set Stop

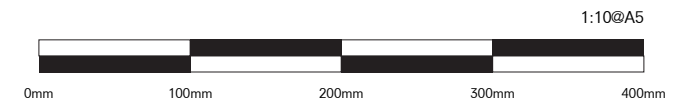
The Details

WALKABLE SKYLIGHT



The walkable skylight detail is designed as a high-performance architectural element, integrating structural integrity, thermal efficiency, and safety within a

refined, accessible surface. It is set within a thermally broken aluminium frame, which minimizes thermal bridging and condensation, ensuring consistent insulation performance. The frame is seated on a reinforced concrete upstand, providing both structural stability and weather protection, while clearly defining the threshold between glazed surface and roof construction. The glazing assembly consists of laminated and toughened safety glass, designed to resist impact and maintain structural cohesion in the event of breakage. The interlayer lamination prevents fragmentation, supporting walkability without compromising safety. An argon-filled cavity between the glass layers enhances thermal performance by reducing conductivity, while a Low-E coating helps regulate solar gain reflecting infrared radiation while allowing visible light to pass through, thereby improving energy efficiency and daylighting quality. Perimeter drainage channels are integrated into the assembly, managing water runoff and preventing accumulation around the glazed area.





The Trial of Socrates

The trial of Socrates stands as a pivotal moment in the history of Western thought and judicial systems. Charged with impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens, Socrates faced a jury of 501 citizens in an Athenian court, not simply to defend himself but to challenge the moral and political assumptions of his time. Socrates' method of dialectical questioning exposed apparent contradictions in the values of his fellow citizens and the juridical order, positioning the trial as an intersection of philosophy and justice. Despite his refusal to conform or compromise his principles, he was found guilty and sentenced to death. Even as he sipped the hemlock, he maintained that obedience to the law and fidelity to one's values were inseparable.

'CLOSING' ARGUMENT


THE PARK unfolds as a calm, thoughtfully designed public space, where natural elements and architecture are carefully balanced. Trees cast gentle shadows across the paved surface, offering moments of shade and stillness. A few people occupy the space quietly some seated alone in reflection, others accompanied, absorbed in their own rhythm suggesting a place that invites pause rather than urgency. The surrounding buildings, with their clean lines and muted tones, sit confidently in the background, grounding the scene without overwhelming it. The Art Gallery entrance hints at cultural activity within, while the open layout and visible pathways encourage movement and exploration.



THE PIAZZA

presents as a structured yet open, central, breathing space within the larger complex, framed by a rhythm of colonnades and softened by the presence of trees emerging from below. The space feels calm and ordered, defined by clean architectural lines and a sense of quiet symmetry. A few figures move through the space some briskly, others at ease hinting at a gentle interplay between daily routines and slower moments of pause. The clear daylight enhances material contrasts cool concrete, warm brick, soft foliage while long shadows suggest either the start or winding down of a day.





THE COURTYARDS framed by a sequence of robust columns and overhangs, define the architectural rhythm of the space. The setting feels open yet structured, where generous walkways and soft shadows invite movement and informal gathering. A few people linger or pass through, suggesting a balance between social interaction and transitory activity. The architecture is understated but confident, composed of clean lines and restrained materiality. The light interacts subtly with the surfaces, while the trees below introduce texture and depth.


An architectural rendering of a modern building featuring a large, low, copper-clad canopy supported by a series of tall, slender concrete columns. The building has a long, horizontal profile with large glass windows and doors. The foreground is a paved plaza with a few people walking. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds and a flock of birds flying. The overall style is clean and minimalist.

THE FORMAL SPACE ahead does not tower, commands attention, its long, low canopy slicing into the open air like a gesture of calm authority. Columns rise in clean, measured intervals, casting soft, deliberate shadows across the stone ground. Above, the copper canopy catches the late sun. It's warm, coppery surface glows just enough to draw the eye. The lines are sharp and intentional, there's a sense of respect in their precision toward the space, the sky, and those who pass beneath. This is not merely a formal building. It marks a threshold ceremonial, yet not grandiose; public, yet deeply personal. In its presence, visitors feel small in the best way grounded, welcomed, and aware that they have arrived somewhere that matters.

THE ENTRANCE

canopy extends overhead like a welcoming gesture, casting long, soft shadows along the columns that frame the entryway. There is a clear sense of balance here: clean geometry, open air, and greenery rooted at the heart of the structure. The trees behind the glass seem to breathe with the stillness, their presence subtle yet grounding not mere decoration but essential. Someone sits cross-legged by the edge of a planter, speaking quietly with a friend, as if the space itself encourages calm conversation. A cyclist passes by with fluid, unhurried movement, while pigeons gather peacefully, unbothered by the human pace around them. Light filters down through the space between the structure and the sky, illuminating the space under the canopy. The entrance becomes more than a threshold it is a moment of pause, a space between what is brought in and what might be carried out.





THE ATRIUM opens up as a layered public space defined by clarity and openness. The interplay of concrete structures, glass railings, and natural vegetation below creates a calm yet engaging environment. Scattered figures animate the space without overwhelming it. Integral to this openness is the carefully designed security zone. Security checkpoints and screening areas are strategically positioned to minimise any sense of intrusion. Frosted glass partitions and restrained metalwork reinforce a feeling of transparency and accessibility rather than confinement. Staff areas and control points are discreetly integrated into the architectural flow, ensuring safety while preserving the atrium's welcoming atmosphere. Above, the skyline framed by soft clouds and sunlit façades adds a sense of lightness and dimension, enriching the spatial experience.

THE PASSAGE

unfolds as a deliberate architectural moment, polished concrete columns rise in quiet rhythm, slender and steady like the trunks of a silent forest, grounding the space with their presence. Above, the ceiling is a tessellated mosaic of warm, reflective tiles, catching and fracturing the filtered light into slow-moving fragments that dance softly across the volume. Light seeps down from geometric openings far above, spilling in angled pools of copper and gold. This natural illumination is neither harsh nor artificial; it settles gently onto the stone floor, warming the cool surface and animating the shadows that trace their quiet choreography. The floor itself, smooth and deliberate, anchors the space while reflecting the delicate interplay of sun and structure. Wayfinding here is less a matter of signs and more a whispered suggestion woven into the architecture's flow. The open expanse and steady rhythm of columns guide visitors naturally toward spaces for reading, listening, and gathering.



THE COURTROOM

defies traditional hierarchies, circular in plan, intimate in scale, and spatially democratic. There are no elevated benches or platforms of authority. Instead, judges, lawyers, jurors, plaintiffs, defendants, and observers all sat at the same level eye to eye, equally exposed. The space was designed not to dominate but to reveal, evoking less a tribunal and more a collective reckoning. The circular form demanded attention, proximity, and accountability. Every seat faced another. Justice, here, was not imposed from above but negotiated between individuals, unfolding in plain sight. Atmospheric light filtered softly from above, diffused through frosted glass panels. Overhead, the reflective ceiling shimmered with subtle motion, a surface that abstracted and absorbed tracing gestures, glances, and shifts of emotion.





VERDICT

The Future

The future of courthouses positions the courthouse itself as a civic space where all actors regardless of their direct involvement in legal processes can interact with the system in meaningful ways. It reflects a future where justice is woven into the everyday fabric of the city, transcending the traditional boundaries of isolated, formal institutions. Courthouses need to evolve from being static symbols of state power into dynamic, participatory civic spaces that are deeply integrated into urban life. Reimagined courthouses might in the future reflect a shift toward a justice system that is not just a place for adjudication but a visible, active part of the community a space for negotiation, education, and prevention.

REFLECTION

Throughout the design process of the **'Territory on Trial'** project, the central focus has been to explore how spatial organization, material language, and circulation patterns within a courthouse can mediate the complex and often invisible power structures between the various key actors involved in the judicial process. The traditional courthouse model, often monumental and rigid in its hierarchical expression, tends to reinforce social and institutional divisions. This project seeks to challenge and rethink that model. The research began by mapping the existing spatial protocols of courthouses through site visits, precedent studies and written case studies, examining where actors intersect, where they are separated, and how their movement is controlled. It became evident that spatial segregation particularly between the judiciary and the public or between defendants and victims serves both functional and symbolic roles. However, this often comes at the cost of transparency, accessibility, and emotional wellbeing for those navigating the justice system.

Working within the urban and cultural context of **Milan**, a city shaped by layered histories of power, civic identity, and architectural formality, this project critically examines how courthouse design can evolve to respond to contemporary understandings of justice, transparency, and human dignity. The research centres on the territorial dynamics and hierarchical relationships embedded within judicial architecture, particularly how these are expressed, reinforced, or challenged through spatial design. The existing Palazzo di Giustizia, recognizable through its fascist-era architecture, served as a point of reference throughout the design development. Its monumental scale, axial symmetry, and strict segregation of circulation paths embody a top-down model of authority, where power is visually

and physically distanced from the public. While such architecture conveys order and formality, it also risks alienating those most vulnerable within the justice system. The **'Territory on Trial'** Project seeks to challenge and question past, current and future courthouses and aims to propose a more inclusive and responsive spatial model for a contemporary courthouse in Milan.

By rethinking spatial hierarchies not as rigid borders but as fluid and negotiated relationships the design proposes a layered approach to circulation, privacy, and territoriality. Judges, lawyers, defendants, and the public are no longer assigned strictly separate domains but are offered shared or adjacent spaces where visibility and mutual acknowledgment are possible. For example, transitional areas such as waiting rooms and mediation zones are designed as semi-public territories where spatial cues such as natural light, material contrast, and acoustic softness mediate behaviour without resorting to strict physical barriers.

The Milanese urban fabric, with its dense blocks and permeable courtyards, inspired the design's emphasis on porosity and civic integration. Rather than creating a courthouse as an isolated fortress which acts as a divider in the urban landscape, the project situates the building as part of the everyday life of the city. The more sensitive zones courtrooms, deliberation chambers, and holding areas have been placed below ground, to maintain necessary levels of security and dignity while six distinct buildings above, enable easy direct access to various services and facilities. The buildings depending on the programme vary in materiality in scale, aiming to defuse hierarchical aspects thereby making the engagement with the judicial system more accessible for everyone.

One key challenge was addressing the tension between authority and accessibility. To better understand the dynamics at place, the courtroom itself was reimagined: no longer a theatre of judgment with a dominant axis and elevated bench, but a space that balances gravitas with spatial equity. While the judges bench is still legible as a central figure, the reshaped courtroom offers a environment which fosters dialogue over intimidation and hierarchy. The change of the courtroom layout came with unknown challenges due to the segregation that still needs to stay in place outside of the space to ensure impartiality and safety of everyone involved. Thereby a multi-levelled courtroom cluster was designed with circulation routes on multiple floors, with actors either ascending or descending. Spaces such as waiting areas, mediation rooms, and circulation nodes were developed as shared spaces with spatial cues (lighting, material, acoustics) that subtly communicate behavioural expectations and social dynamics.

These zones act as buffers, promoting moments of encounter that are neither confrontational nor fully integrated, allowing actors to coexist within a more carefully mediated environment with a central passage, where various actors can connect. Another challenging aspect of the design process was understanding how architecture can either embed or soften hierarchical distinctions. While some degree of hierarchy is essential for the functioning of the judicial process, it can be argued that it can be made legible in ways that are more inclusive and less alienating. The spatial exploration how hierarchy and territoriality can be addressed through scale, proximity, materiality, accessibility etc. and how the judicial process which in itself is complex and for many incomprehensible can be

broken down spatially and informatively led to a increasingly growing and entangled fabric which can be described more as a 'Centre of Justice' rather than a courthouse.

Ultimately, the project reflects an attempt to create a active part in Milans urban fabric that acknowledges the complexities of power, vulnerability, and territoriality inherent to the justice system and within the context of Milan, with its strong legal traditions and evolving multicultural population, this architectural rethinking of the courthouse aims to reflect a justice system that is not only fair but also a visibly active and vibrant part of everyday life. Reflecting a shift from viewing courthouses as static monuments of state power toward understanding them as civic spaces of negotiation, prevention and education for various actors irrespective of their level of involvement in the judicial process.

ANNEX

GLOSSARY
COURTHOUSE

a building that contains law courts; a building that contains rooms where trials and other legal cases happen

HIERARCHY

a system in which people or things are arranged according to their importance; a system in which people or things are put at various levels or ranks according to their importance

AUTHORITY

the moral or legal right or ability to control; a group of people with official responsibility for a particular area of activity

POWER

ability to control people and events

TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS

the way spaces/territories change over time because of interactions between people, activities, and resources

HIERARCHICAL RELATIONS

how different places/territories are organized into levels of importance or influence

TRIAL

the hearing of statements and showing of objects, etc. in a law court to judge if a person is guilty of a crime or to decide a case or a legal matter

THE DOCK

the place in a criminal law court where the accused person sits or stands during the trial

JUDGE

a person who is in charge of a trial in a court and decides how a person who is guilty of a crime should be punished, or who makes decisions on legal matters

JURY

a group of people who have been chosen to listen to all the facts in a trial in a law court and to decide if a person is guilty or not guilty, or if a claim has been proved

LAWYER

someone whose job is to give advice to people about the law and speak for them in court

PLAINTIFF

someone who makes a legal complaint against someone else in court; a person who accuses someone else in a law case of having done something illegal

DEFENDANT

a person in a law case who is accused of having done something illegal; a person in a court of law who is accused of having done something wrong

PUBLIC

relating to or involving people in general, rather than being limited to a particular group of people

PRESS

newspapers and magazines, and those parts of television and radio that broadcast news, or reporters and photographers who work for them

CROWN COURT MANUAL

a court in England and Wales that deals with serious criminal cases such as indictable offences, appeals from magistrates' courts, and sentencing for cases passed up from magistrates' courts. Cases are heard before a judge and, in many instances, a jury

EVIDENCE

facts, information, documents, etc. that give reason to believe that something is true; to provide evidence (= facts, information, etc. that give reasons for believing) that something is true or present

STARE DECISIS

the principle in law that a decision is made based on decisions in previous cases

ASSIZE COURTS

periodic criminal courts in England and Wales that operated from about 1350 until their abolition in 1972. They were established to allow judges to travel around the country to hear serious cases, ensuring that justice was accessible beyond the central courts in Westminster.

CASE STUDIES

a detailed account giving information about the development of a person, group, or thing, especially in order to show general principles; a detailed examination of a particular process or situation over a period of time

SEGREGATION

the act of keeping one person or thing separate from another person or thing

FASCIST ERA

mass movement that dominated many parts of central, southern, and eastern Europe between 1919 and 1945. Fascist movements propagated extreme nationalism that often went hand in hand with militarism and racial purity. The prosperity of a nation depended on a unified polity that put the group's welfare above the individual's.

FIRST INSTANCE

first level of judgment where a legal case is heard and decided for the first time. This is where: Evidence is presented, Witnesses are heard, The judge (or panel of judges) issues a first ruling.

FIRST APPEAL

second level of judgment, where a party challenges the decision made by a court of first instance. The case is reviewed, either: completely (de novo meaning evidence and witnesses can be re-examined, or partially just reviewing legal errors or interpretation. The court can confirm, change, or reverse the first judgment.

MAT BUILDING

A mat-building is a type of architectural design where the structure is organized as a horizontal, grid-like system spreading outward rather than upward and made up of repetitive units. The term was popularized by Alison Smithson (part of the Team 10 movement) in the 1960s.

PASSAGE

a usually long and narrow part of a building with rooms on one or both sides, or a covered path that connects places; an act of moving through somewhere

PIAZZA

especially in Italy, an open area with a hard surface in a town, especially where there is no traffic

PATIOS

an area outside a house with a solid floor but no roof, used in good weather for relaxing, eating, etc.; an outside area with a solid floor next to a house, where people can sit

THE RULE OF LAW

a set of laws that people in a society must obey, or the fact that such a set of laws exists: Everyone is subject to the rule of law, Rule of law is essential to the future of the country.

THE RULE OF LAW**rule of law**

The rule of law is a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers four universal principles: accountability, just law, open government, and accessible and impartial justice.

EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW: NO ONE, REGARDLESS OF STATUS, POWER, OR POSITION, IS ABOVE THE LAW. ALL INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, MUST FOLLOW THE LAW.

LEGAL CERTAINTY: LAWS SHOULD BE CLEAR, KNOWN, AND STABLE, SO THAT INDIVIDUALS AND BUSINESSES CAN UNDERSTAND AND PLAN THEIR ACTIONS ACCORDINGLY. LAWS SHOULD NOT BE APPLIED ARBITRARILY OR RETROACTIVELY.

ACCOUNTABILITY: ALL INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, ARE ACCOUNTABLE UNDER THE LAW. THIS MEANS THERE MUST BE MECHANISMS IN PLACE TO HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE FOR UNLAWFUL ACTIONS.

TRANSPARENCY: LAWS SHOULD BE ENACTED, ADMINISTERED, AND ENFORCED IN A TRANSPARENT MANNER. PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO THE LAWS AND DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE: PEOPLE MUST HAVE ACCESS TO IMPARTIAL AND FAIR LEGAL PROCESSES AND REMEDIES, ENSURING THAT DISPUTES CAN BE RESOLVED AND RIGHTS ENFORCED WITHOUT UNDUE DELAY OR DISCRIMINATION.

FAIR AND INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY: THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM MUST BE IMPARTIAL AND INDEPENDENT FROM OTHER BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT. COURTS MUST BE ABLE TO DECIDE CASES BASED ON THE LAW, FREE FROM INTERFERENCE OR INFLUENCE.

PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS: THE RULE OF LAW ENSURES THAT BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS ARE PROTECTED, SUCH AS THE RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH, THE RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL, AND PROTECTION FROM DISCRIMINATION.

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Court Users,
Plaintiff,
and
Government Authorities,
Defendant.

NOTICE TO ATTEND COURT

You are hereby notified that you are required to appear before the Court in connection with the case referenced below:

Case Number: 2025-CT-000

Case Title: Laura Simonsen /
P5 Presentation: Territory on Trial

Courtroom: Courtroom T

Date of Appearance: Tuesday, 28th
October 2025

Time: 16:45 - 18:30pm (CET)

Location: Faculty of Architecture
and the Built Environment;
Julianalaan 134, 2628 BL Delft

Purpose of Summons:

You are being summoned to appear in court as a:

- ☐ Defendant
☐ Witness
☒ Juror
☐ Other:

If attending online, please join the session using the following details:

Meeting Link: [Territory on Trial](#)

Meeting ID: 393 875 554 463 3

Passcode: uA7sx2yY

Join Time: Please log in at 16:50 latest to ensure connectivity and readiness.

Important: You must ensure you have a reliable internet connection. You are expected to behave with the same level of respect and formality as you would in a physical courtroom.

Annex

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO MY FRIENDS

thank you for being there through it all! The laughs, the cries, the late nights, the hour long Rhino, Revit and Grasshopper tutorials, countless phone and video calls no matter the time or day, Bouwpub visits and dinners and the moments you didn't even realise I needed you. They mean more than I can say!

TO MY HOUSEMATES

thank you for surviving the chaos with me (and sometimes being the chaos), the shared dinners, the late-night pep talks, spontaneous dance breaks in the kitchen, endless cups of tea, the practice presentations you stayed awake for and the everyday moments that kept me grounded!

TO MY PARENTS

thank you for your patience, and your belief in me even when I doubted myself, and for making it possible for me to do this at all. Supporting me through five years of university isn't something I take lightly, your sacrifice gave me the freedom to learn, grow, and finish what I started. I'll always be grateful!

TO MY MENTOR TEAM

thank you for pushing me, guiding me, and helping me see things more clearly especially when I couldn't do that for myself!

None of this would've happened without all of you!





