



COMPLEX PROJECTS

# ECHOES OF TOMORROW

A PARLIAMENT OF NATURAL THINGS FOR BERLIN

Vittorio Domanda

*Project book*

**2024**

**COMPLEX PROJECTS**  
**Bodies and Building Berlin**  
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## About Rights of Nature

In our contemporary era, the global environmental crisis has reached unprecedented levels. Since 1970, 70% of vertebrate life has faced extinction, signalling a profound loss of biodiversity. Alarming statistics further reveal that the sustenance of our current lifestyle consumes the equivalent of 1.6 Earths annually, illustrating the unsustainable nature of our practices. Human activities, such as fisheries and pollution, have affected 60% of the world's oceans, leaving an indelible impact.

The dangerous threat of ecocide, defined as the large-scale damage, destruction, or prolonged loss of ecosystems, has become an urgent concern. Nations worldwide are grappling with the imperative to safeguard their natural entities from exploitation and extinction.

In 1972, legal scholar Christopher D. Stone questioned the anthropocentric view of nature in his seminal article, "Should Trees Have Standing? Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects". Stone advocated for a paradigm shift, proposing that nature should be granted legal rights. Fifty years after this groundbreaking publication, the imperative to recognize nature as a legal entity and incorporate it into legislative systems has gained global relevance.

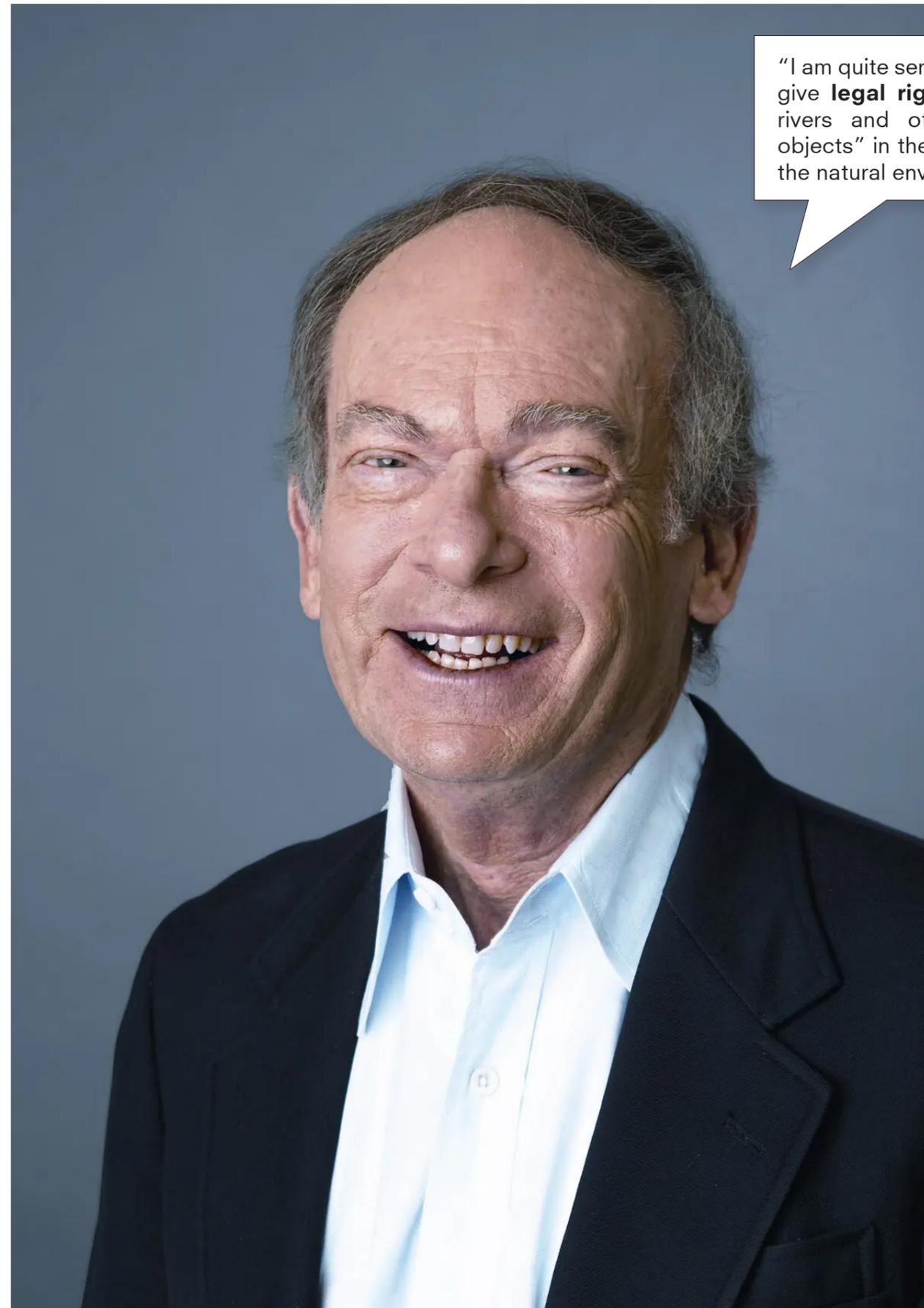
This shift is exemplified by various cases across continents. An illustrative case is the Whanganui River in New Zealand, which achieved historic significance in 2017 as the world's first river to be accorded legal rights. This milestone was motivated by the indigenous Maori communities' imperative to protect the river from pollution, exemplifying

the symbiosis between legal rights and environmental preservation.

Moreover, Te Urewera Park, also in New Zealand, serves as another noteworthy example. Here, a collaborative board comprising Maori representatives and government officials was established to regulate the park's future, embodying a cooperative approach to environmental governance.

These legal developments are not confined to a specific region, as evidenced by cases worldwide. In South America, the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador and the Atrato River in Colombia have been focal points for legal recognition. North America sees cases like the Manoomin in Minnesota and the Orange County River in Florida. In Asia, the Yamuna and Ganga rivers in India, along with all rivers in Bangladesh, are undergoing legal transformations. Africa, too, is part of this global shift, with Uganda leading initiatives to recognize the legal rights of its entire natural environment.

Despite this worldwide development, Europe lags in embracing legal personhood for nature. The urgency to align legislative processes with the recognition of nature's rights is crucial for addressing the contemporary environmental crisis and fostering a harmonious coexistence between humanity and the natural world.



"I am quite seriously proposing that we give **legal rights** to forests, oceans, rivers and other so-called "natural objects" in the environment-indeed, to the natural environment as a whole."

*Should Trees Have Standing?*  
Christopher D. Stone, 1972.

Christopher D. Stone  
The Washington Post, 2021

**‘I have done my job as philosopher and constituent by gathering together the scattered themes of a comparative anthropology. Others will be able to convene the Parliament of Things’**

Bruno Latour (1991)



Bruno Latour and the Parliament of Things  
Partizan Public, 2023

### About Parliament of Things

In 1991 Bruno Latour published “We Have Never Been Modern”, an “anthropology of science” (Latour, 1991) which deepens the separation between society and nature, according to the principle of modernity. According to Latour, the things and phenomena in our surroundings are not confined to either the social or the natural sphere; rather, they represent hybrids—a fusion of cultural and environmental factors devoid of free will. Latour emphasizes the need to refrain from speaking on behalf of things and the universe, making the political disparity between humans and things a critical concern in modern societies. This requires a revolution of thought, as Latour states:

Non-human entities should also be formally represented, have rights, etc. in addition to human entities (...). Non-human “things” only have a voice vicariously articulated by scientists, activities, artists etc..., since they don’t have free will and ability to express themselves. (1991)

In his book, Latour introduces the concept of a “Parliament of Things,” a hypothetical assembly where both humans and things (represented vicariously by technicians) participate in discussions and vote for themselves. Latour argues that humans have never had the privilege of granting rights to nature, asserting that the belief in human superiority over things has always been an illusion, with power dependent on both the social and natural spheres. According to Latour:

The Parliament of Things is a speculative research into the

emancipation of animals, plants and things (...). Law should not be centered around Men, but around Life. We are just one party, among all animals, plants and Things. (1991)

Latour contends that our societies are not truly modern, as the dichotomy between nature and culture is a fabricated notion. Numerous examples, such as the ozone layer, computer chips, AIDS, and frozen embryos, challenge the idea of a clear separation between human and non-human factors. Pre-modern people didn’t make this distinction: in this sense, “we have never been modern” as a society.

While the theory of the Parliament of Things is intriguing, it raises several complex questions. From the challenges of delineating the boundaries of things to the consideration of various voices, from the concept of legalisation to methods of prioritisation and selection, the realization of such a Parliament poses numerous issues in effectively regulating society. In this sense, the concept of modernity appears distant from the current structures of our governments. Latour himself acknowledged the need for more speculative research, recognizing the disparities between theory and reality.

**Thesis topic**

The research endeavors to redefine the conventional notion of "Parliament" as a space dedicated to discussion, voting, and law-making. Traditionally, parliaments serve as fundamental institutions within the framework of governments, fulfilling specific functions and embodying meaningful values. They stand as tangible representations of democratic ideals and authoritative governance. Their architecture usually symbolizes the character of the governance both internally and externally, playing a relevant role for the State.

As an integral part of this exploration, the project addresses the evolving needs of the Parliament in response to contemporary challenges. Climate control and management, gender equality enhancement, civil rights, international cooperation, peace, and the formulation of effective local policies emerge as crucial considerations. The Parliament's role is expanded to accommodate these pressing concerns, thereby becoming a dynamic institution that actively addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by the states.

Furthermore, the thesis delves into the concept of the Rights of Nature, exploring the legal frameworks that grant non-human entities the right to exist and flourish. Drawing inspiration from instances such as The Tree That Owns Itself, the Whanganui River, the Amazon rainforest, and the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, the project considers the modern trends of recognizing and upholding the rights of the natural world, reshaping the conventional understanding of legal rights and representation.

By looking at the limitations of existing paradigms, the project aspires to take a bold step by infusing some of the theoretical concepts of the Parliament of Things into the design process. This theoretical framework, as expounded by Latour, challenges the idea of modernity and the conventional boundaries between human and non-human entities, emphasizing the interconnectedness of society and nature. The Parliament envisioned for the future is intended to transcend the traditional divide, providing a space where both human and non-human natural elements actively participate in the legislative dialogue.

As a result of these considerations, the thesis contemplates the transition of government systems from "democracy" to "rescracy," which means from a system of government by the whole population to a system of government both by human and natural entities. This ambition aims to a more inclusive and comprehensive form of governance that accommodates both human and non-human voices within the legislative process.

**Problem statement**

Contemporary parliaments find themselves at a critical juncture, facing multifaceted challenges that question the efficacy of their traditional structures and practices. The crisis is evident not only in the demographic makeup of parliamentary bodies but also in the widespread discontent and demands for substantial changes in national politics.

In Germany, a significant concern arises from the current composition of parliamentary representatives, with a staggering 18% of individuals under the age of 40 among the 709 parliamentarians in the national Bundestag. This demographic imbalance raises questions about the diversity and representativeness of parliamentary bodies in reflecting the dynamic perspectives of the population.

The democratic fabric is further strained by a substantial 39% of the German population expressing a demand for drastic changes in national politics. Dissatisfaction rates, standing at 36% in Germany (ranking as the 4th best among EU countries), signal a growing disillusionment with the efficacy of parliamentary systems.

The discontent is multifaceted, putting into risk the democratic setting of Germany (and other states). The representativeness of parliaments is under scrutiny, as demographic imbalances may compromise the ability of these bodies to authentically voice the diverse perspectives within society. Furthermore, issues of participation and transparency question the accessibility and openness of

parliamentary processes to the public. Concerns about corruption and elitism challenge the foundational principles of democracy, while evolving notions of freedom demand a reevaluation of the balance between individual liberties and governance.

As a result of these considerations, key questions emerge from this crisis:

- *What role does the parliamentary institution play in our society today?*
- *Is the conventional form of the legislative body losing public trust and nearing obsolescence?*
- *What is the future of parliaments in the coming years?*

In light of these challenges, it becomes imperative to reconsider the future trajectory of parliaments. The classical form of the legislative body, with its traditional functions and structures, faces skepticism and a decline in public trust. As we navigate the complexities of contemporary governance, this problem statement sets the stage for a critical examination of the evolving role and viability of parliamentary institutions in the years to come.

**Research question**

*What if we welcome all things, plants and animals to the Parliament of Berlin? What would the Spree river vote for during the plenary sessions? What would be the reasoning of the brown bear? What claims would the Tiergarten and its trees make, and what future would the red fox see for itself?*

The thesis addresses the dichotomy between nature and society in the legislative process through an architectural design project. The ambition of the project is to provide a personal contribution to the evolution of parliamentary buildings and to engage in a critical reflection on the future of this architectural typology. To do so, the main goal is to design a new Parliament for the city-state of Berlin by drawing inspiration from the theory of the Parliament of Things, articulated by Bruno Latour in his book "We Have Never Been Modern". As an architect, I scrutinize the architectural approach for a Parliament of this nature. Presently, the sole proposal translating Latour's theory into design was a collection of imaginative drawings created by Partizan Publik for Holland Festival in 2017.

This project is distinct in its nature; it ventures into uncharted territory and architectural innovation without a pre-existing reference or established precedent. This design project seeks to redefine the essence of parliamentary spaces by embracing the voices of all entities, both human and non-human, within the legislative process. In exploring this topic, the central research question emerges as follows:

- *How can a contemporary Parliament be designed to include, besides humans, natural entities in the legislative process?*



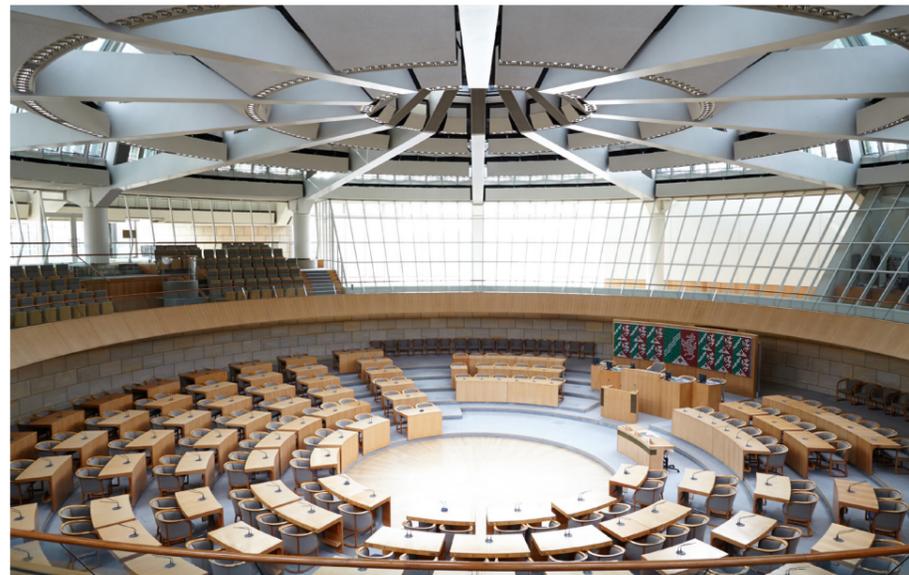
Illustration about project's concept  
Collage



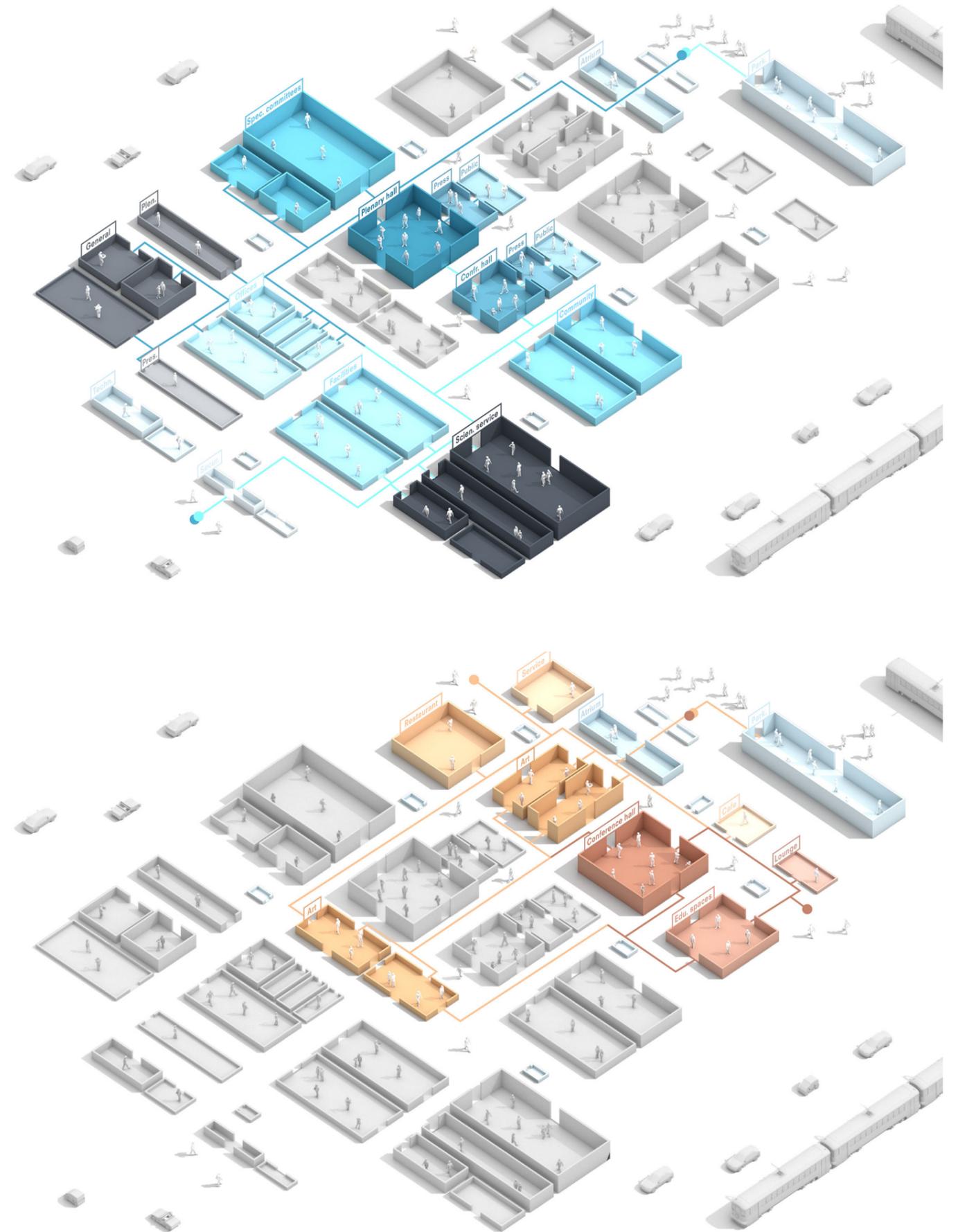
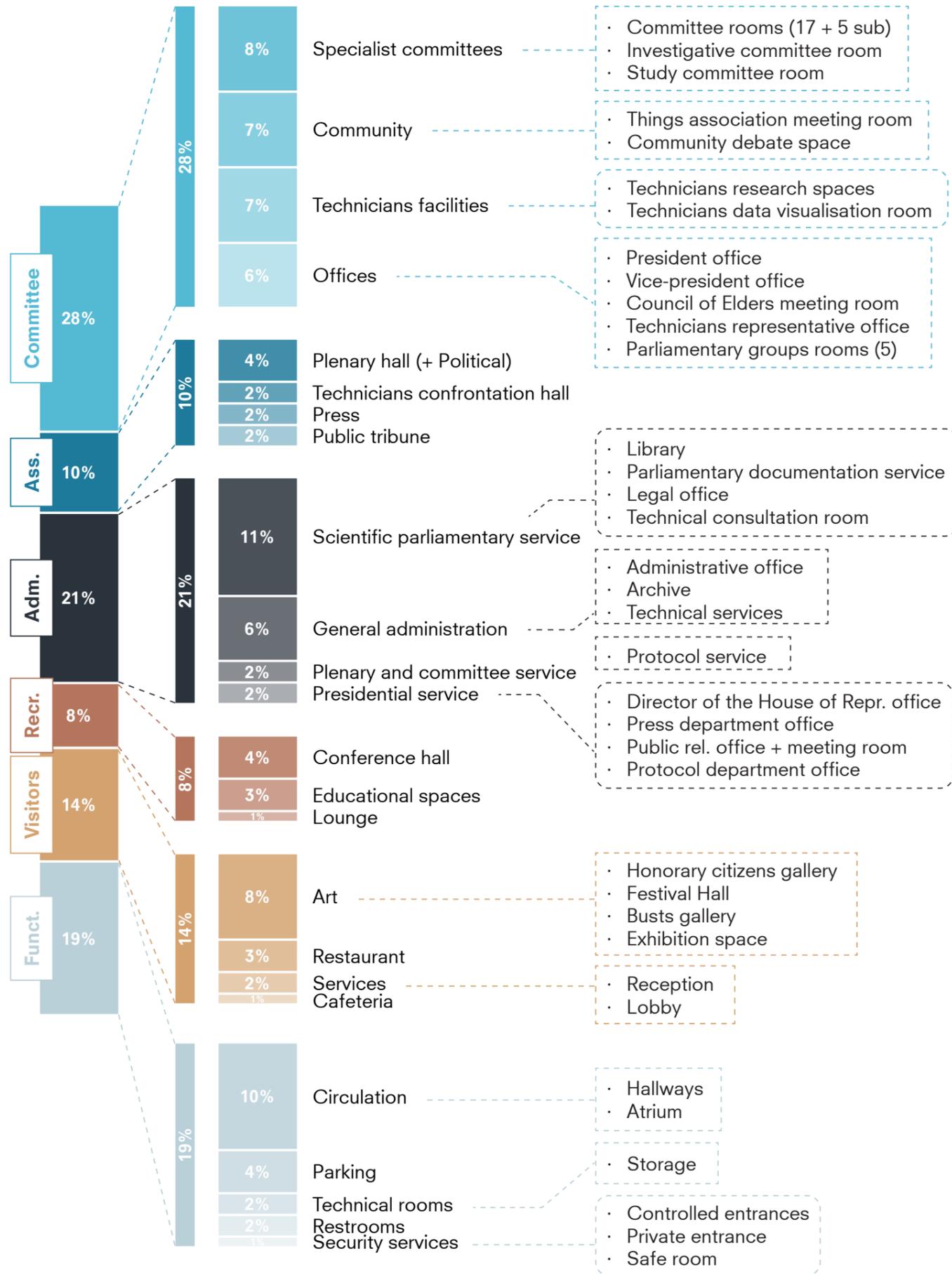
Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin  
Main facade, photo



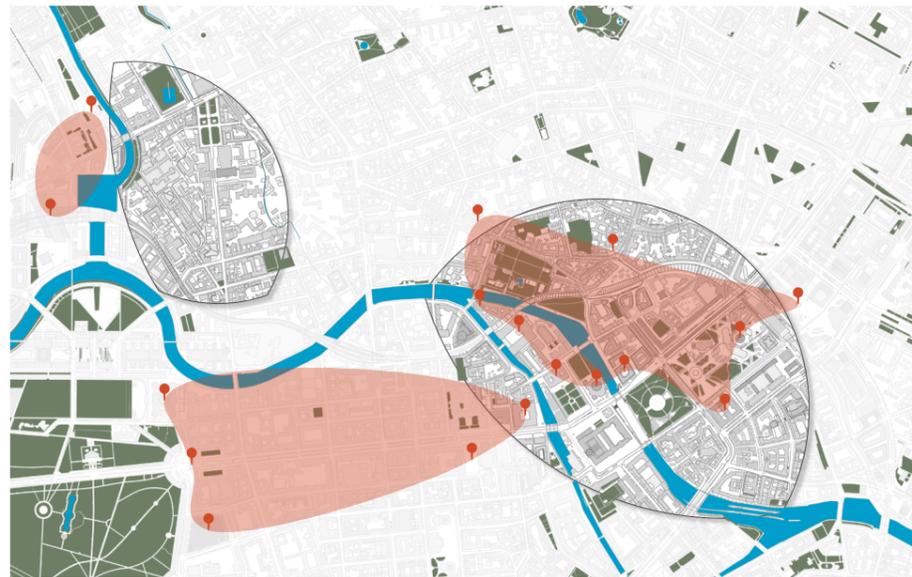
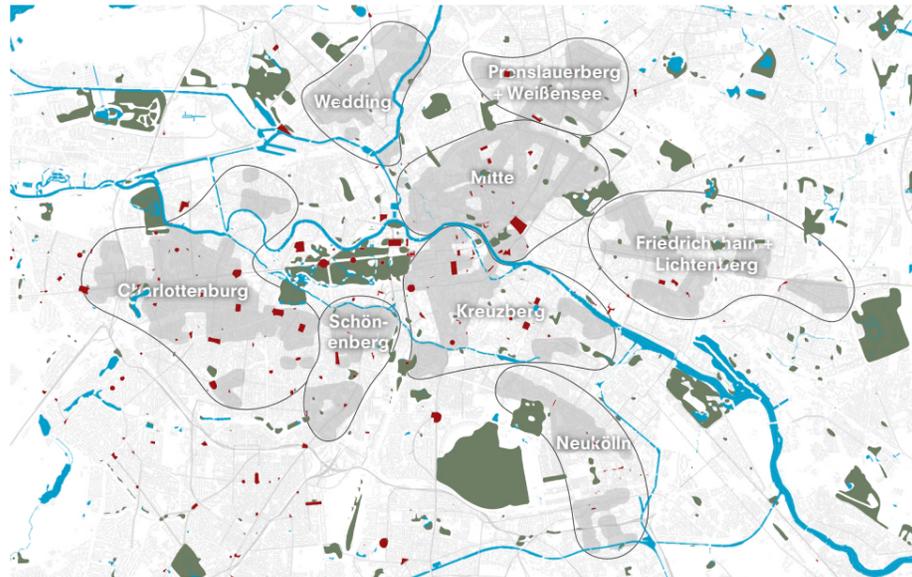
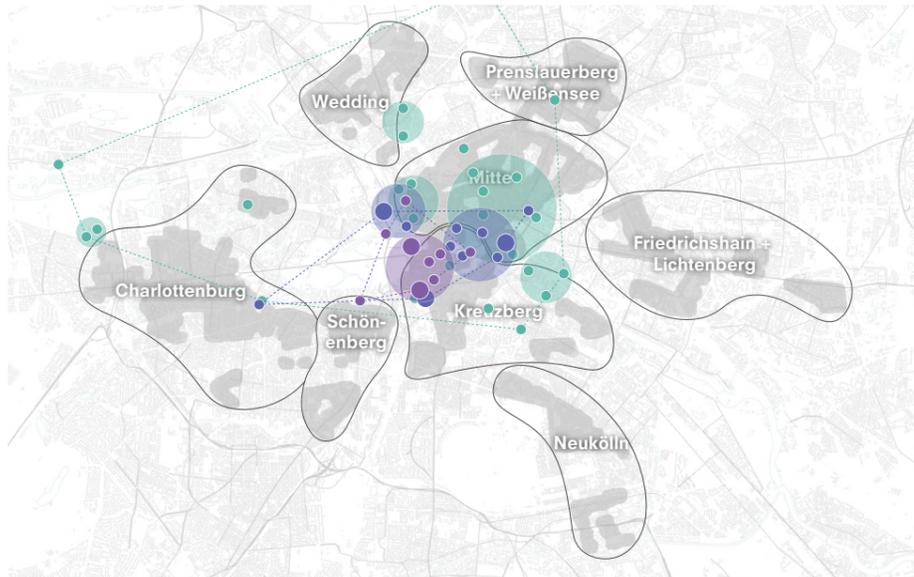
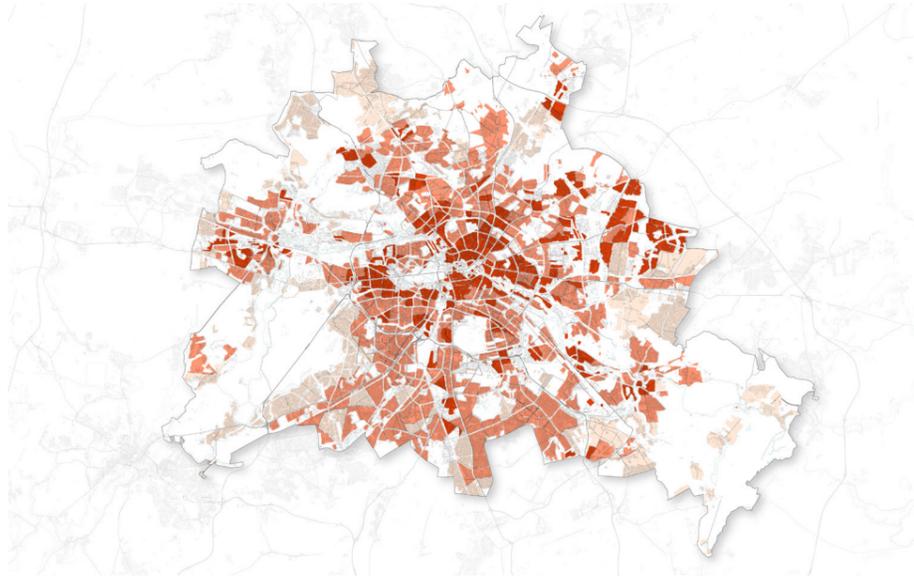
Political process, current (black) and proposed additions (light blue)  
 Diagram



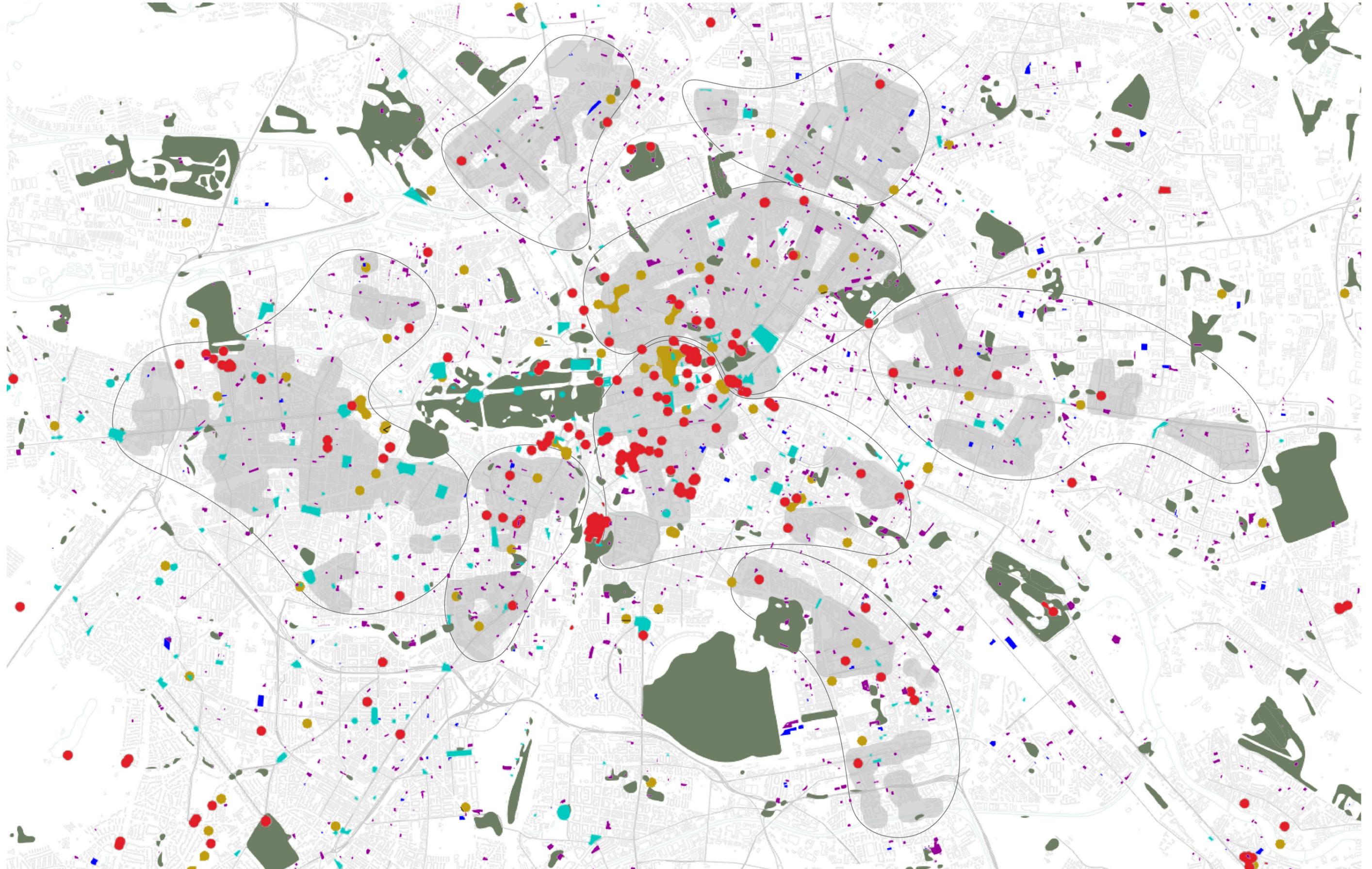
Collection of Plenary Hall views from around the world  
Perspectives, photos



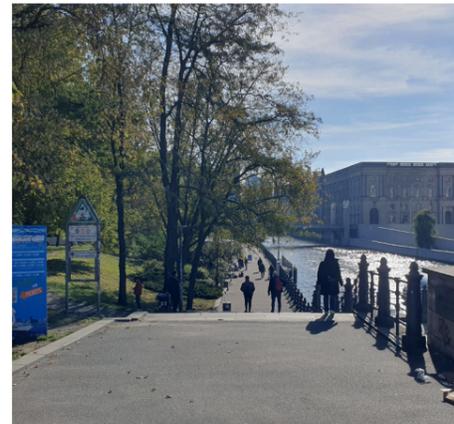
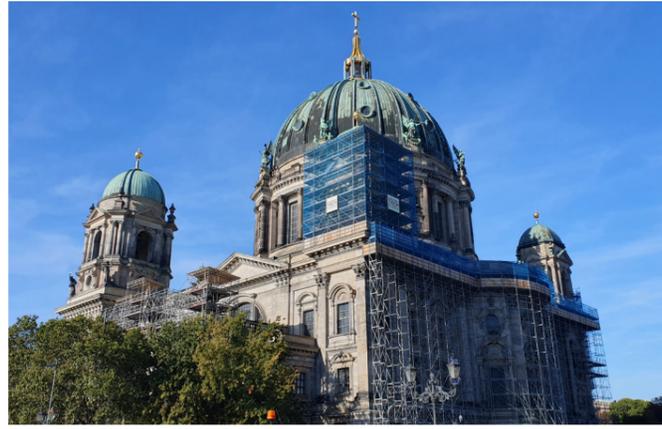
Program bar and preliminary program distribution  
Diagrams



Site selection  
Urban level, areas level, sites level



Berlin's "Cabins in the city"  
Areas level

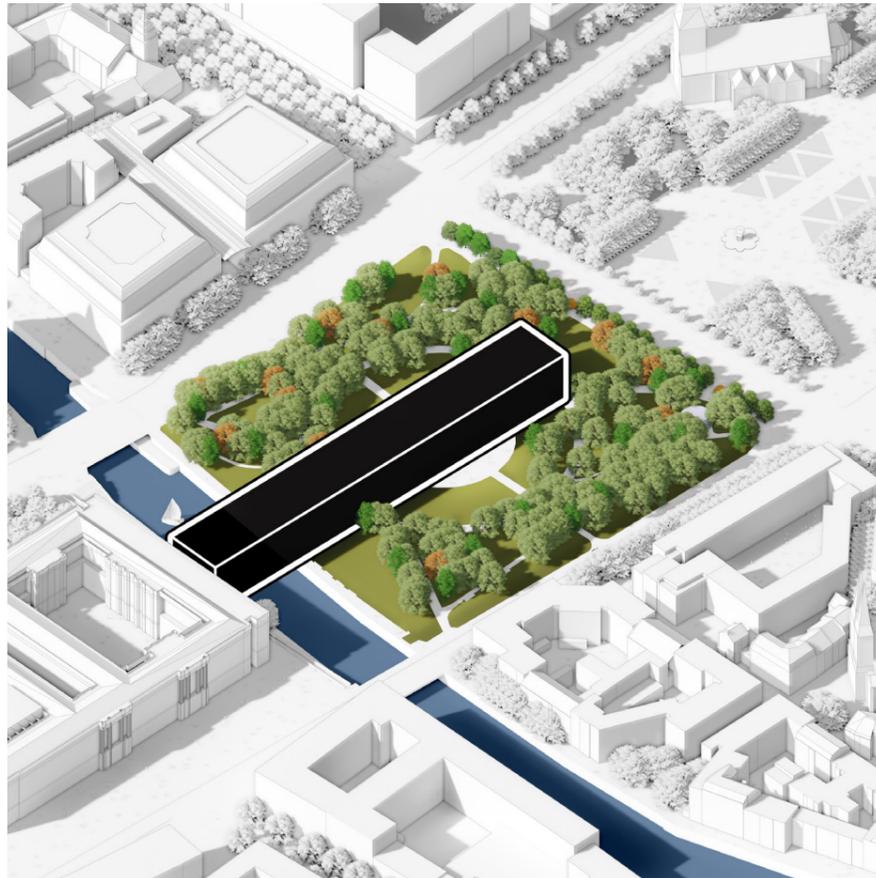


Site's atmosphere impressions  
Personal photos



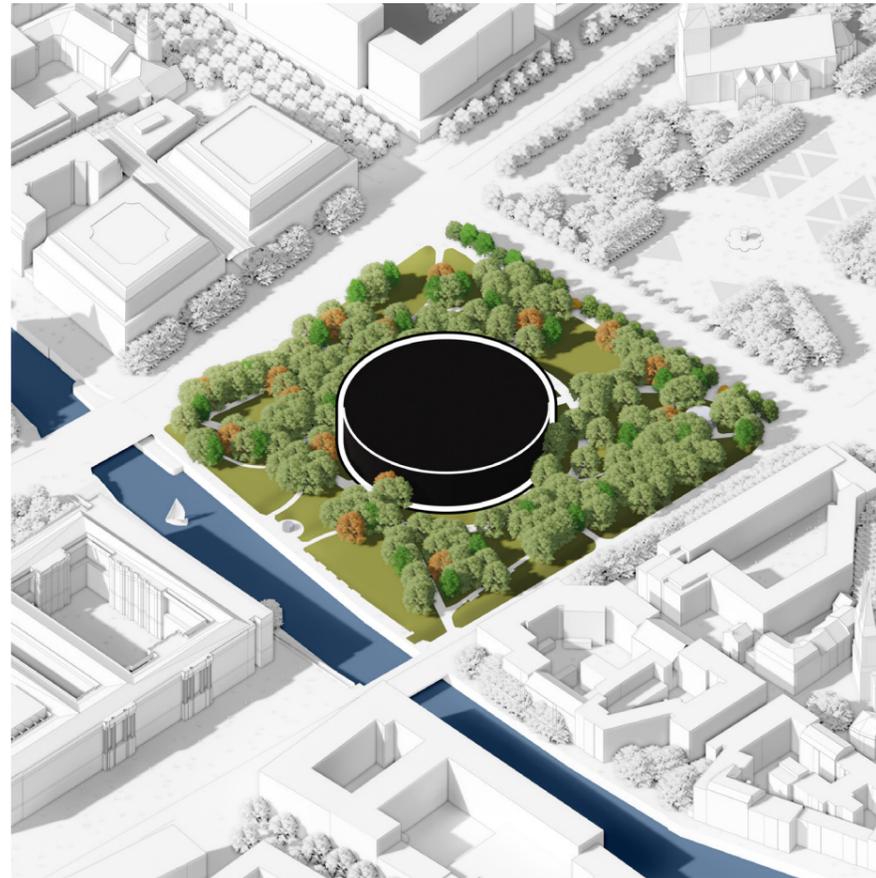
Isometric view of the site  
Isometric 3d diagram

/ STRATEGY 1 /  
WATER CONNECTION



- + connection to river
- + focus on trees+water
- some trees cut down
- difficult system
- occupation of river space

/ STRATEGY 2 /  
HIDDEN BEHIND NATURE

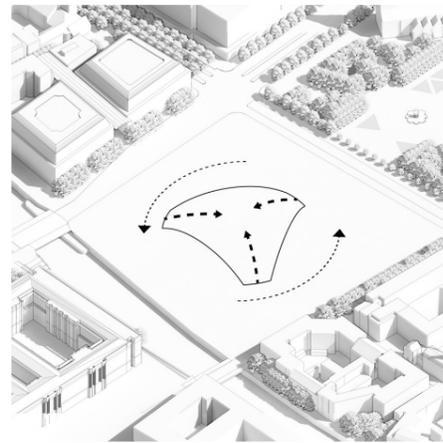
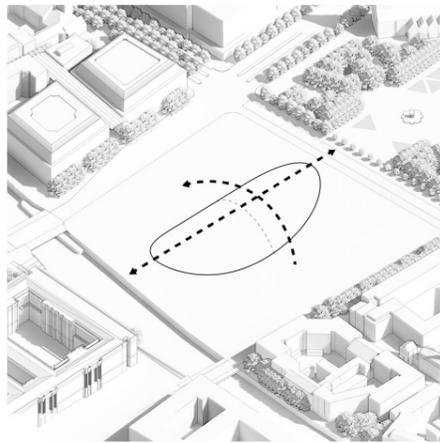
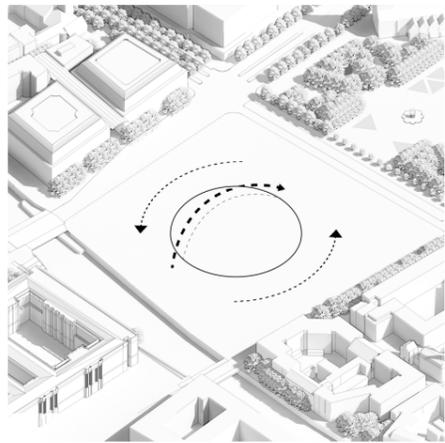
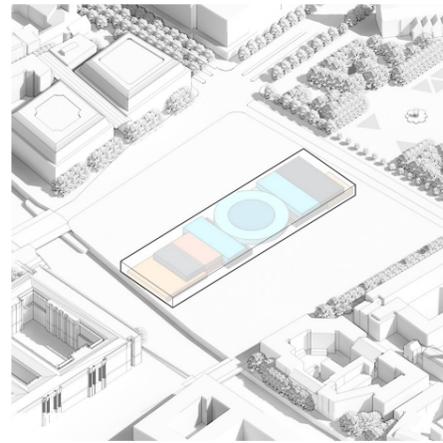
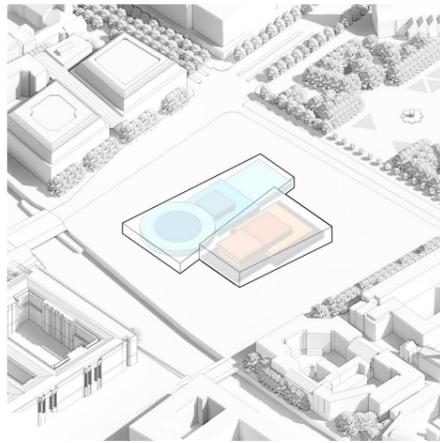
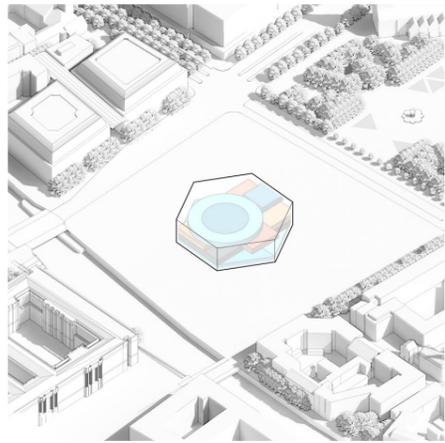


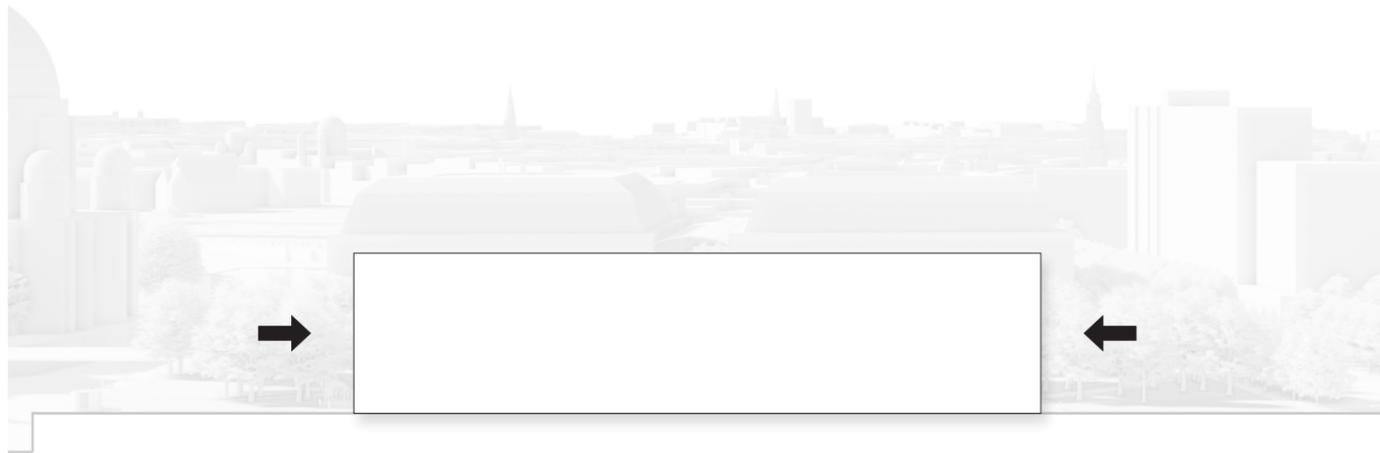
- + focus on trees
- + nature more important than building
- + 0 trees cut down
- /

/ STRATEGY 3 /  
NATURE ON TOP



- + focus on trees
- all trees cut down
- difficult system
- greenwashing

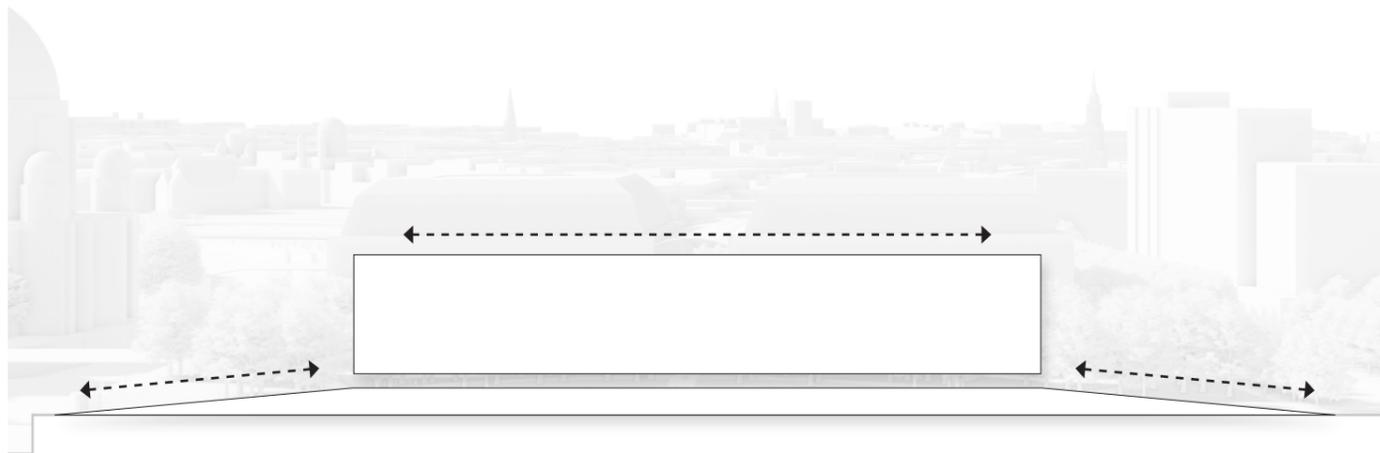




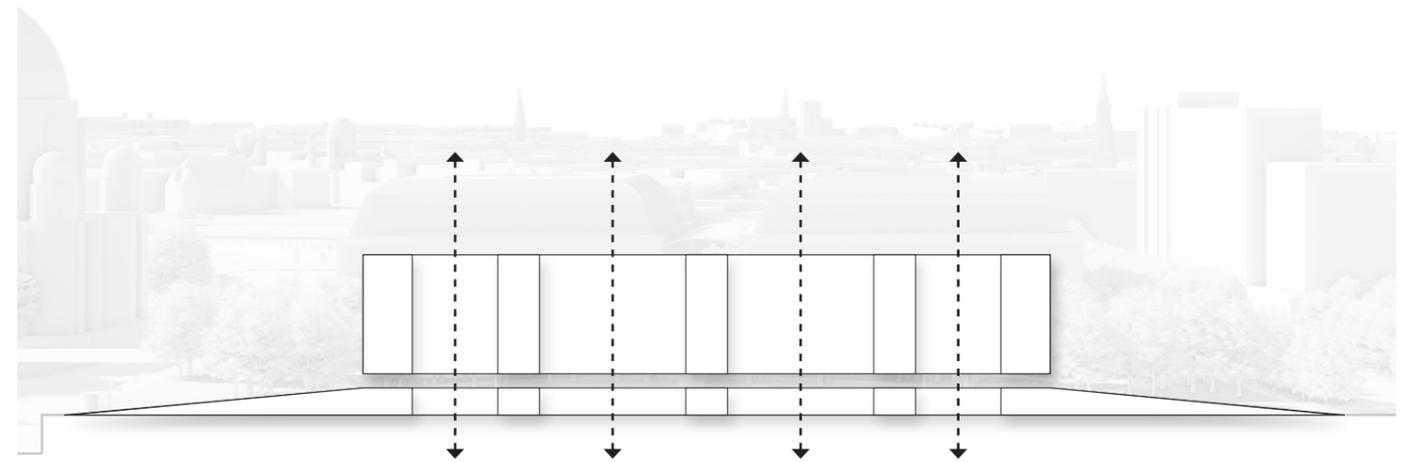
Frontless building = **Circular shape**



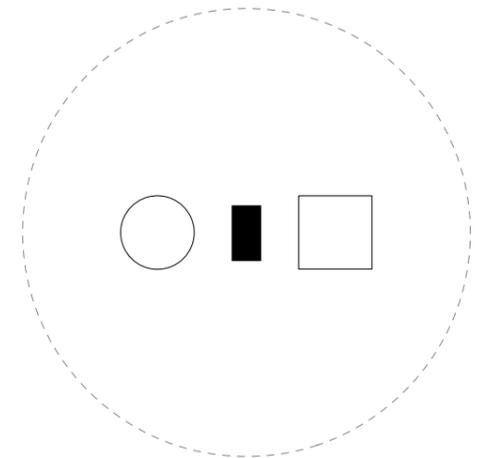
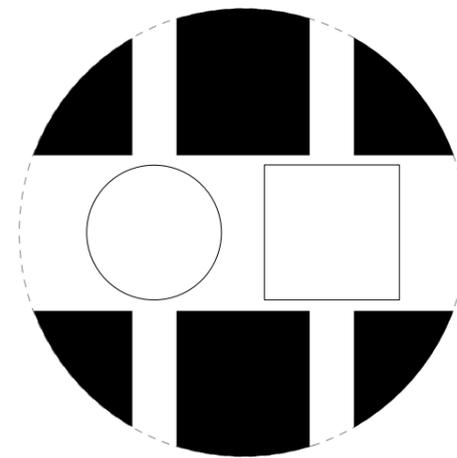
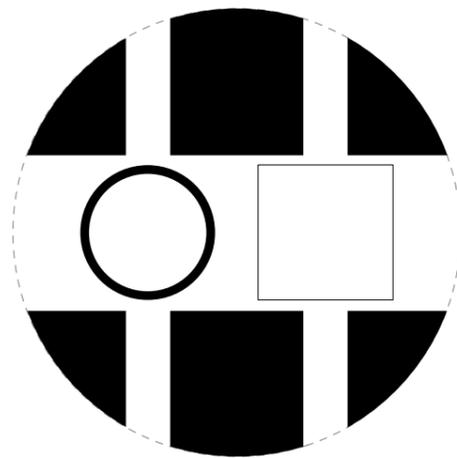
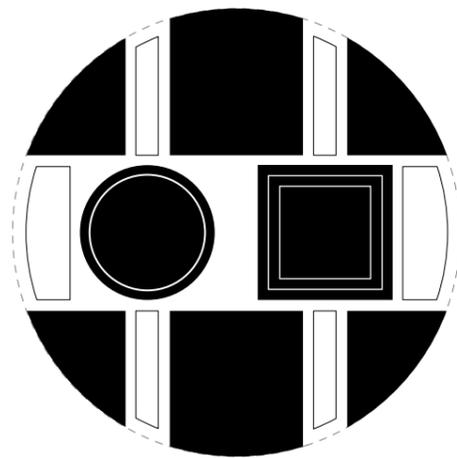
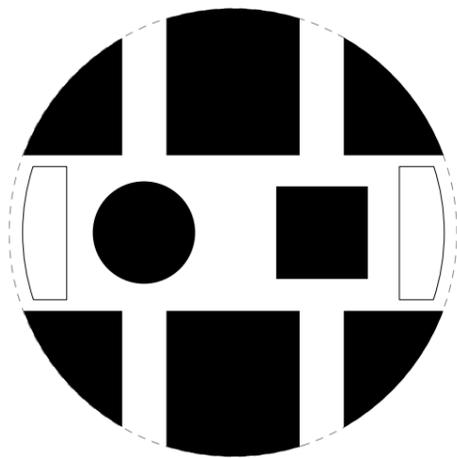
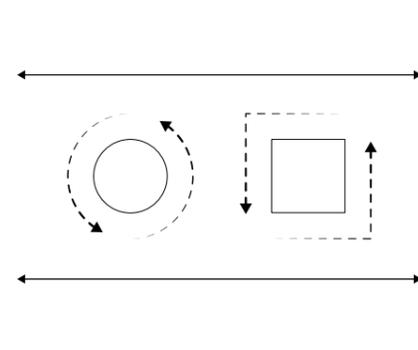
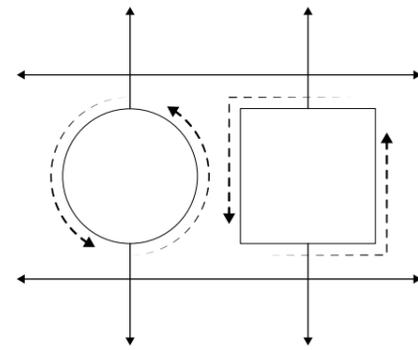
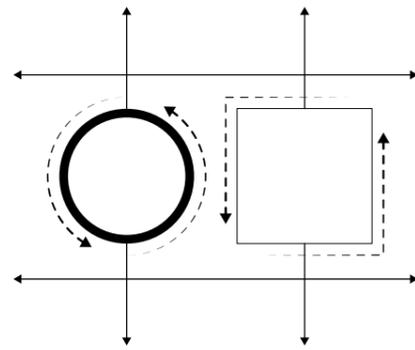
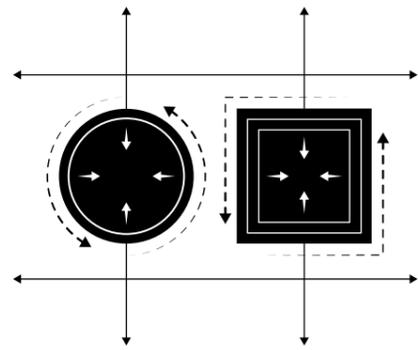
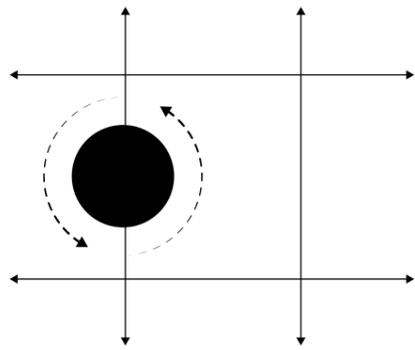
Frontless building = Circular shape  
Public ground floor = **Floating structure**



Frontless building = Circular shape  
Public ground floor = Floating structure  
Open access = **Upward flow**



Frontless building = Circular shape  
Public ground floor = Floating structure  
Open access = Upward flow  
Public functions highlighted = **Vertical voids**



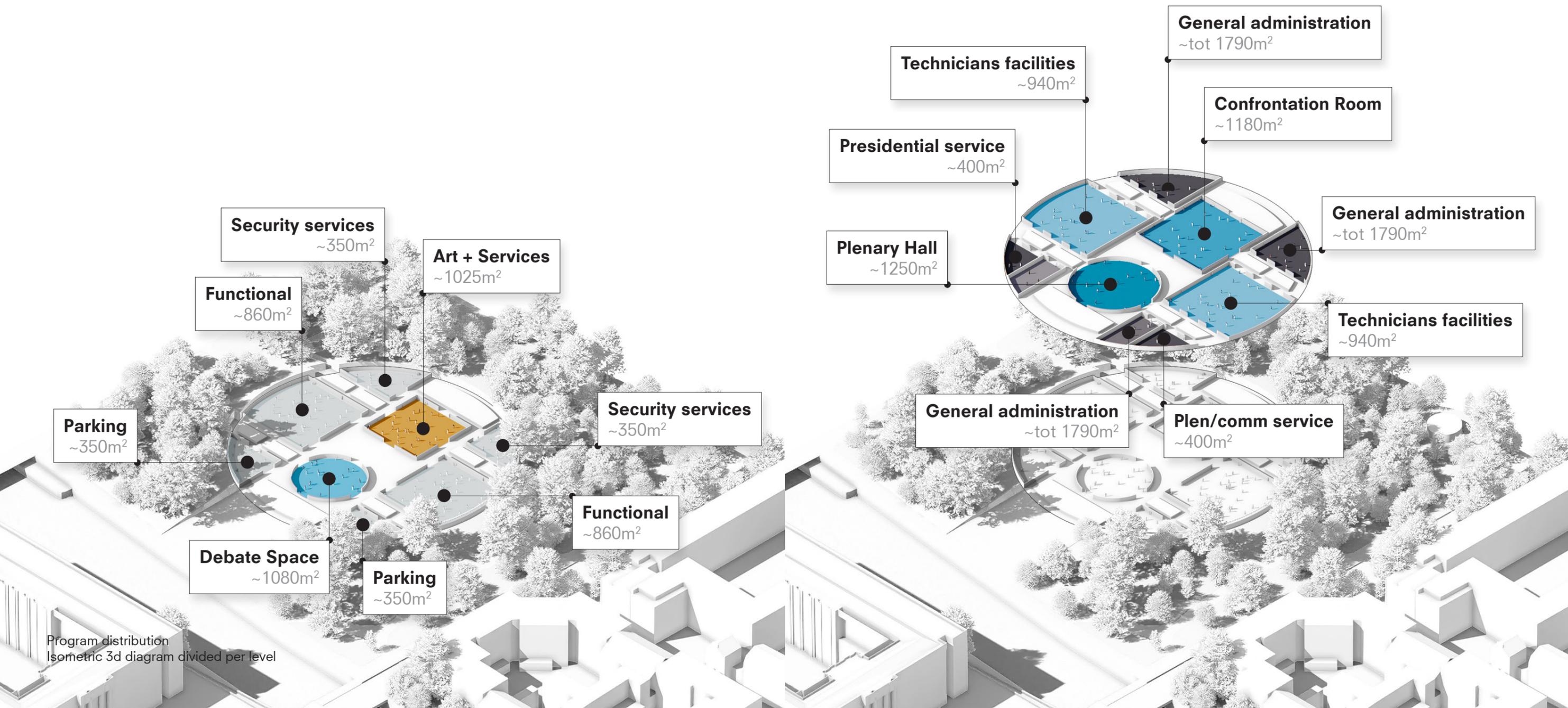
Ground Level

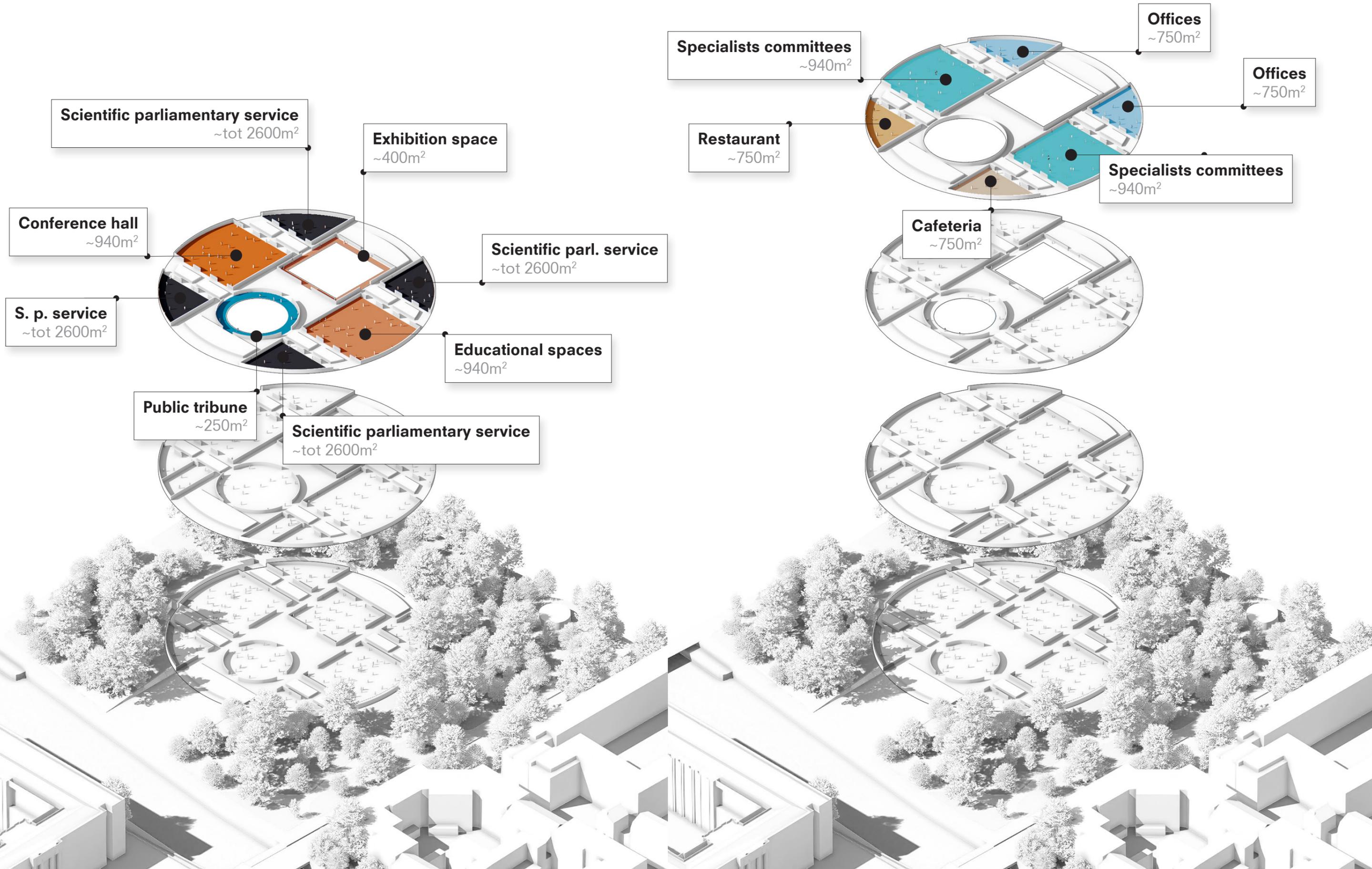
First Level

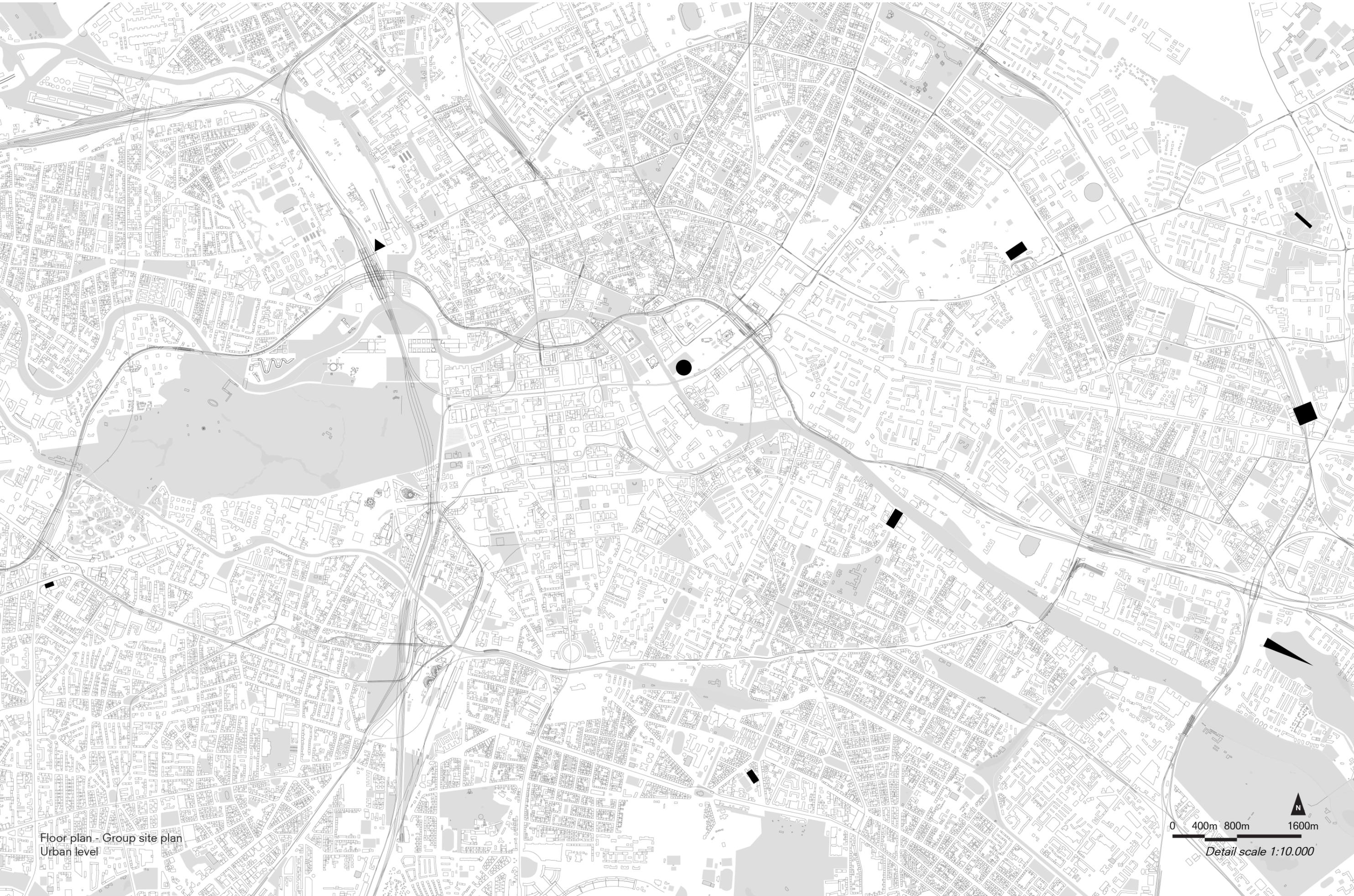
Second Level

Third Level

Roof Level



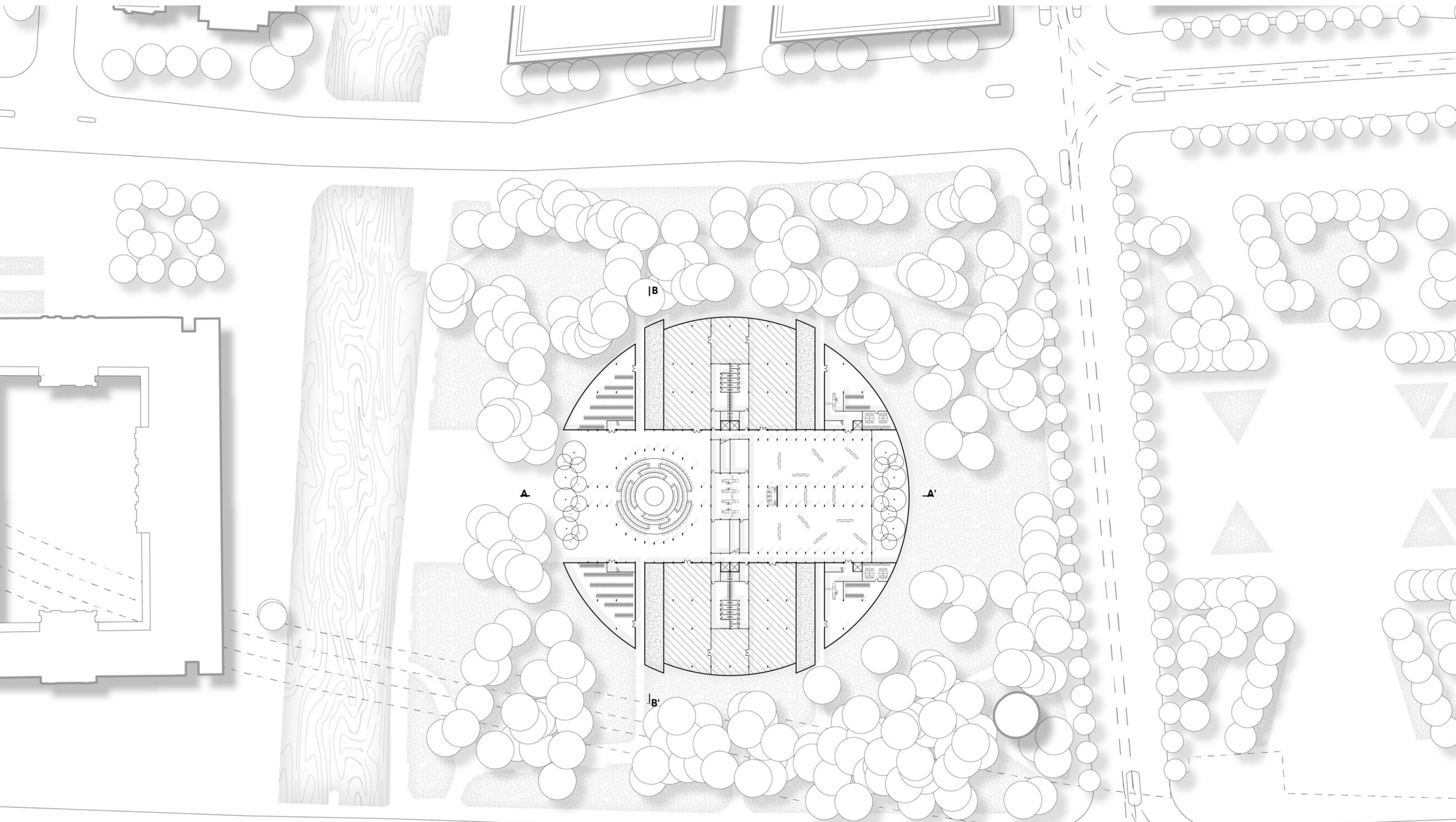




Floor plan - Group site plan  
Urban level

0 400m 800m 1600m

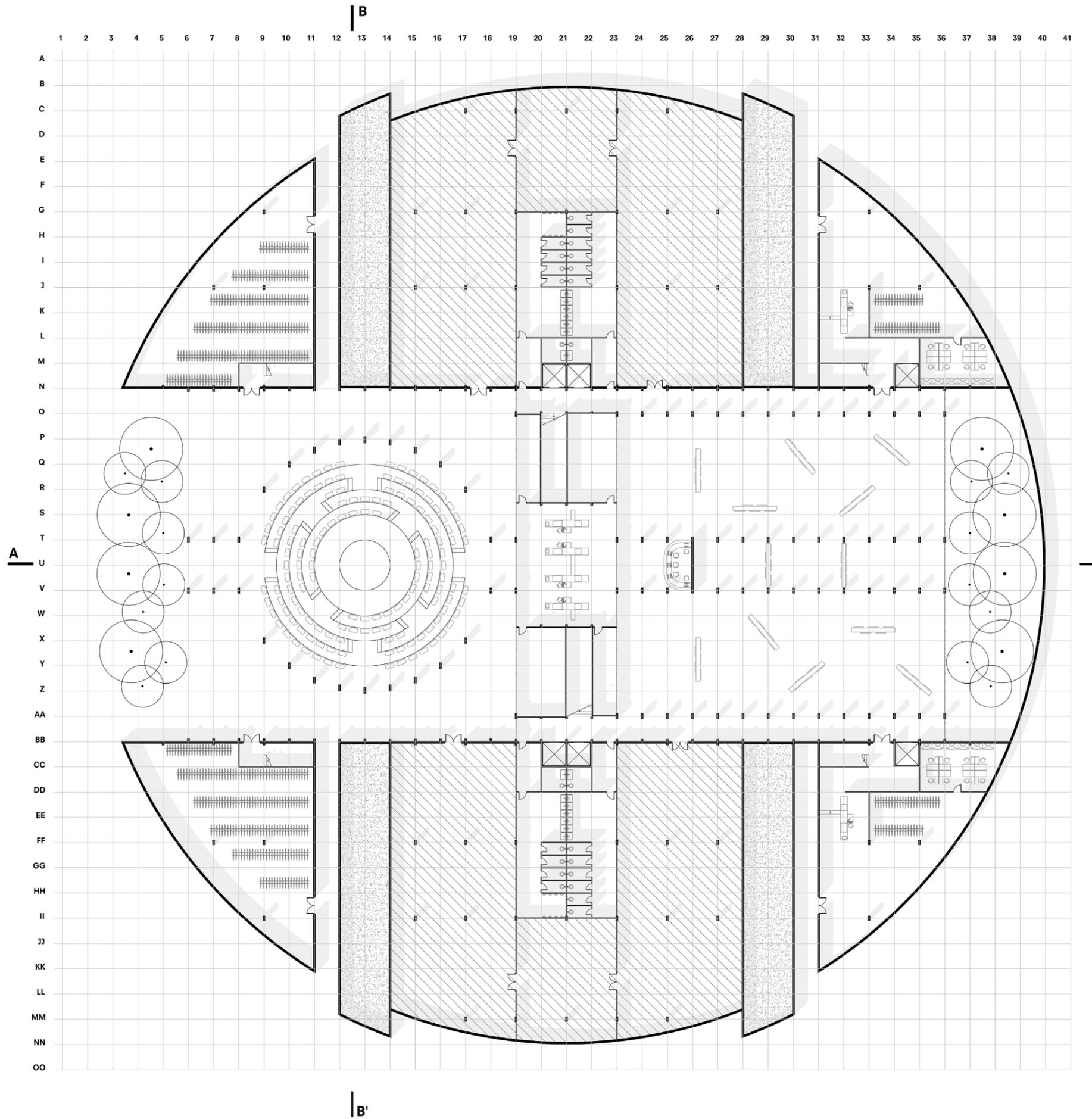
Detail scale 1:10.000



Floor plan - Urban implementation  
+0.00m

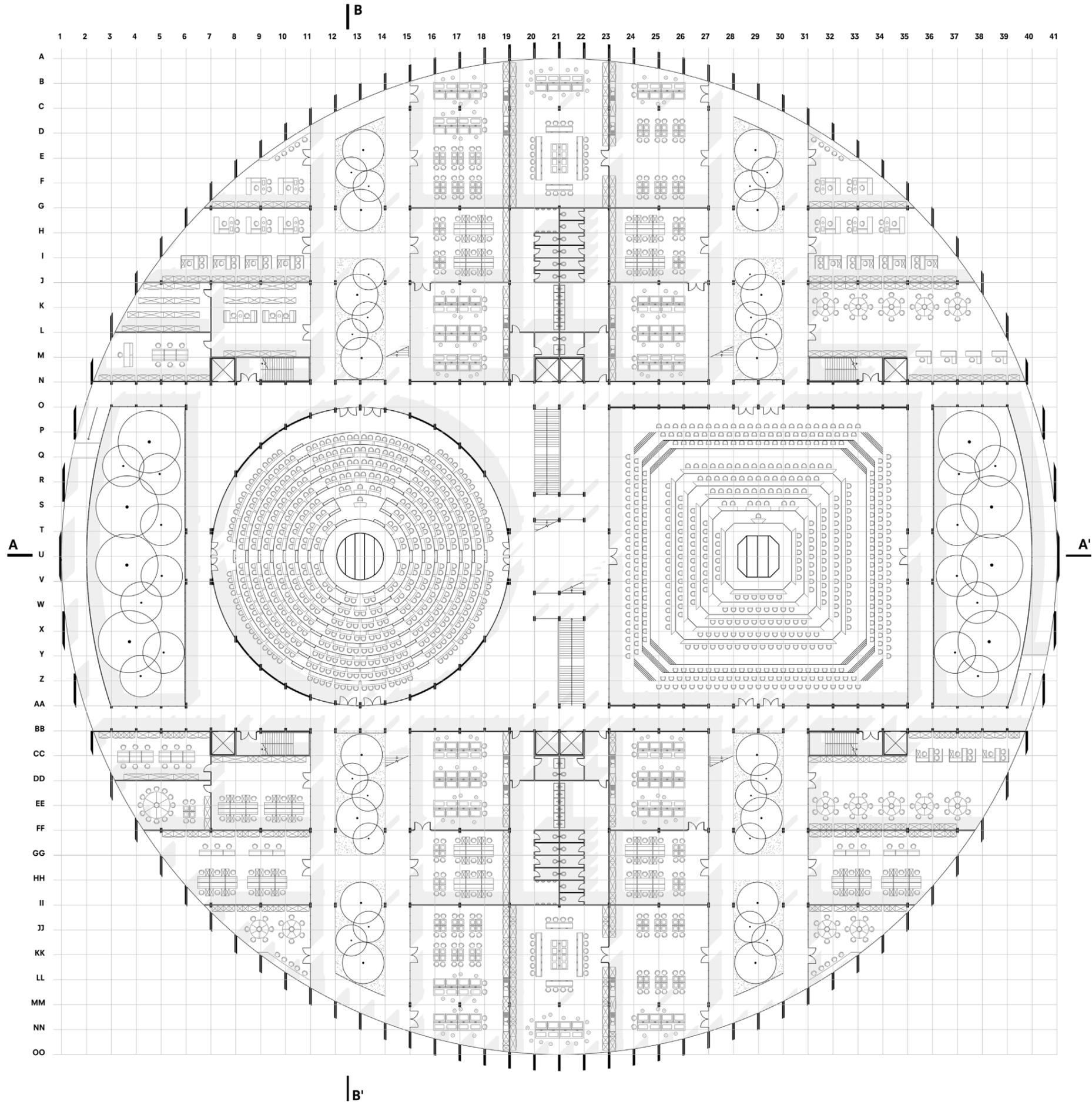
0 15m 30m 60m

Detail scale 1:500

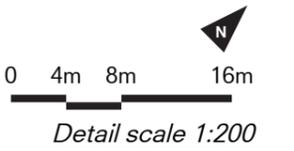


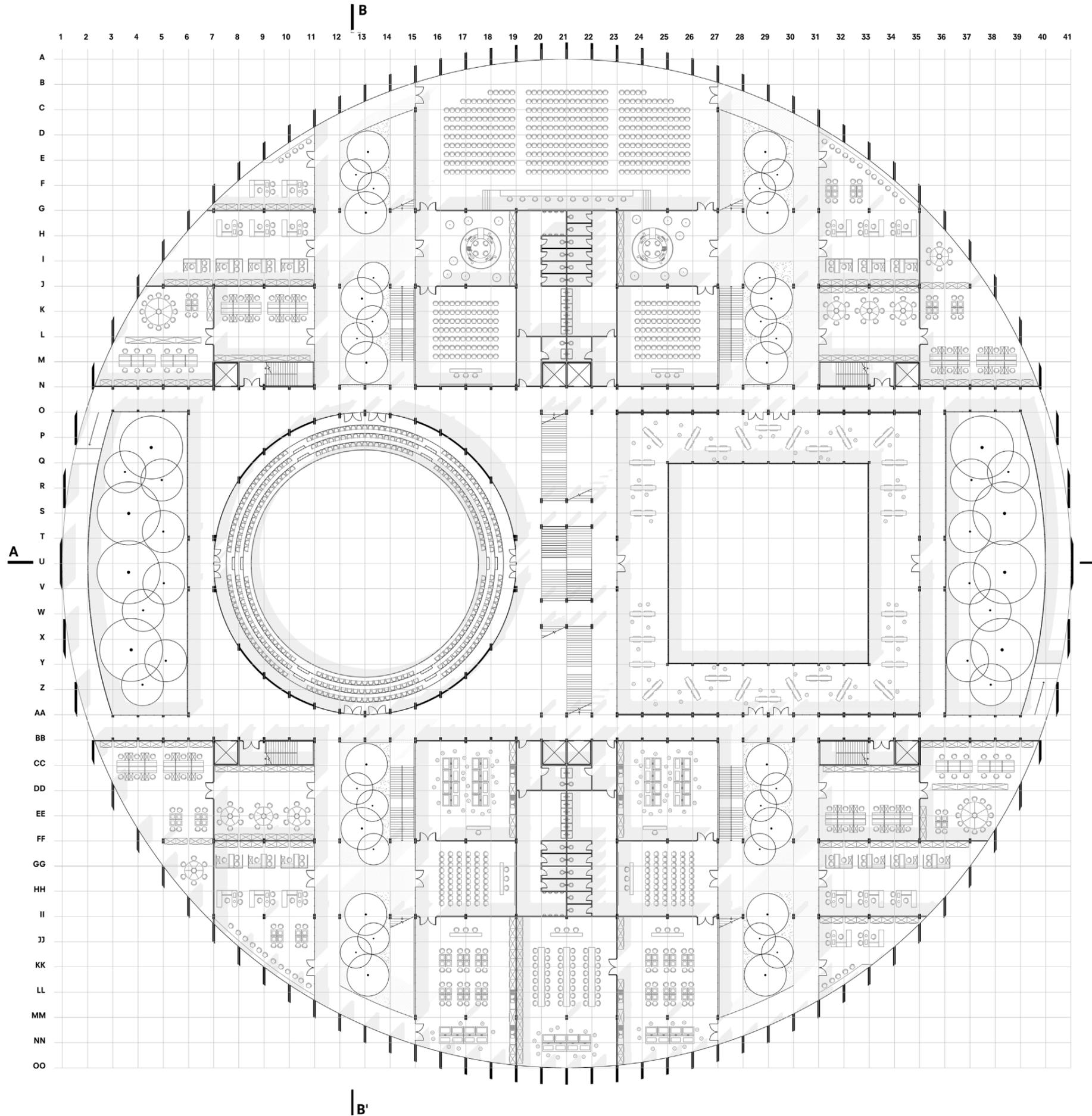
Floor plan - Level 0  
+0.00m



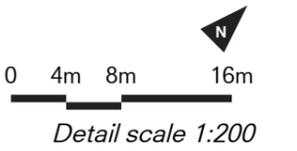


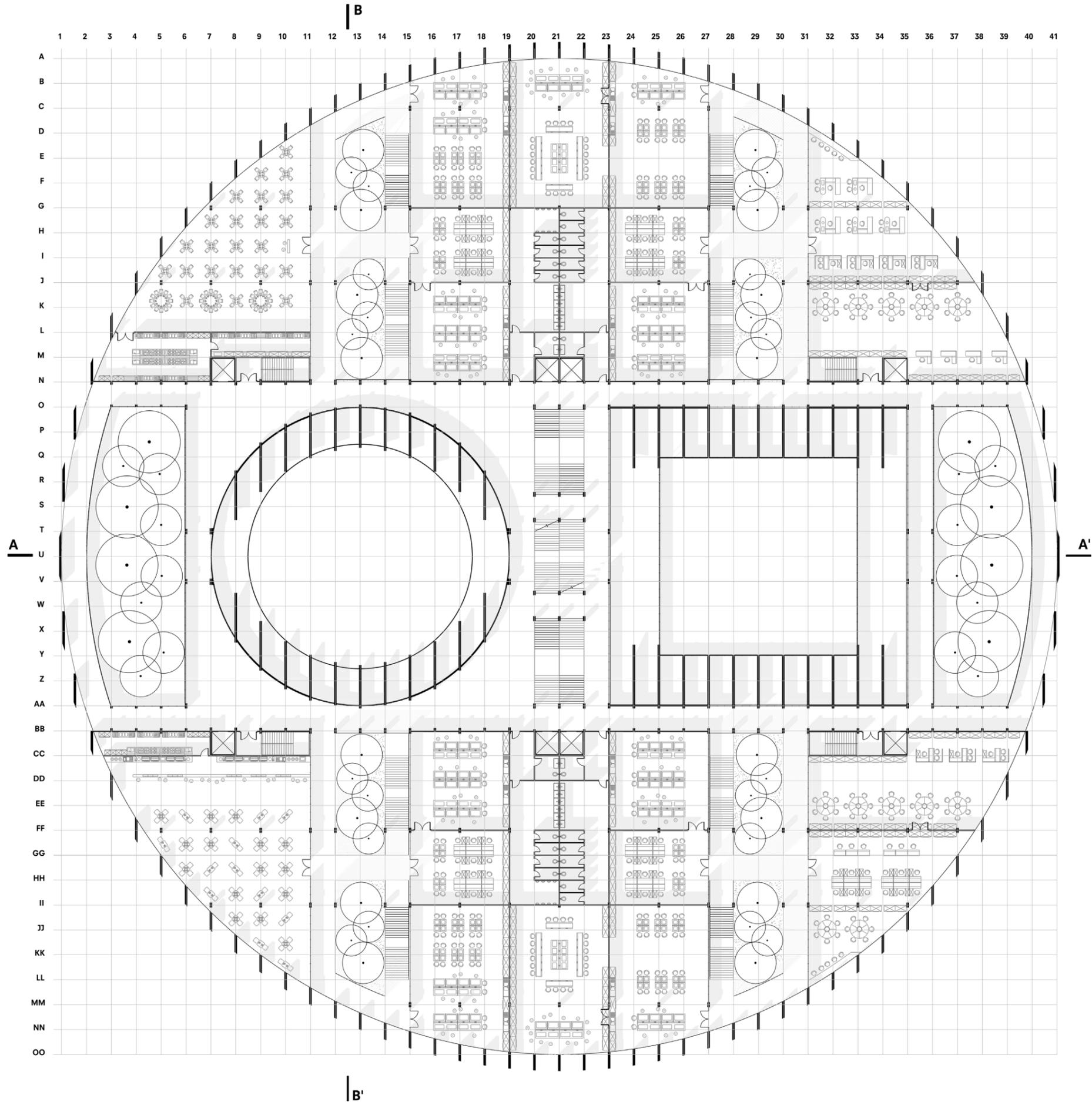
Floor plan - Level 1  
+6.50m





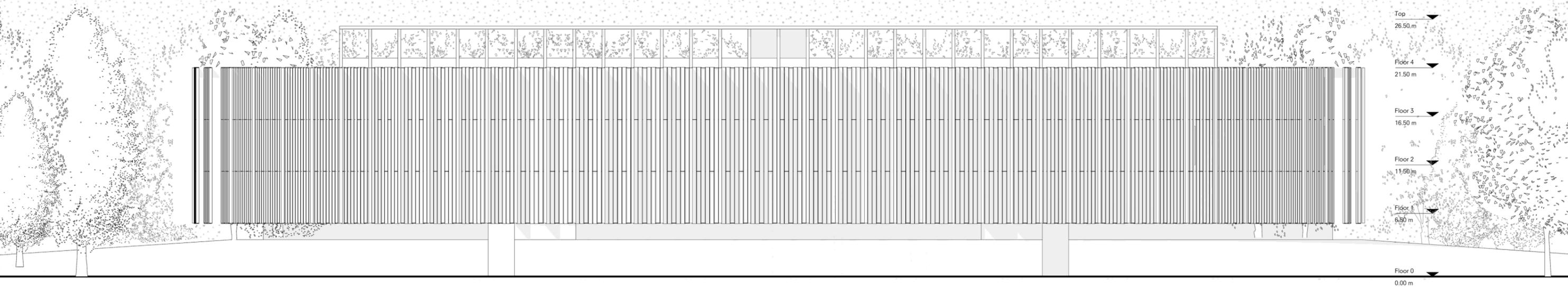
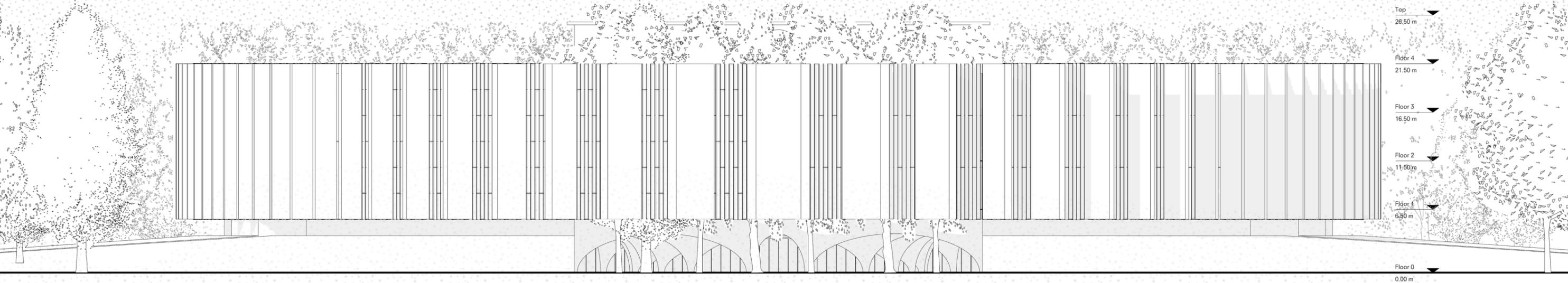
Floor plan - Level 2  
+11.50m





Floor plan - Level 3  
+16.50m

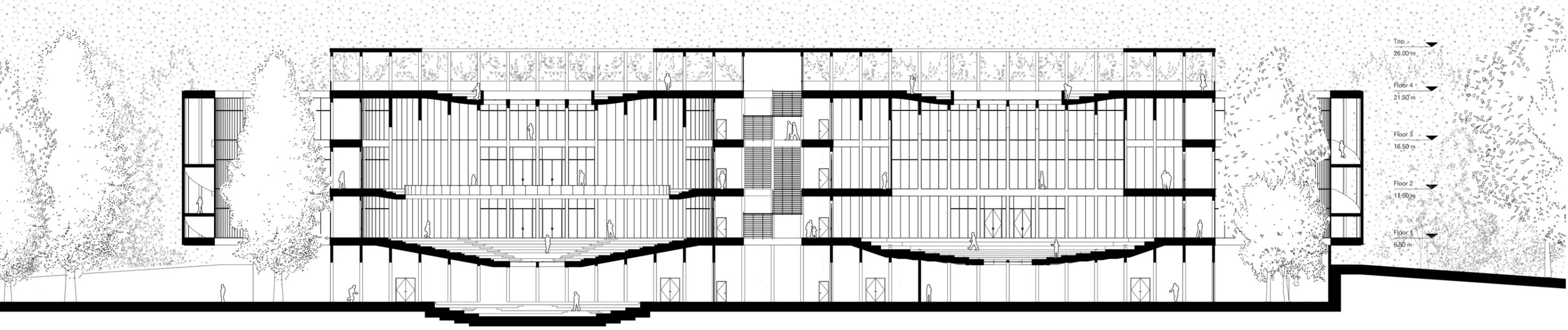
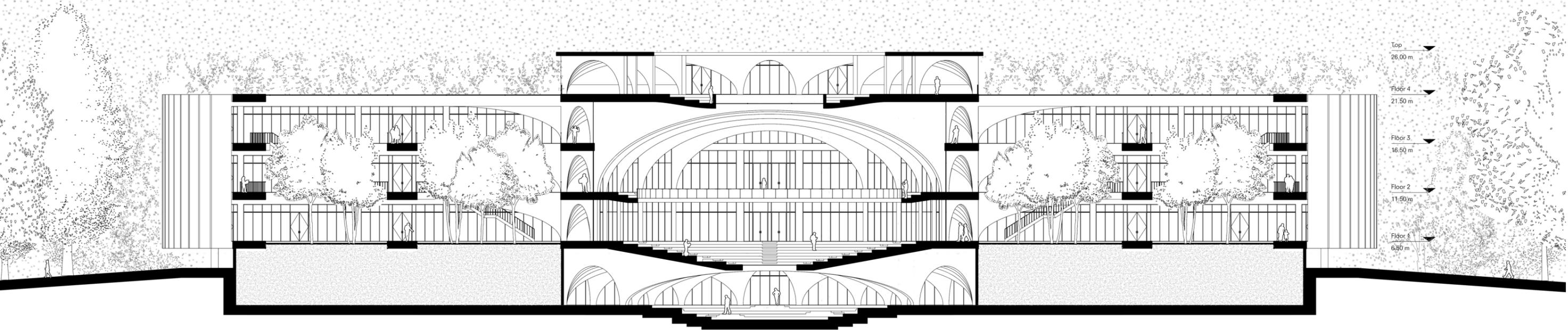




South-West elevation  
River side (top)

South-East elevation  
Rathausstraße side (bottom)

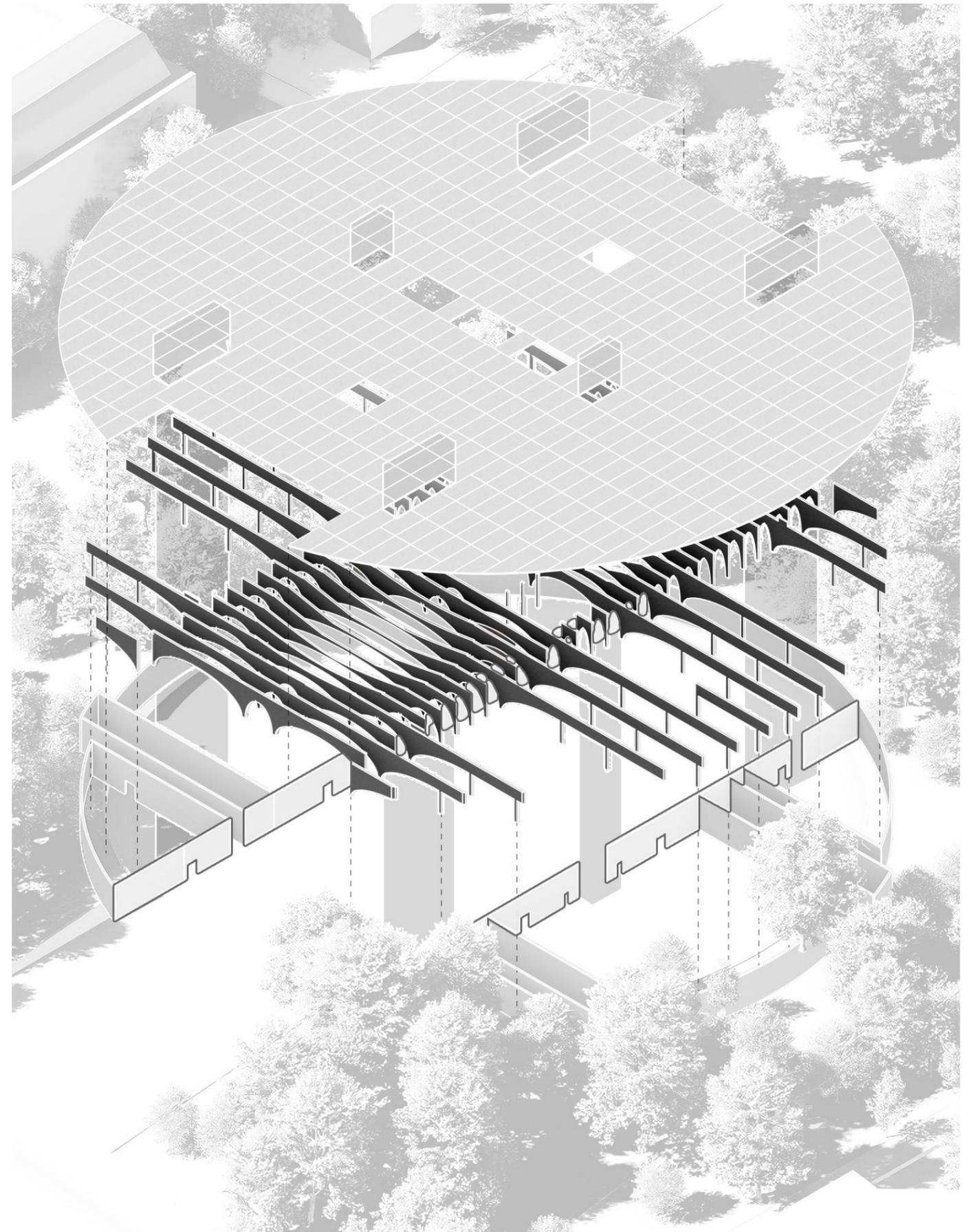
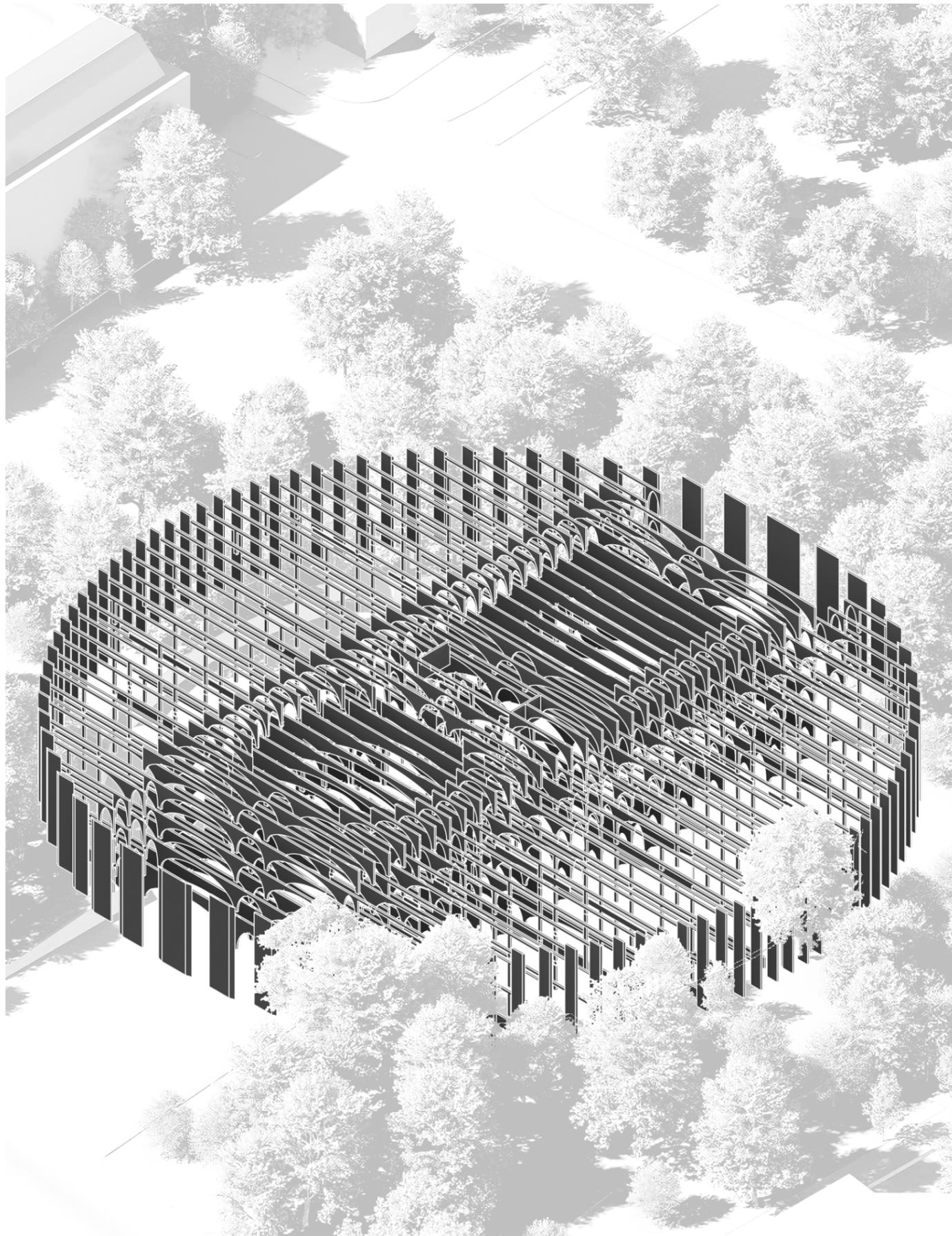




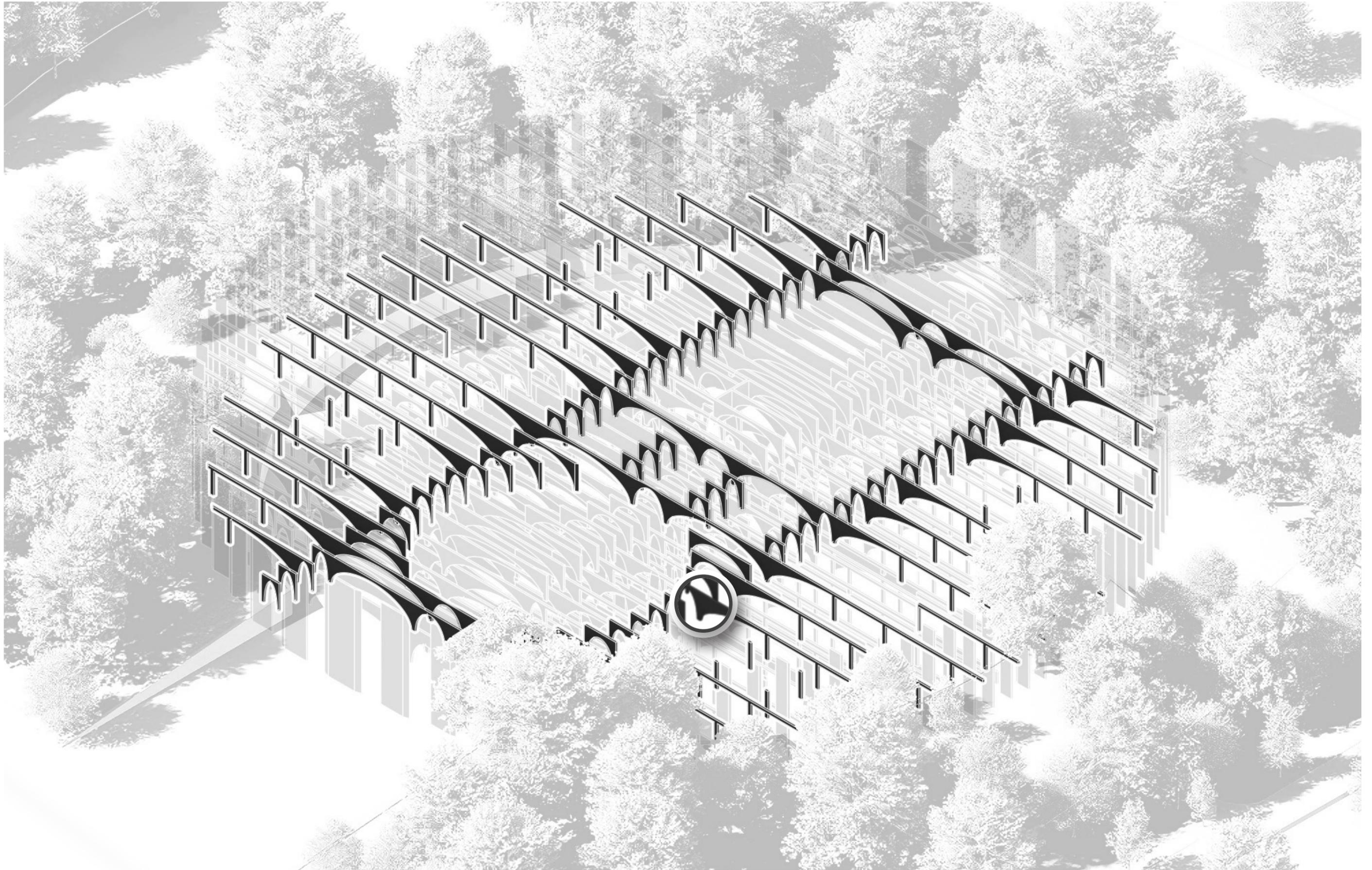
Section B-B'  
Transversal section (top)

Section A-A'  
Longitudinal section (bottom)



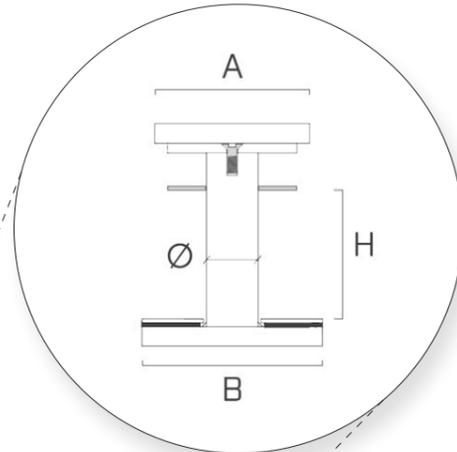


Structural diagram and explosion Level 0  
Isometric 3d diagram

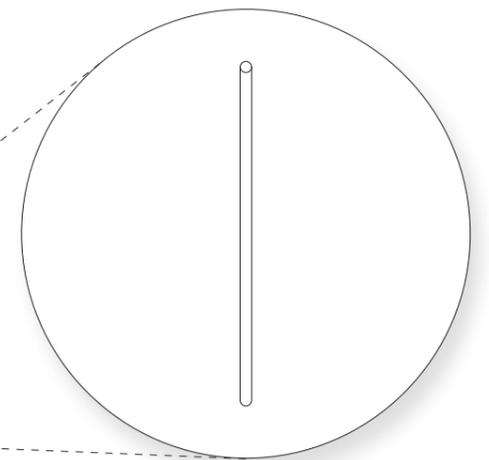


Level 1 structure focus  
Isometric 3d diagram

rothoblaas

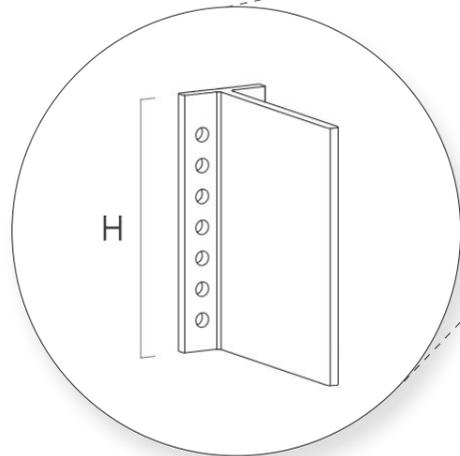


**PIL120M160**  
 COLUMN-TO-FLOOR  
 CONNECTION SYSTEM  
 Ø=120mm / H=160mm  
 A=280mm / B=280mm



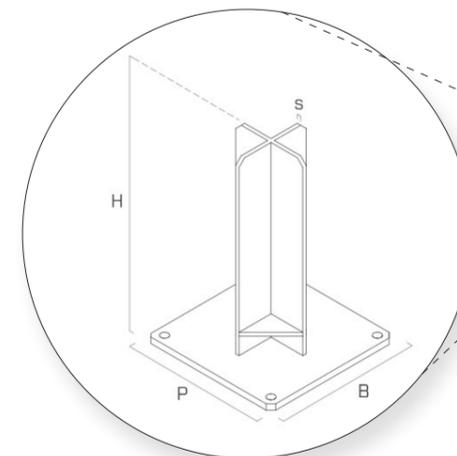
**METAL RODS**  
 VERTICAL METAL CONNECTION  
 L=1500mm / P=25mm

rothoblaas

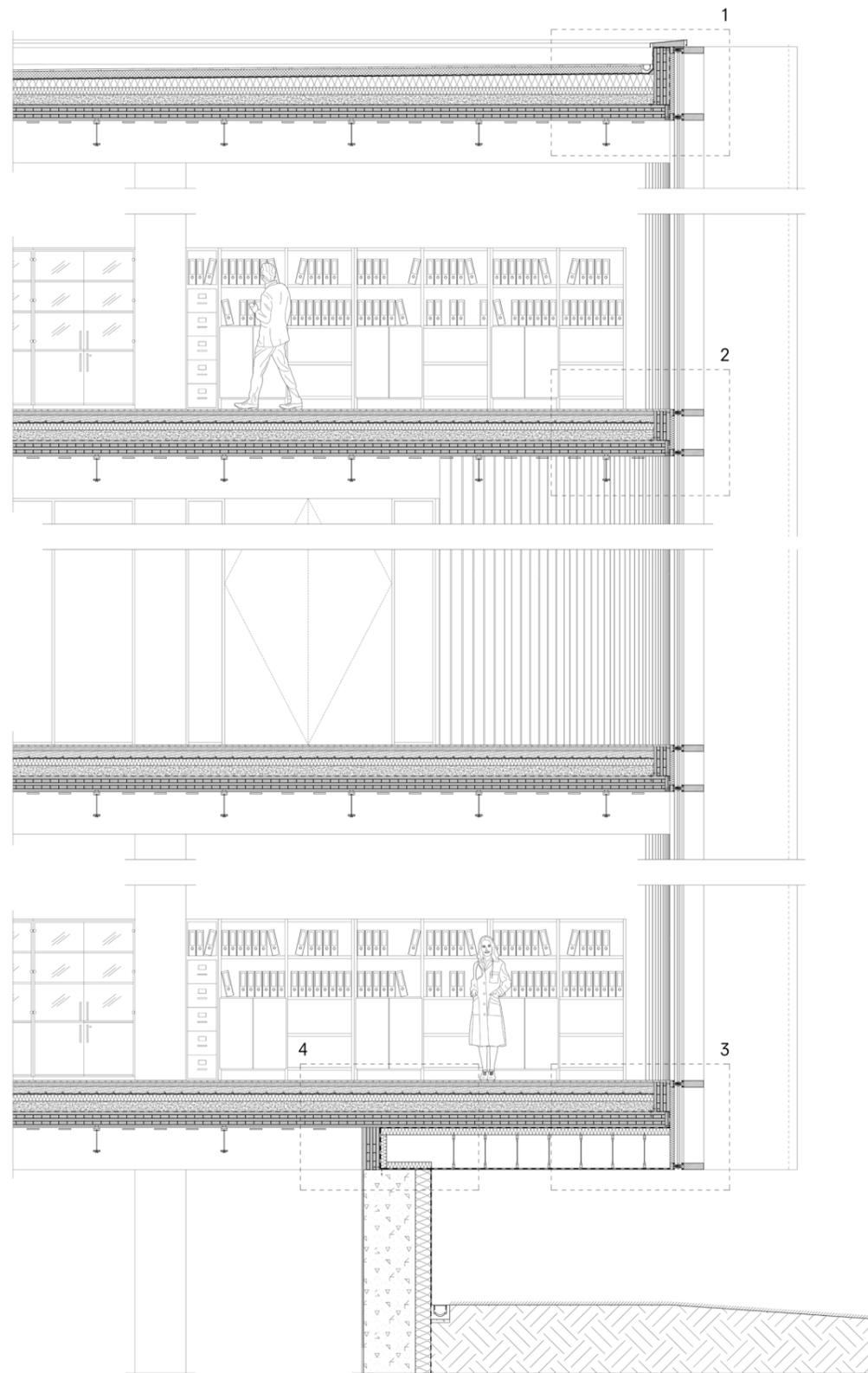


**ALUMINI215**  
 CONCEALED BRACKET WITHOUT HOLES  
 H=215mm

rothoblaas

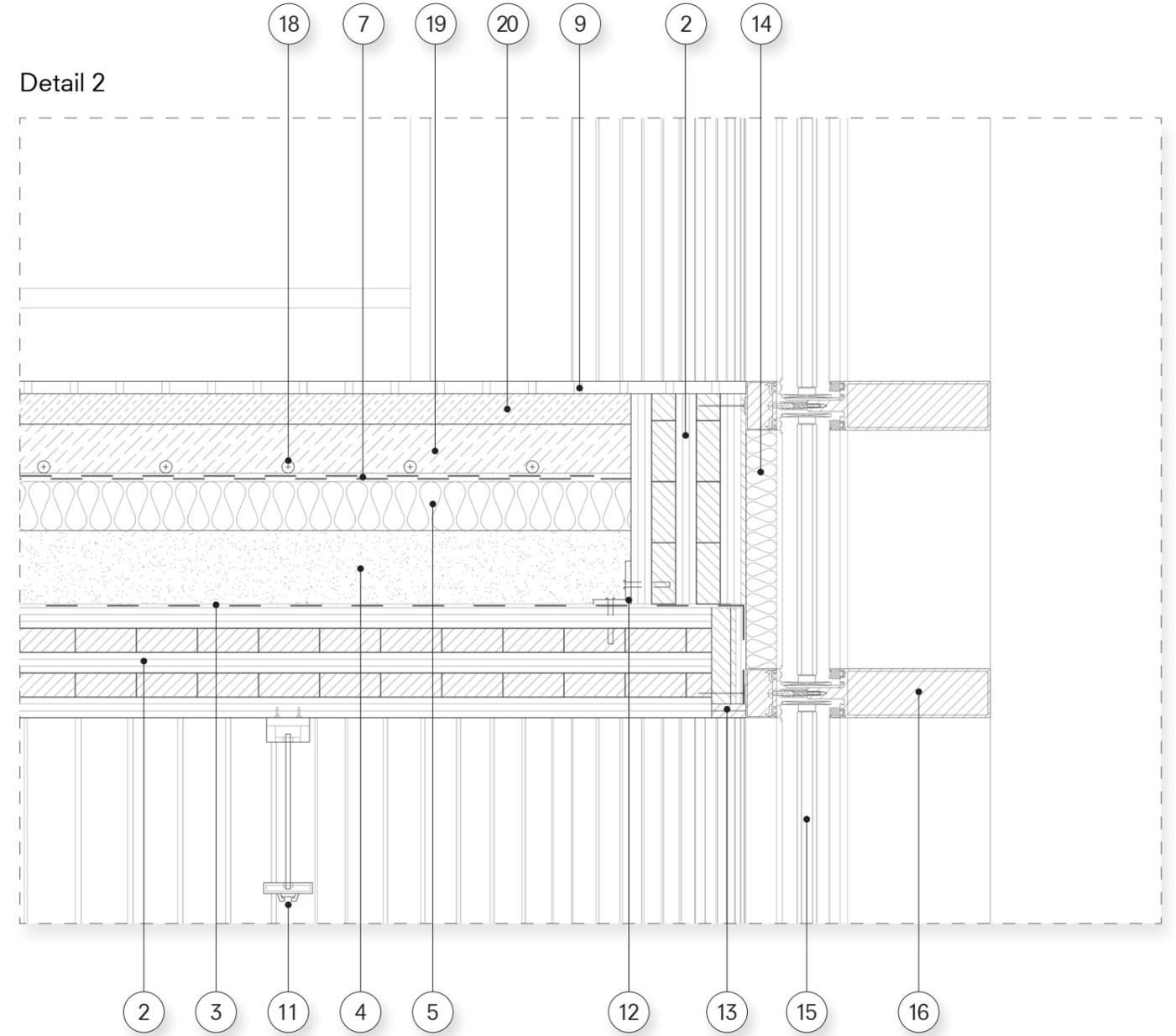
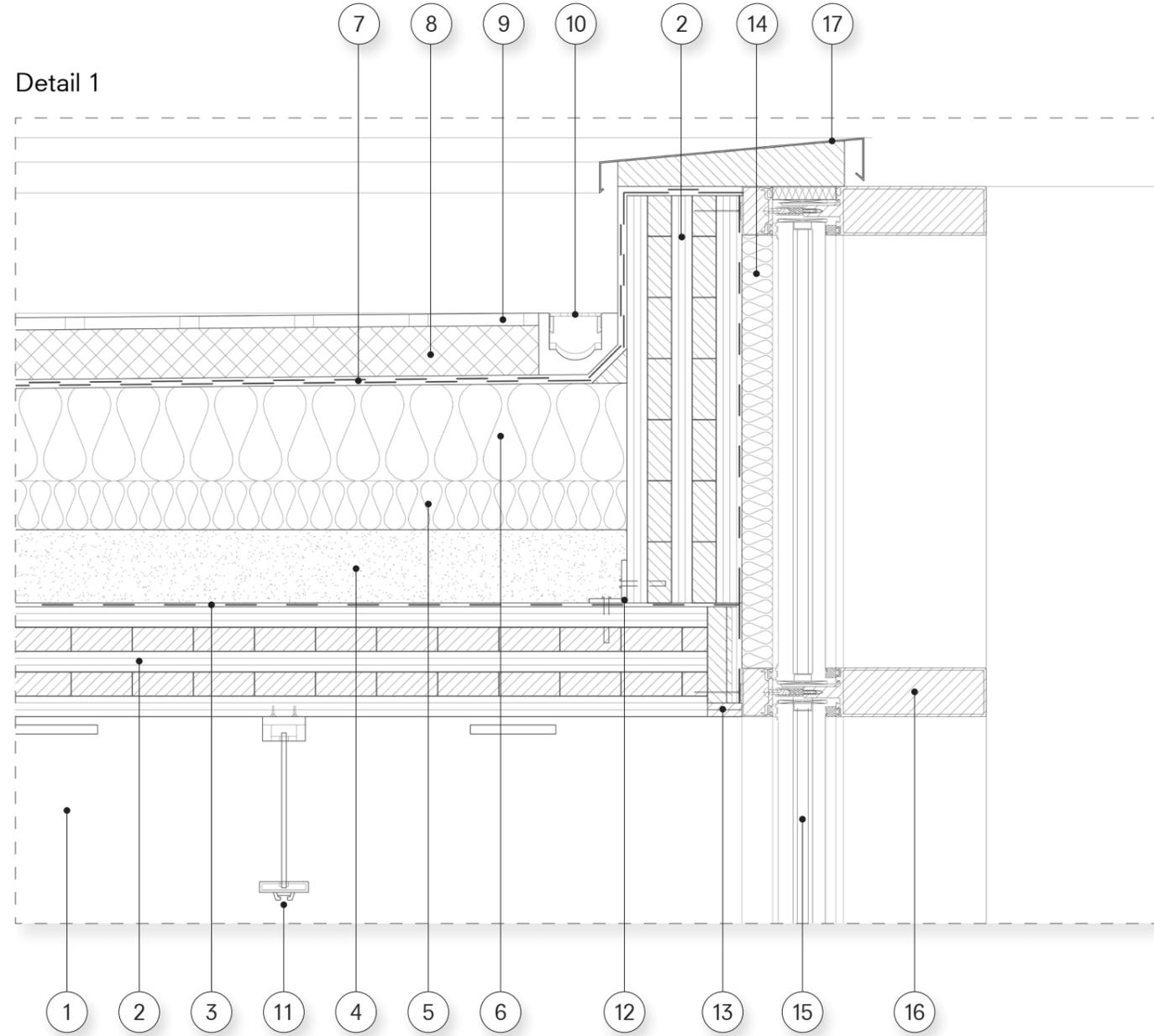


**XS10160**  
 CROSS-SHAPED POST BASE  
 B=220mm / P=260mm  
 H=312mm / S=8mm



Envelope fragment  
Technological section

0 40cm 80cm 160cm  
Detail scale 1:20

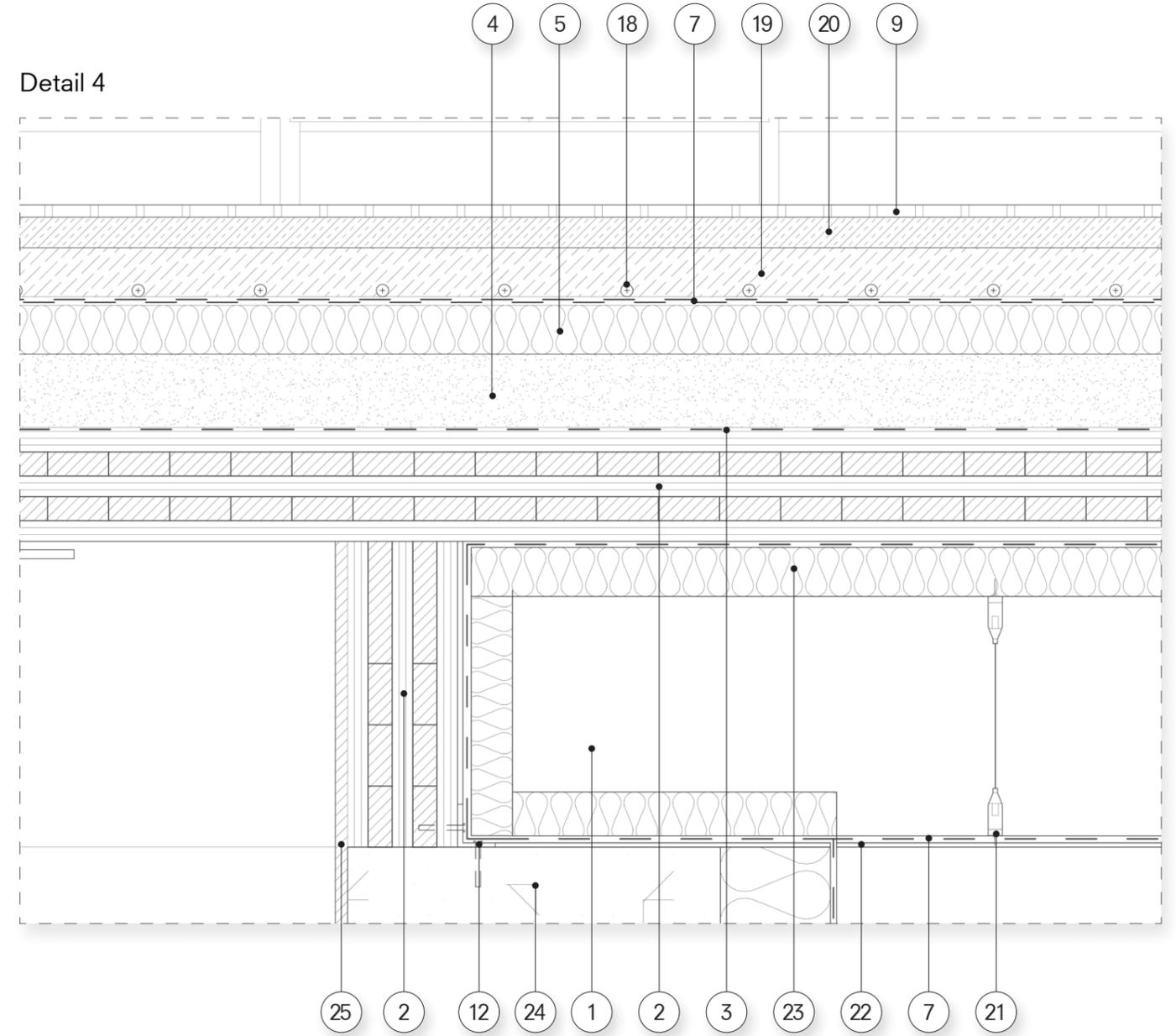
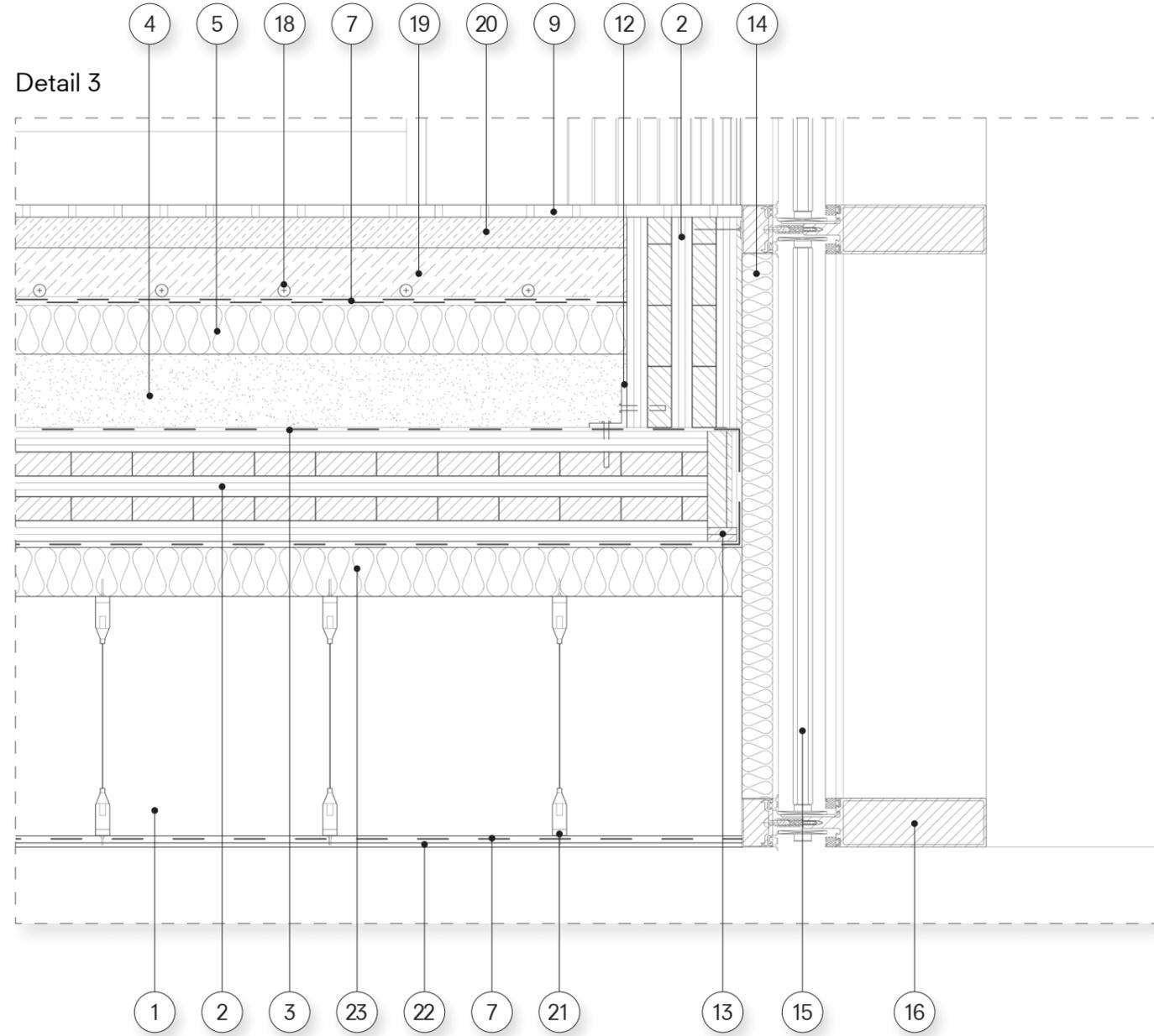


- ① Primary wooden beam 300mmx600mm
- ② Cross laminated timber 180mm
- ③ Trickle protection
- ④ Latex-bonded chipping infill 120mm
- ⑤ Mineral fibre footfall sound insulation 80mm

- ⑥ Mineral fibre insulation 160mm (in gradient)
- ⑦ Vapor barrier (separating layer)
- ⑧ Drainage element 80mm
- ⑨ Floor covering 20mm
- ⑩ Gutter

- ⑪ Lighting fixture
- ⑫ Angular metal bracket
- ⑬ Wooden edge finiture
- ⑭ Mineral fibre thermic insulation 50mm
- ⑮ Doubl glass panel 32mm

- ⑯ Wooden mullion 80mmx400mm
- ⑰ Drip edge
- ⑱ Embedded tubes radiant floor
- ⑲ Cement screed 80mm
- ⑳ Bedding mortar 50mm

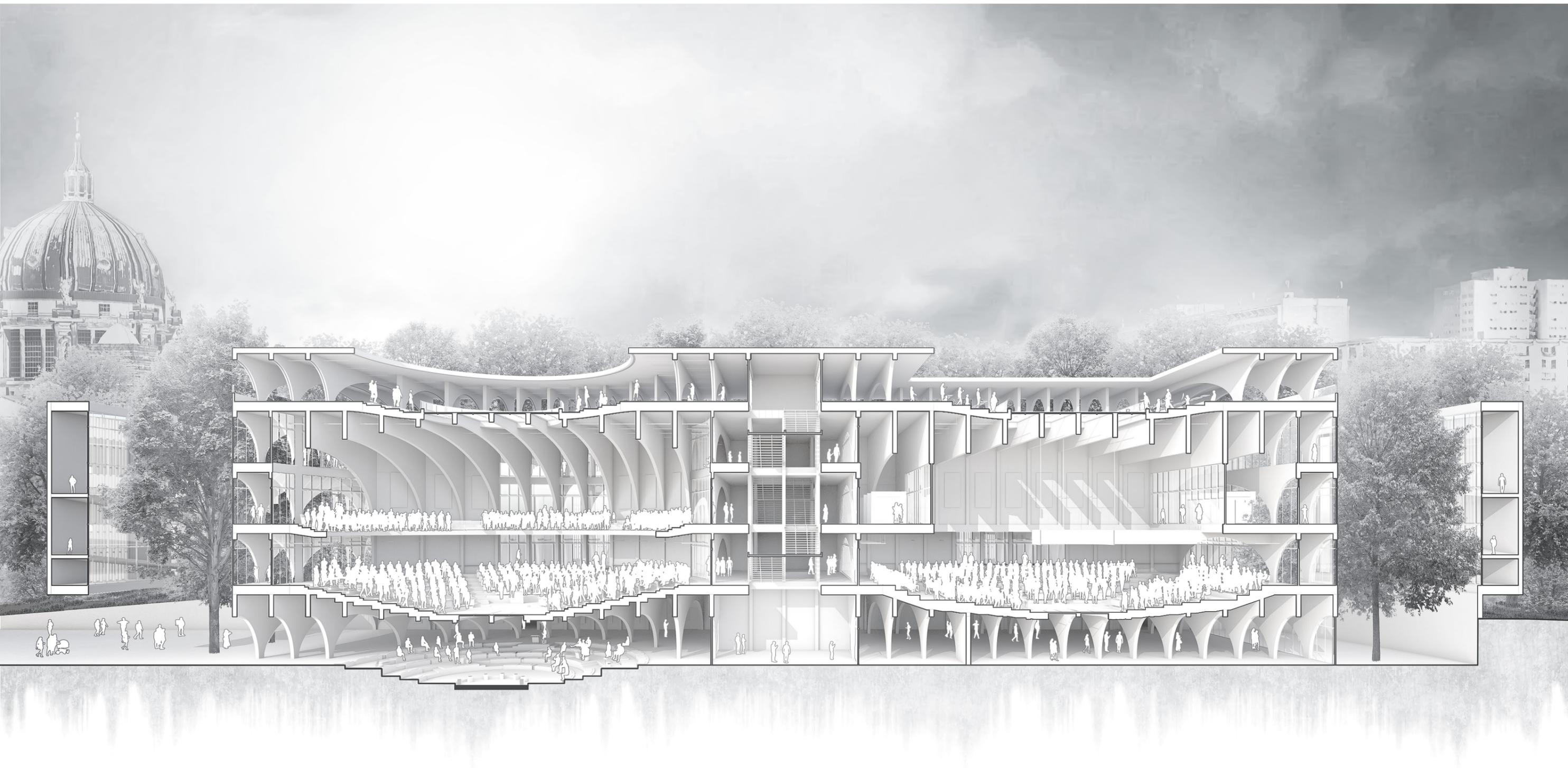


- ① Primary wooden beam 300mmx600mm
- ② Cross laminated timber 180mm
- ③ Trickle protection
- ④ Latex-bonded chipping infill 120mm
- ⑤ Mineral fibre footfall sound insulation 80mm

- ⑦ Vapor barrier (separating layer)
- ⑨ Floor covering 20mm
- ⑫ Angular metal bracket
- ⑬ Wooden edge finiture
- ⑭ Mineral fibre thermic insulation 50mm

- ⑮ Doubl glass panel 32mm
- ⑯ Wooden mullion 80mmx400mm
- ⑰ Embedded tubes radiant floor
- ⑱ Cement screed 80mm
- ⑳ Bedding mortar 50mm

- ㉑ Suspended ceiling aluminum hangers
- ㉒ Plywood board 7mm
- ㉓ Mineral fibre thermic insulation 80mm
- ㉔ Concrete wall 60mm
- ㉕ Plywood board 20mm



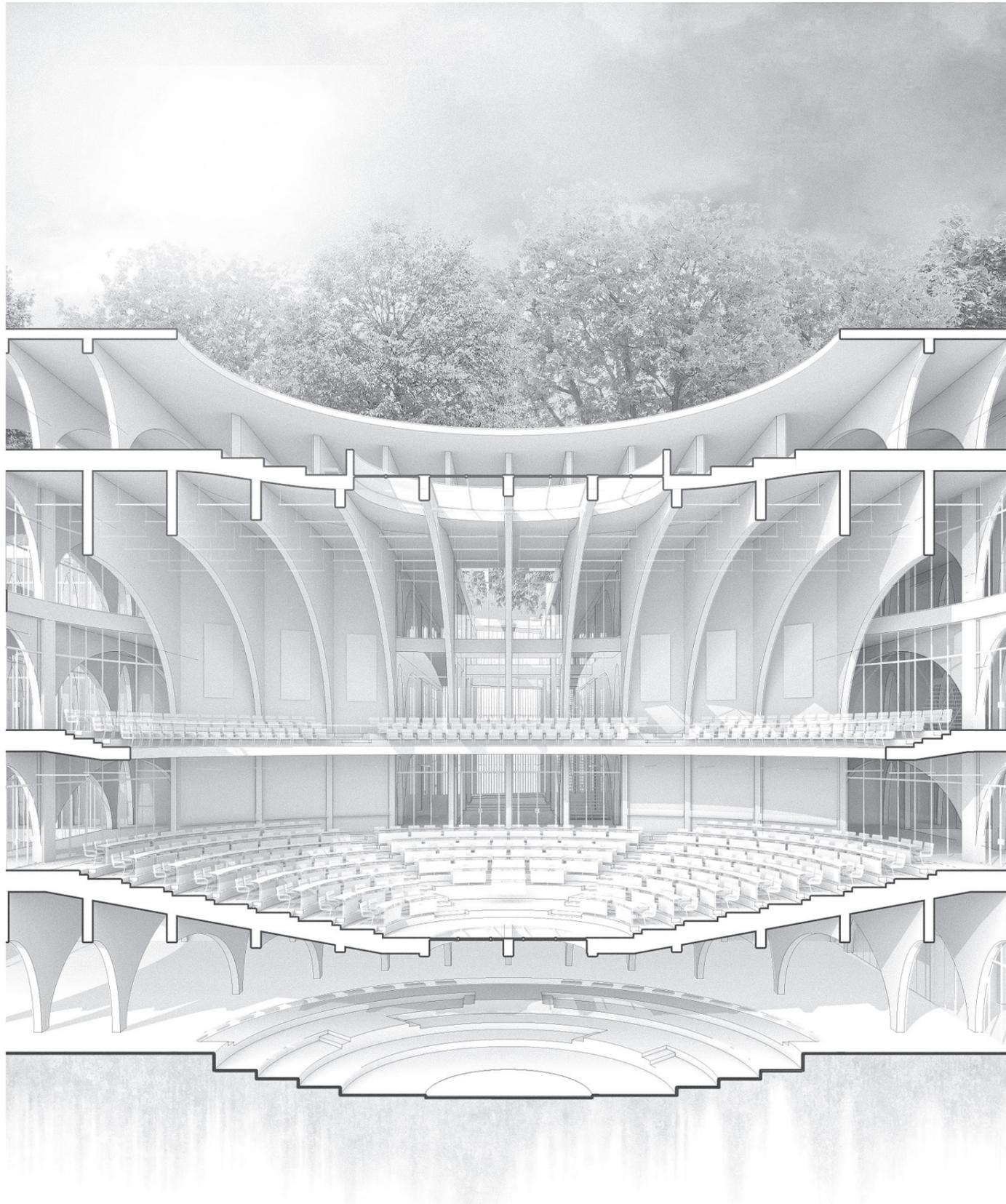
Key drawing - Greyscale  
Perspective section A-A'

Detail scale 1:100



Key drawing - Rendered  
Perspective section A-A'

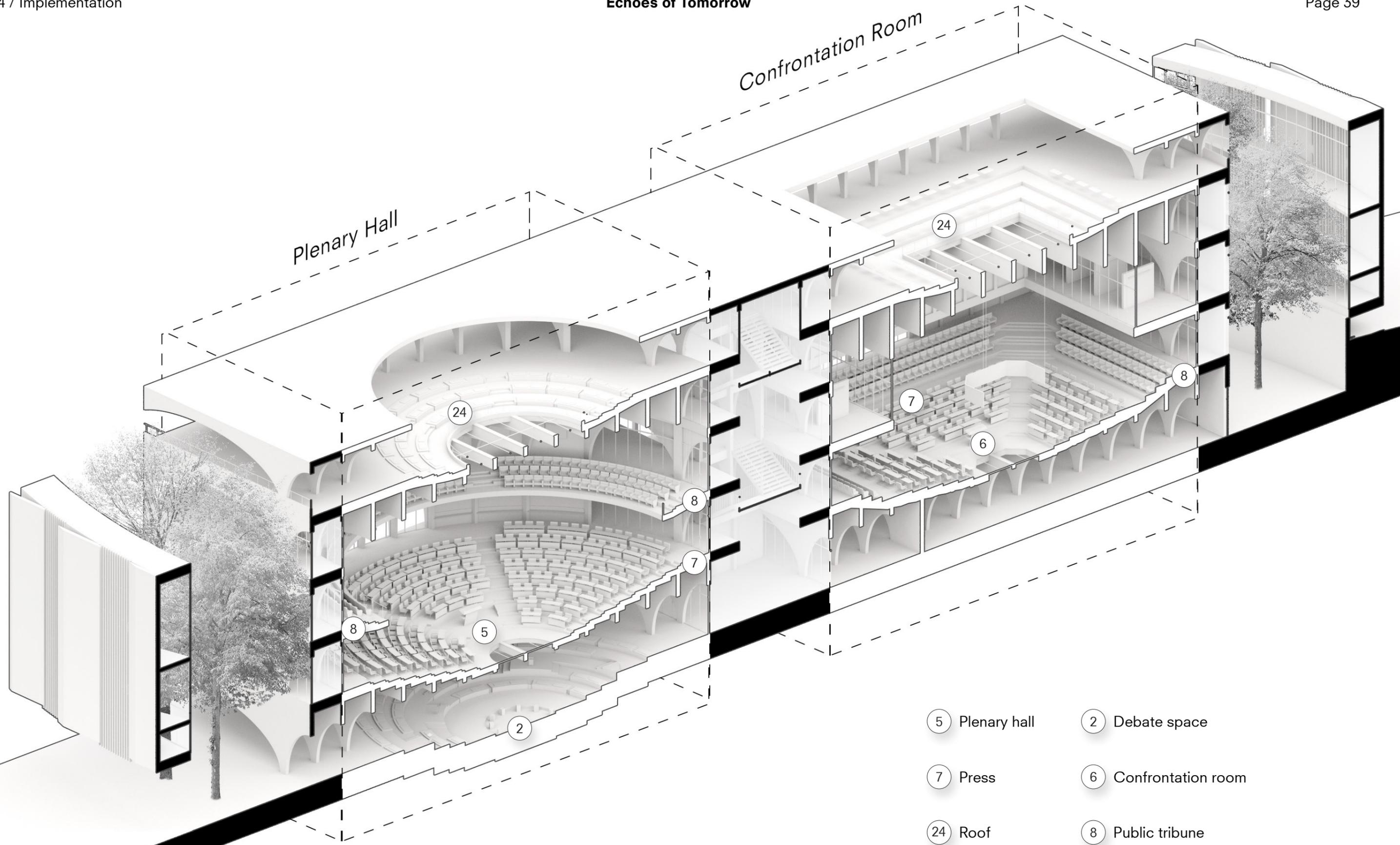
Detail scale 1:100



Interior fragment - Greyscale  
Perspective section Plenary Hall



Interior fragment - Rendered  
Perspective section Plenary Hall



Key space(s) diagram  
Isometric 3d sectioned diagram

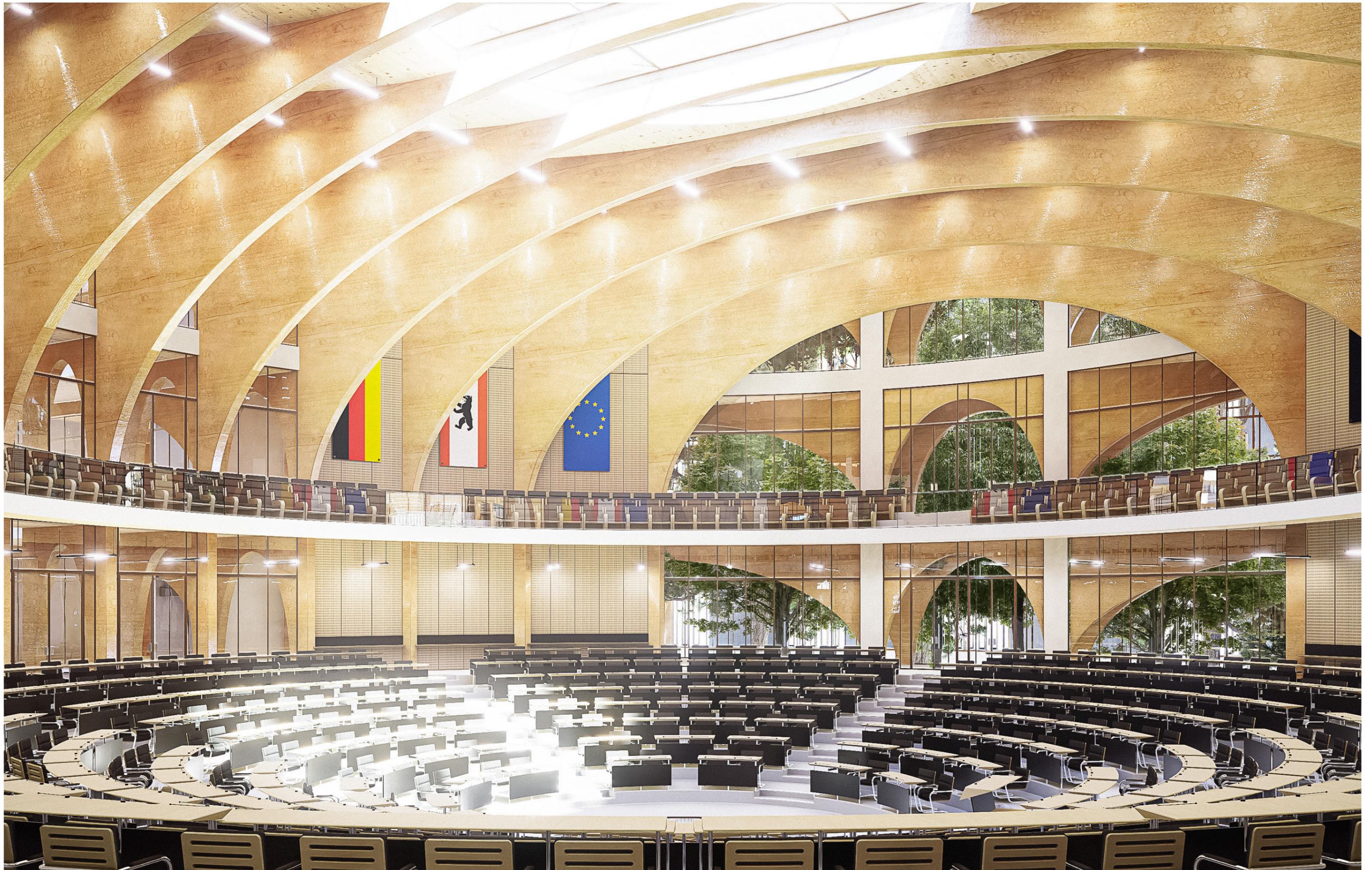
- 5 Plenary hall
- 2 Debate space
- 7 Press
- 6 Confrontation room
- 24 Roof
- 8 Public tribune



Exterior view - Back side  
Perspective from Level 0



Interior view - Debate space  
Perspective from Level 0



Interior view - Plenary Hall  
Perspective from Level 1



Interior view - Plenary Hall  
Perspective from Level 1



Interior view - Confrontation Room  
Perspective from Level 1



Interior view - Confrontation Room  
Perspective from Level 1



Interior view - Green wing  
Perspective from Level 1



Interior view - Restaurant ("Casino")  
Perspective from Level 3



Exterior view - Front side  
Perspective from Level 0



Exterior view - Rooftop  
Perspective from Level 4

