



THE 'THIRD PLACE' IN BETWEEN

A STUDY OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THRESHOLD SPACES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Abstract

Spontaneous social interactions are essential for a fulfilling daily life, yet they are becoming increasingly rare in today’s preplanned routines. Third places – informal, inclusive settings separate from home and work – can fill this gap. Over time, libraries have evolved into spaces where the community can come together, making them strong contenders for third places. This research focuses on the Royal Library of The Hague (KB), exploring how it can better function as a third place by redesigning its transitional spaces to encourage spontaneous social interaction. Through literature review, on-site mapping, and case study analyses, the research assesses both the urban context and the interior transitional spaces of the KB, and investigates the design criteria for enhancing social interactions. The analysis focuses on seven topics – route/ circulation, façade, vision, spatial organisation, light, and furniture and green.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

Social interactions or the absence thereof can have a great impact on the quality of life. Research shows that individuals living without intimate personal ties tend to struggle emotionally and find it difficult to maintain a clear perspective on life. “When they are not allayed by the reasonable objections and reassurances of others, [these] individual[s] may [even] come dangerously close to paranoia or depression” (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). The need for social interaction is great, as it offers people perspective and a sense of belonging (Jeffres et al., 2009).

In modern daily life, however, experiences are increasingly preplanned, scheduled, controlled, and commercially packaged. Life has become a “two-stop model” with people organising their entire lifestyle around work and home, leaving only room for planned interactions, rather than spontaneous and unplanned ones. However, it is precisely these spontaneous interactions that make for the most memorable and fulfilling experiences (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982).

1.1. The third place

Over time, the number of places where these casual interactions and community involvement can occur has decreased, causing people to expect too much emotionally and socially from home and work, thereby limiting their exposure to a broader social network (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). According to Ray Oldenburg (1989), for daily life to be fulfilling, a separate place is needed for people to come together, a place that provides people with experiences and relationships that are not available at home or work. This is where the idea of the third place comes in – a place for the community. Oldenburg (1989) concludes that participating in these third places contributes to a sense of identity, belonging, and connection.



Figure 1: Places of society according to Oldenburg, 1989

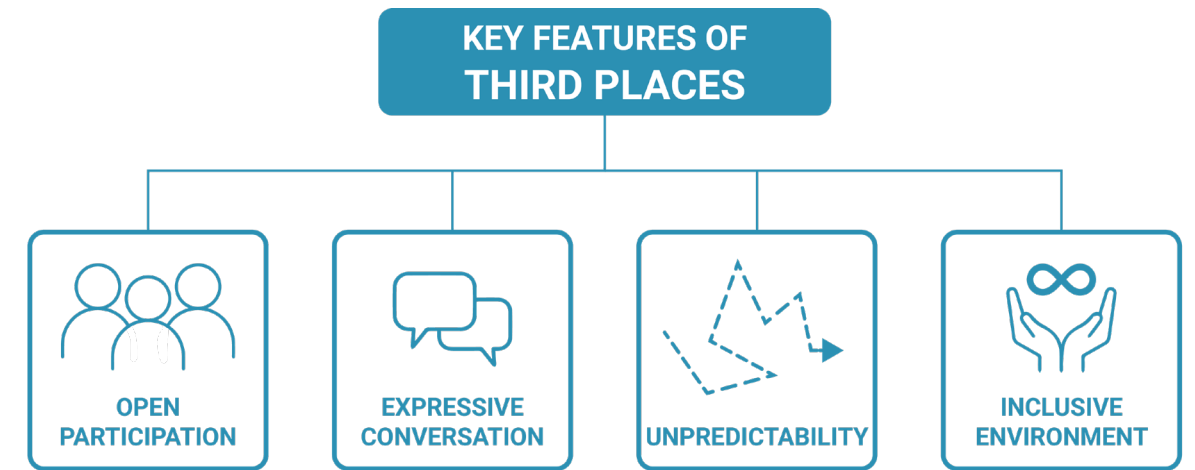


Figure 2: Key features of third places according to Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982

But what makes for a good third place? To clarify this, we examine the key features as derived from Oldenburg and Brissett’s (1982) research (Figure 2). This research emphasises the significance of open participation, expressive conversation, unpredictability, and an inclusive environment. A well-functioning third place gives everyone the opportunity to participate in conversation without a certain social hierarchy. “People are there to participate, not to enjoy monologues” (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). The conversations that take place are not instrumental or pragmatic, but informal chatter and banter based on common experiences. This expressive form of communication builds deeper emotional and spiritual bonds (Klapp, 1969). The third place must also have a sense of unpredictability. Participants do not always know who they will meet or what will happen. Lastly, since a third place is open to everyone, regulars and newcomers interact naturally, creating an inclusive environment. In conclusion, all of these features enhance the quality of spontaneous and unplanned social interactions, which, as mentioned earlier, are so important for a fulfilling daily life.

1.2. The contemporary library

Within the discussed framework, many different types of spaces can function as a third place, such as coffee shops, book stores and bars. The focus of this research, however, will be the library. To understand why the library is a good contender for a third place, we must first dive into its history.

Libraries have been around since ancient times, but their function has undergone many changes. For a long time, the ability to read and write was limited to the elite, making libraries available only to this privileged sector of society. It was not until Europe’s Renaissance, when universities started gaining more power, that this balance began to shift. This change led to the library as we know it today, where anyone can access its contents (Falavigna & Rolim, 2019).

In the late 20th century, however, the Technological Revolution sparked concerns that libraries would disappear as people were now able to access information from their homes. Yet, instead of disappearing, libraries have responded to this problem by taking up new responsibilities and becoming places where people are “as likely to do [their] homework, take part in an activity, [or] meet a friend for coffee as borrow a book” (Falavigna & Rolim, 2019). Thus, the modern library is no longer limited to its traditional functions, but it has become a “destination in itself, a living room in the city” (Worpole, 2013).

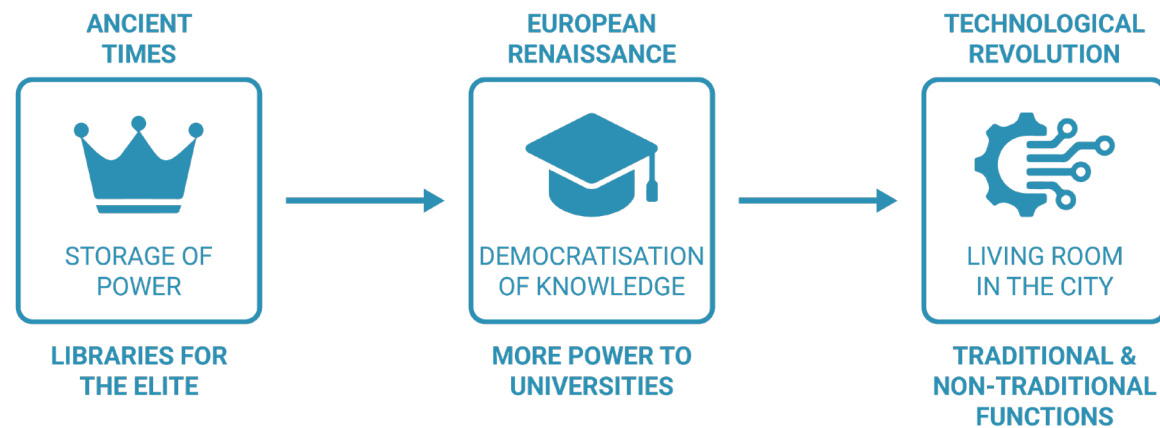


Figure 3: The library's function over time

According to Jakovlevas-Mateckis et al. (2017), the programme of a library is separated into traditional, or informational, services and non-traditional, or cultural and social, services. Their research also concludes that 20-35% of the library programme should be assigned to social and cultural activities (Figure 4). This “allow[s] libraries to meet informational, cultural, communicational, and other needs of the society” (Falavigna & Rolim, 2019). For a library to become a well-functioning third place, these cultural and social services need to be well-executed, emphasising the stimulation of social interactions.

1.3. Transitional space

While programming is an important aspect in the topic of ‘the contemporary library as a third place’, the design has a significant impact as well. This is where architecture comes in. Architecture, and thus, “form, access and connections between spaces” (Falavigna & Rolim, 2019) has “a direct influence on people, dictating which encounters are possible and how memories are created” (Van Slyck, 2007 cited in Griffis, 2013).

Due to the significance of access and connections of a building for the third place and the stimulation of social interactions, this research focuses on transitional spaces, which are important yet often overlooked in architectural design (Boettger, 2014). There are different ways to interpret the term transitional space. Behnke-Pfuhl (2005 cited in Boettger, 2014) turns to expressions such as “intermediate area” and “connection,” and, importantly,

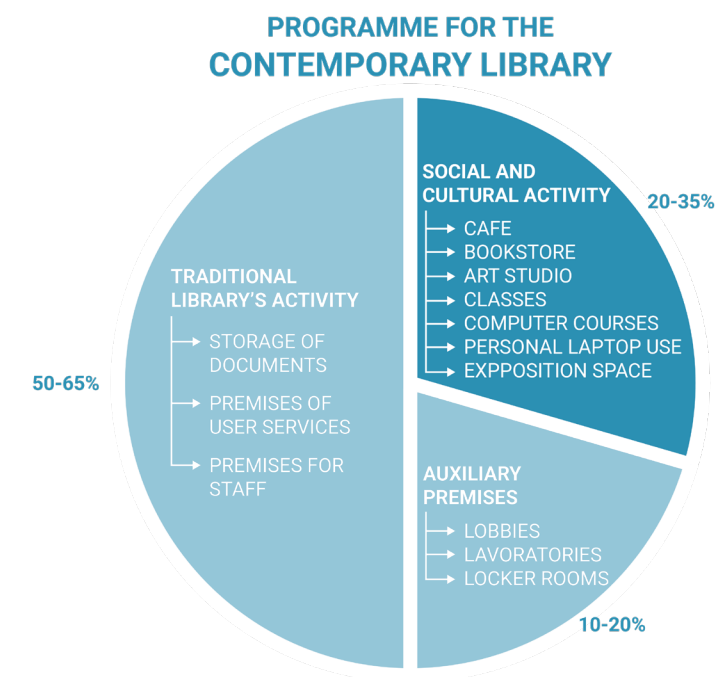


Figure 4: Programme of the contemporary library according to Jakovlevas-Mateckis et al., 2017

includes the social aspect of “facilitating contacts”. Thus, the transitional space plays a role in stimulating social interactions and thereby also holds the possibility to become the core of the “library as a third place”.

To avoid confusion, the difference between the terms place and space must be discussed. A space, or a basic empty entity, becomes a place once meaning is attributed to it (Donbasil, 2015). This research investigates how transitional space can become a third place through stimulating social interactions (Figure 5).

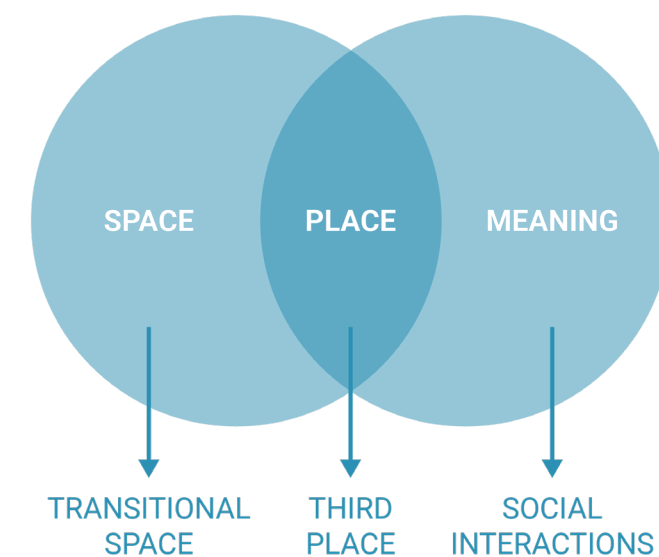


Figure 5: Difference between space, place, and meaning

1.4. Research question

While there are many great examples of libraries that function as a third place, not all libraries fulfil this potential equally. This research focuses on the Royal Library of The Hague (KB). Initial personal observations suggest that this building falls short in attracting the community and stimulating social interactions. The previously explained information on the third place, social interactions, and transitional spaces is therefore combined and projected onto the KB, producing the following research question: *How can stimulation of social interactions, and thus, the idea of the library as a third place, be improved in the KB through the design of its transitional spaces?*

This research will be done by answering the following sub-questions:

- What impact does the KB's urban context have on the possibility for social interactions?
- What impact do the KB's interior transitional spaces have on the possibility for social interactions?
- What are the design criteria for enhancing social interactions in transitional spaces?

1.5. Research boundaries

To apply the term *transitional space* to the research of the KB, this study applies the concept as interpreted by Ruby (2004 cited in Boettger, 2014). According to them, transitional space is not "linear, but a [space that] can be both in front of and behind the façade." Therefore, this research will target two different types of transitional space of the KB: the space between the city of The Hague and the KB – the buildings' direct surroundings (in front of the façade) – and the space between entering the building and entering the spaces with specific functions – the first interior spaces (behind the façade).

In this research, the boundaries of the urban context that will be analysed are as presented in Figure 6. This consists of three parts:

- The edges of the KB – the façade and entrances.
- Everything within the building block on which the KB stands.
- The connections between the edges of the block and the neighbouring areas – The Hague Central, the Koekamp, the Theresia neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood Bezuidenhout South-West.

The interior transitional spaces are as shown in Figure 7. This includes the entrance space on the ground floor of the building and the central hall on the first floor.



Figure 6: Set boundaries for the transitional space of the urban context

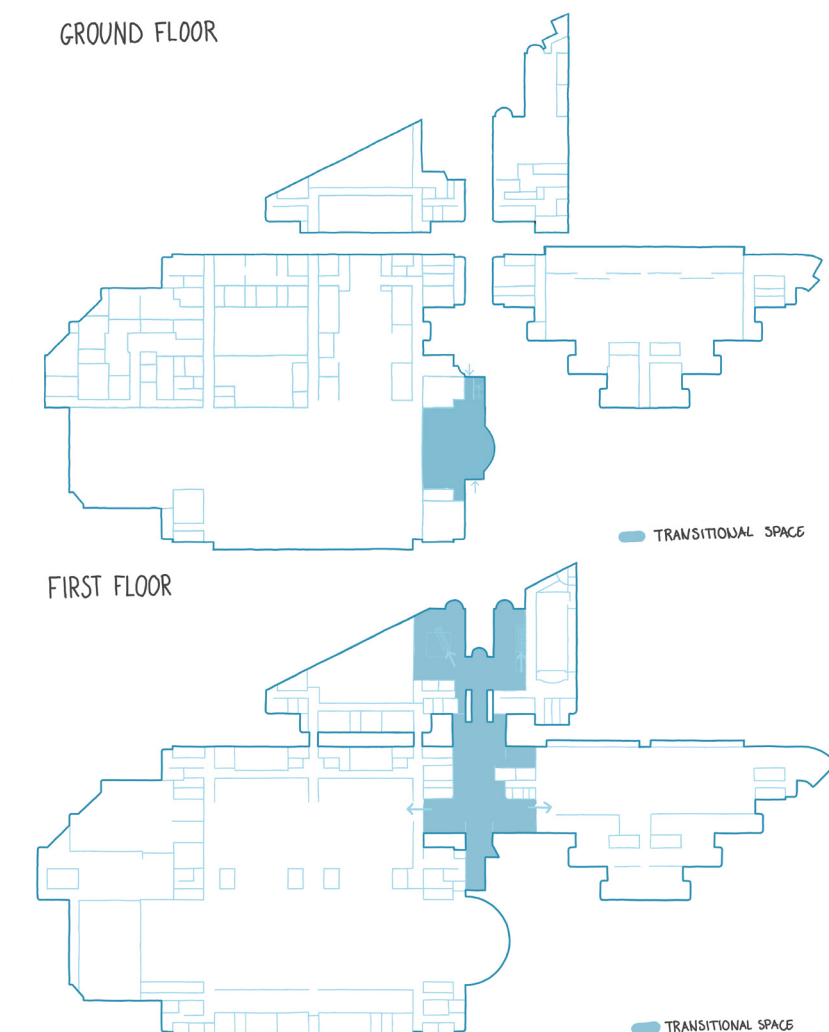


Figure 7: Set boundaries for the interior transitional spaces of the KB

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

2. METHODOLOGY

Based on the sub-questions, this research is structured around two main topics: the Royal Library (KB) and design criteria. Each topic begins with a literature review, followed by mapping at the KB to identify opportunities and constraints within its design and case studies to explore the design criteria. Once this data has been gathered, the design phase for the KB's redevelopment can begin (Figure 8).

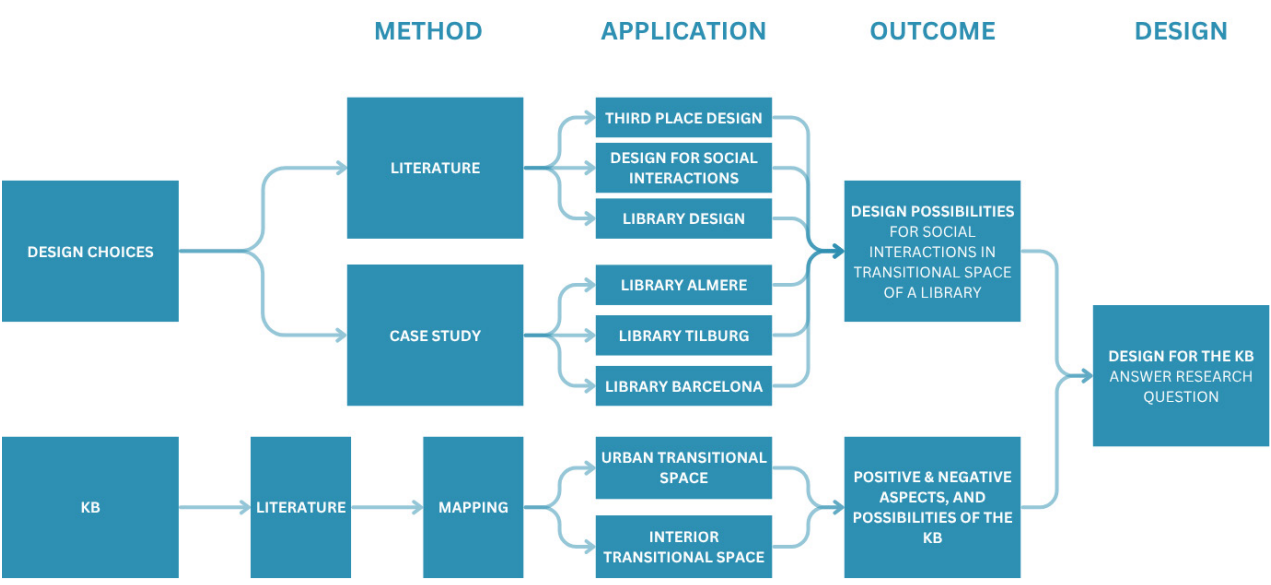


Figure 8: Research diagram

2.1. Literature collection

The process began with collecting literature, using Google Scholar and the TU Delft Library to find sources. Search keywords included 'third place design', 'third place library design', 'design for social interactions', and 'design for social encounters' for identifying design criteria and 'Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag' for research related to the KB.

As concluded in the previous chapter, the main criteria for designing a third place are accessibility and the stimulation of social interactions. The design-based literature was reviewed to identify types of architecture-related interventions that influence accessibility and social interactions. This resulted in six key topics: route/circulation, façade, vision, spatial organisation, daylight, and furniture and green. A seventh topic, use, can be related back to all of these, and is thus included in the research as well. To determine which aspects of the KB should be analysed and to develop design criteria accordingly, a research guideline has been developed for each sub-question (Chapter 2.3 & 2.4).

2.2. Introduction to the six key topics

Route/circulation

Effective wayfinding, and by extension, accessibility, has a direct impact on how buildings and public spaces are used (Bechtel & Churchman, 2002; Holland et al., 2007). Well-designed routing is therefore essential for a third place, as it ensures that visitors can locate the place, even if they are not yet aware of its existence.

Façade

Transitions between building and public space, also referred to as edges, are significant for how many and what kind of activities take place (Gehl & Svarre, 2013; Sanders & Schroder, 2008, cited in Joyce, 2014)). Therefore, the design of a building's ground floor façades, is an important factor in shaping urban life, as it can provide opportunities for interaction (Carmona et al., 2010, cited in Joyce, 2014). As Gehl et al., (2006) put it, "If the ground floors are interesting and varied, the urban environment is inviting and enriching. If the ground floors are closed or lacking in detail, the urban experience is correspondingly flat and impersonal."

Vision

Much of the information people take in while moving through the built environment comes through vision (Hanson, 1998). Understanding visual patterns can therefore be a useful and valuable tool in design. When integrated into a design, it can help to draw attention to important locations or elements, encourage gathering in certain areas (Fisher, 2009), and guide movement patterns (Peponis & Wineman, 2002, cited in Bechtel & Churchman, 2002).

Spatial organisation

The placement of functions and the spatial relationships between them – such as which functions are grouped together and how far functions, and thus different types of users, are from one another – have a direct impact on how a building is used (Kaarwan, n.d.). Effective spatial organization ensures that spaces are arranged in logical and functional ways, improving accessibility and ease of movement throughout the building.

Daylight

According to Jacobs (1961), the presence of sunlight, particularly natural light and open

sky, is an important aspect for a vibrant urban life, as it contributes not only to physical comfort but also to psychological well-being and the general liveliness of public spaces. Jacobs believes sunlight contributes to what she calls the “sidewalk ballet,” the informal social interactions and passive surveillance that keep urban spaces safe and engaging. In contrast, dark spaces tend to drive people away and many spaces become deserted after dark (Holland et al., 2007).

Furniture & green

As noted by Holland et al. (2007) and Aram et al. (2019), social interactions in public spaces are encouraged by the presence of appropriate furniture and vegetation.

Seating plays an especially important role. “Sitting space has been identified as one of the most important characteristics in retaining people in public spaces and possibly supporting social behaviour” (Mehta, 2009). Studies show that when seating is available, people make frequent use of it, and that a greater quantity of seating increases overall use (Gehl & Svarre, 2013; Whyte, 1980). The use of seating is also influenced by its context, as people tend to prefer spots with a good view or shelter over less attractive or, for example, windy locations (Holland et al., 2007). In many cases, people even choose to sit on improvised surfaces rather than use seating that feels uninviting.

The presence of greenery is especially relevant in the urban context. According to Aram et al. (2019), green spaces are naturally used as informal gathering spots, offering “a suitable setting for leisure time, relaxation and social interactions.”

In interior spaces, the presence of different types of furniture and greenery can add to the overall comfort of the space. This comfort is an important factor when trying to encourage visitors to stay longer, a goal for a well-functioning third place. Jacovlevas-Mateckis et al. (2017) mention that elements such as soft furnishings, plants, aquariums, and soft carpet can add to the comfort of a space.

Use

A good indicator of the success and quality of public spaces is how much they are actually used by people. The presence of people tends to attract even more people (Morris, 1994, cited in Joyce, 2014). Therefore, studying how a space is used is essential when trying to design a space that functions as a third place. “Targeted studies can provide a basic understanding of what works and what does not, and thus suggest qualified solutions” (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).

2.3. Research of the KB

The research of the KB is divided into two categories, corresponding to the first and second sub-questions of this study: the *urban context* and the *interior transitional spaces*. Each category includes a literature review focused on finding ways to map the KB in relation to the six topics previously mentioned. From this literature review, two guidelines have been set up, one for each sub-question (Figure 9 & 10).

URBAN CONTEXT	LITERATURE	KB RESEARCH
ROUTE/ CIRCULATION	Gehl, 2013	Test walks with photographs (from different directions)
FAÇADE	- Gehl et al., 2006 - Gehl, 2013 - Mehta, 2009	- Analyse facade types with photographs - Open vs closed - interactive vs passive
VISION	- Dursun, 2007 - Karimi, 2012	- Use of programme Depthmap - Visual connectivity - Isovist fieldmap from entrances to the site
SPATIAL ORGANISATION	NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE LITERATURE	NO URBAN RESEARCH
DAYLIGHT	- Holland et al., 2007 - Jacobs, 1961	- Solar study - Map shady areas
FURNITURE /GREEN	- Aram et al., 2019 - Gehl, 2013 - Holland et al., 2007 - Mehta, 2009 - Whyte, 1980	Map placement seating and green

USE

	- Gehl, 2013 - Mehta, 2009	- Behaviour mapping - Comparison with findings from above
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Figure 9: Research guideline urban context

INTERIOR TRANSITIONAL SPACES	LITERATURE	KB RESEARCH
ROUTE/ CIRCULATION	- Fisher, 2009 - Hillier & Hanson, 1984	- Access graph with floor plans - Depths from building entrances to functions
FAÇADE	NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE LITERATURE	NO INTERIOR RESEARCH
VISION	- Fisher, 2009 - Hanson, 1998 - Bechtel & Churchman, 2002	- Use of programme Depthmap - Visual connectivity - Isovist fieldmap from building entrances
SPATIAL ORGANISATION	Kaarwan, n.d.	Clustering of the current spaces/functions
LIGHT	Holland et al., 2007	- Map light areas - Map shady areas
FURNITURE /GREEN	- Gehl, 2013 - Whyte, 1980 - Mehta, 2009	Map placement seating and green
↓		
USE	- Gehl, 2013 - Mehta, 2009	- Behaviour mapping - Comparison with findings from above

Figure 10: Research guideline interior transitional spaces

2.4. Research on design criteria

To answer the third sub-question, the literature that led to the six topics of design will be analysed more thoroughly, focusing on specific design choices within the topics and their impact on accessibility and social interactions. Based on this literature, a set of criteria will be developed for each design topic, including design suggestions that will guide the design process at the end of this research.

The design-based research will also incorporate three case studies. The selection of these case studies was based on the following criteria:

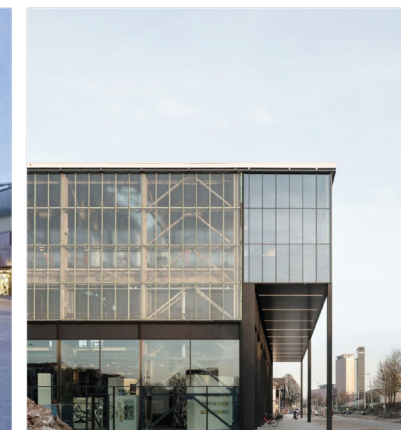
- The building must be a library.
- The design must have the intention of creating a third place and/or enhancing social

NIEUWE BIBLIOTHEEK ALMERE



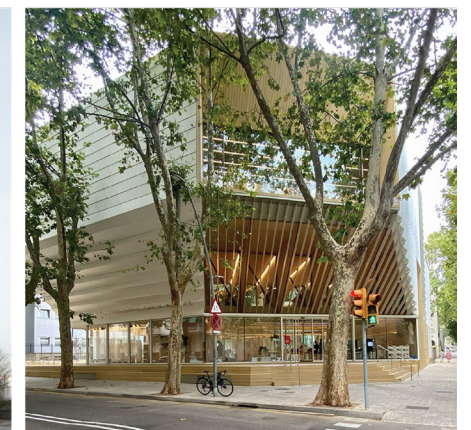
Meyer en Van Schooten Architecten

LOCHAL TILBURG



Braaksma & Roos architectenbureau, CIVIC architects, Inside Outside, Mecanoo

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ
LIBRARY BARCELONA



SUMA Arquitectura

Figure 11: Selected case studies

interactions.

- Two libraries must be located in the Netherlands to allow for site visits, with one international case included to provide a non-Dutch perspective.

Based on these criteria, the selected case studies are the Nieuwe Bibliotheek in Almere, the Lochal in Tilburg, and the Gabriel García Márquez Library in Barcelona (Figure 11).

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH

3. RESEARCH

3.1. Urban context

3.1.1. Route/circulation

According to Gehl & Svarre (2013), test walks are a useful method for identifying both problems and opportunities for city life on a specific route. This type of analysis helps observers understand what might make a route frustrating or unpleasant. Gehl & Svarre also recommend taking photographs to support communication of the findings, as they can effectively illustrate how urban form interacts with, or fails to support, public life.

To apply this method to the KB's urban context, test walks to the site were done, approaching the site from all directions. This resulted in seven routes leading to the KB. These routes were mapped out and photographs were taken along each route to document the experience, as can be seen in Figures 12-16. Each image is accompanied by a short explanation and the route's positive and negative points are highlighted, with a green border for positive aspects and an orange border for negative aspects.

Following the individual route analyses, a summary map was made to combine all the findings, in which both the positive and negative aspects of the site were marked (Figure 17). Positive elements include parts of the building that are visible from multiple entry points to the site and well-used public squares. Negative aspects include dark and windy areas, major roads acting as barriers, and hidden entrances. From this map it becomes clear that the negative aspects along the routes outweigh the positive ones. Thus, there is a need for improvement in the design of the routes.

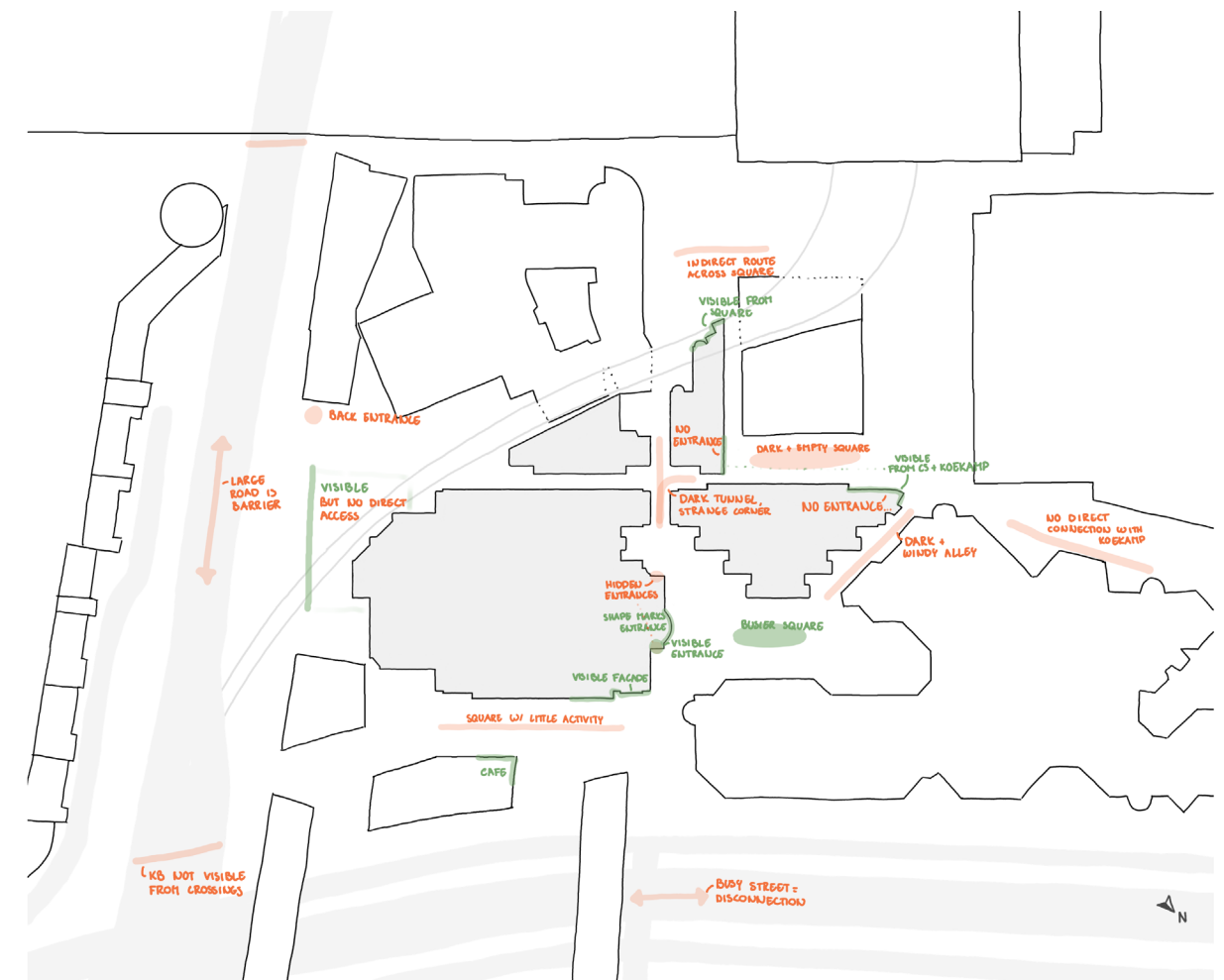
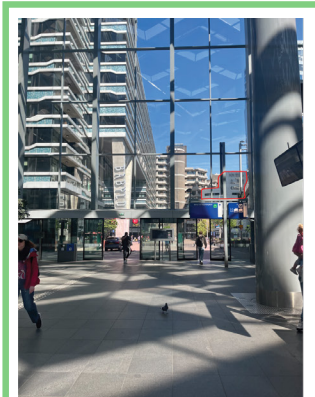
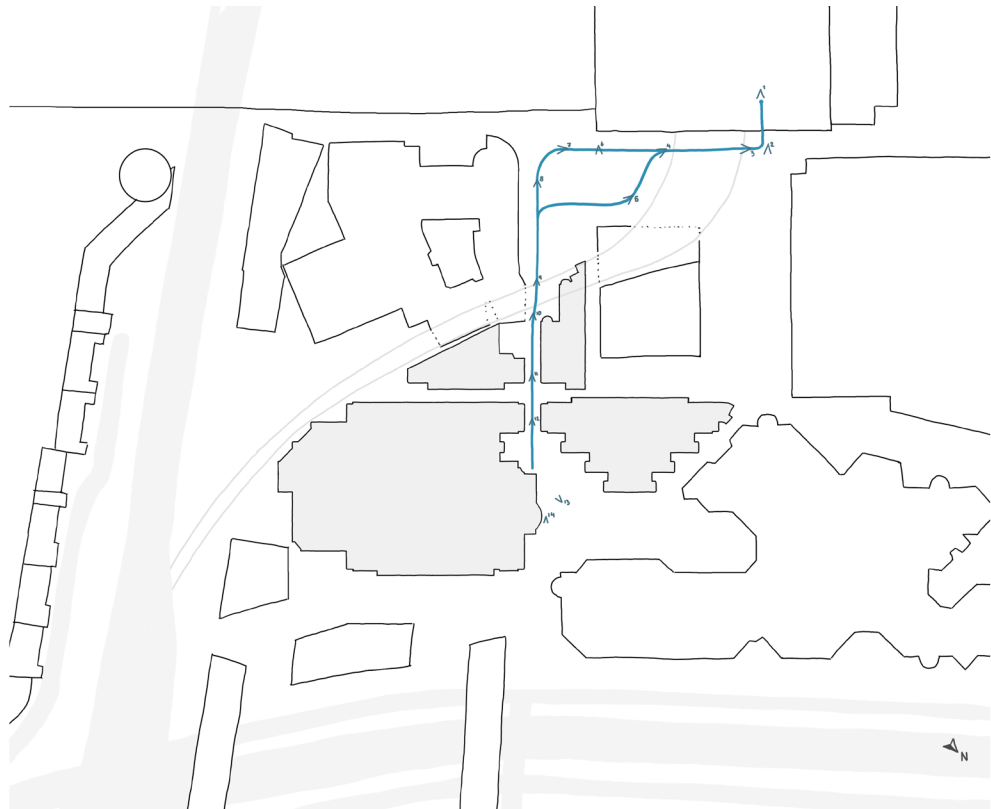


Figure 17: Route conclusions

ROUTE 1:
from The Hague Central
Station



1: In the hall of the Central Station. A small corner of the KB can be seen in the distance.



2: Outside the Central Station.



3: Turning right, passing under the tram viaduct.



4: On the other side of the viaduct, a larger portion of the KB becomes visible on the left.



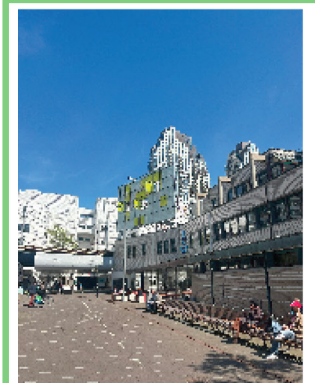
5: Crossing the square, with the KB in the background.



6: Crossing the square option 2.



7: Walking towards the National Archive building, unclear at first what building this is.



8: Passing the National Archive building, walking towards the KB.



9: Passing under the tram viaduct once again.



10: Heading into a tunnel... The sign says KB, so this must be the right way.



11: The crossing of two paths.



12: KB entrance no.1 under the tunnel, small and uninviting.



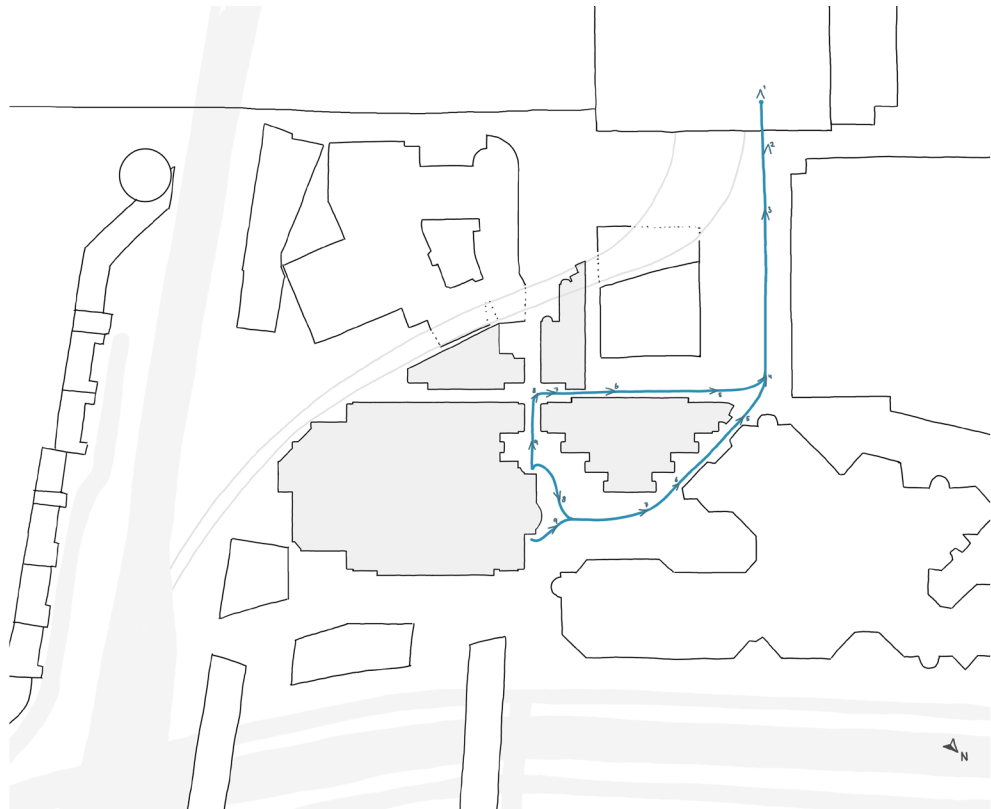
13: View of entrance from the other side, very hidden.



14: Keep walking and the Palace of Justice comes in view. The other KB entrance, however, is still invisible.

Figure 12

ROUTE 2&3: from The Hague Central Station



1: In the hall of the Central Station. A small corner of the KB can be seen in the distance.



2: Outside the Central Station.



3: Crossing the square towards the visible corner of the KB.



4: There's no entrance here... Should the visitor go straight or turn right?



5: Option 1, go straight into the shaded and windy alley between the KB and BuZa.



6: Turning the corner, the rest of the KB comes in view.



7: Crossing the square, this looks like an entrance.



8: One entrance is on the right of the half-circle, very hidden.



14: The other entrance is on the left, also not visible from every angle.



5: Option 2, turn right and walk along KB facade across an empty square.



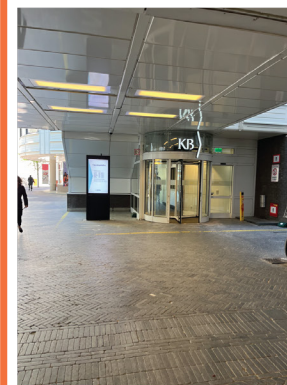
6: Moving towards a dark tunnel...



7: Unclear in which direction the entrance is...



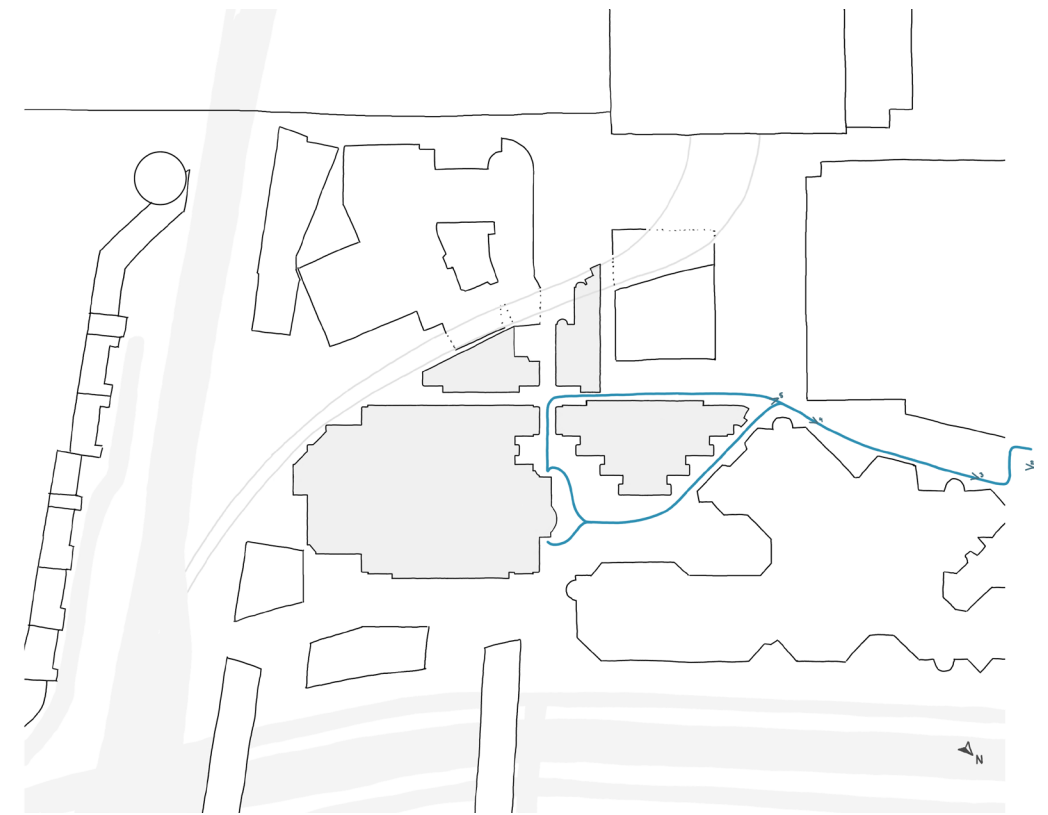
8: Ah, there it is to the left.



9: KB entrance no.1 under the tunnel, small and uninviting.

Figure 13

ROUTE 4:
from the Koekamp



				
1: Walking from the Koekamp, a small part of the KB is in view in the distance.	2: A large street needs to be crossed first.	3: Passing the entrance to a parking lot, the only sidewalk is on the left. The KB is no longer in view.	4: Coming closer, the KB comes into view again.	5: There's no entrance here... Should the visitor go left or right?

Figure 14

ROUTE 5:
from the Theresiastraat

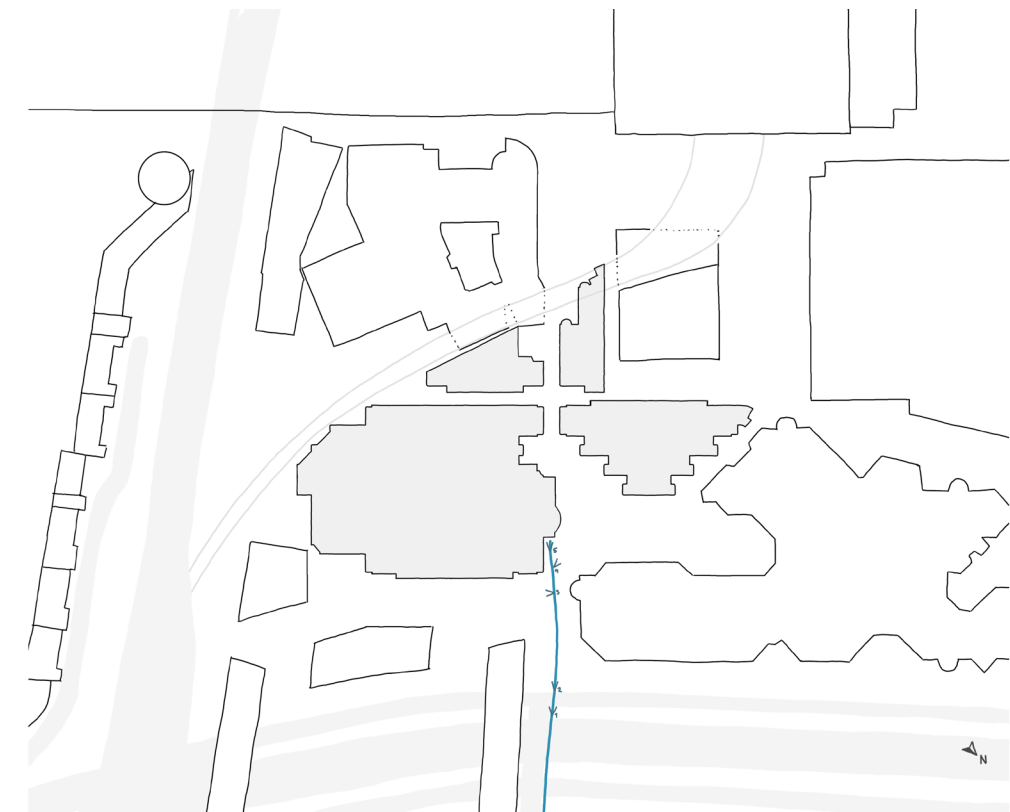
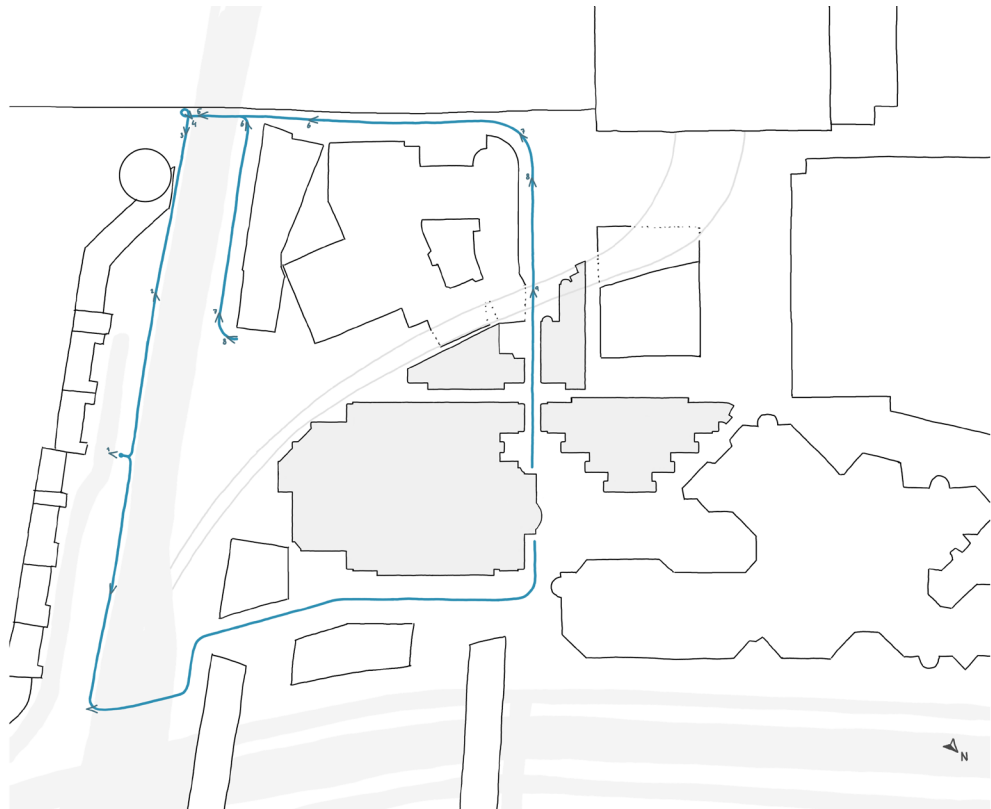


Figure 15

ROUTE 6&7:
from Bezuidenhout south-
west



1: The view from neighbourhood Bezuidenhout South-West, a large sign of the KB is visible, but this street needs to be crossed first.



2: Option 1 is to cross far to the left, seemingly leaving the KB behind...



2: Option 2 is to cross far to the right, seemingly leaving the KB behind...



3: Crossing a bridge.



3: Crossing the street.



4: Down the stairs.



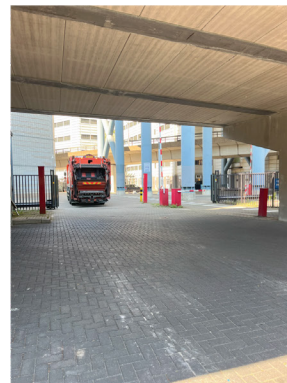
5: Passing underneath the large road. Should the visitor go straight or turn right?



6: Turning right, passing a bike parking.



7: Turning the corner.



8: We find the back entrance to the KB.



6: Going straight, walking between the railway and National Archives building.



7: Arriving at a square, the KB coming into view on the right.



8: Passing the National Archive building, walking towards the KB.



9: Passing under the tram viaduct.

Figure 16

3.1.2. Façade

Gehl et al. (2006) compare different façade types, emphasising the strong effect these can have on their direct environment: 5 km/h scale versus 60 km/h scale, open versus closed, interactive versus passive, rich in sensory experience versus boring, varied versus uniform, and vertical versus horizontal.

To apply this to the KB, two analyses were conducted to evaluate where and whether the ground floor façades are open or closed (Figure 18) and whether they are interactive or passive (Figure 19).

While some parts of the KB's ground floor façade, such as those at the main entrance and the restaurant, are quite open, the majority of the façade lacks this quality. Studies show that people spend more time lingering in areas with no 'dead space', or façades with blank surfaces that one cannot see through (Mehta, 2009). Yet, many of the KB's façades are closed off, with blank brick walls and windows that have been covered, making the overall feel of the building inaccessible and unwelcoming.

In addition to this, the façade is entirely passive and has no interactive elements. It is flat, with no places to sit, lean, or engage with the building. This stands in contrast to the BuZa/ First Chambre building across from the KB, which has window ledges that people use to lean, linger, and thus, socially interact.

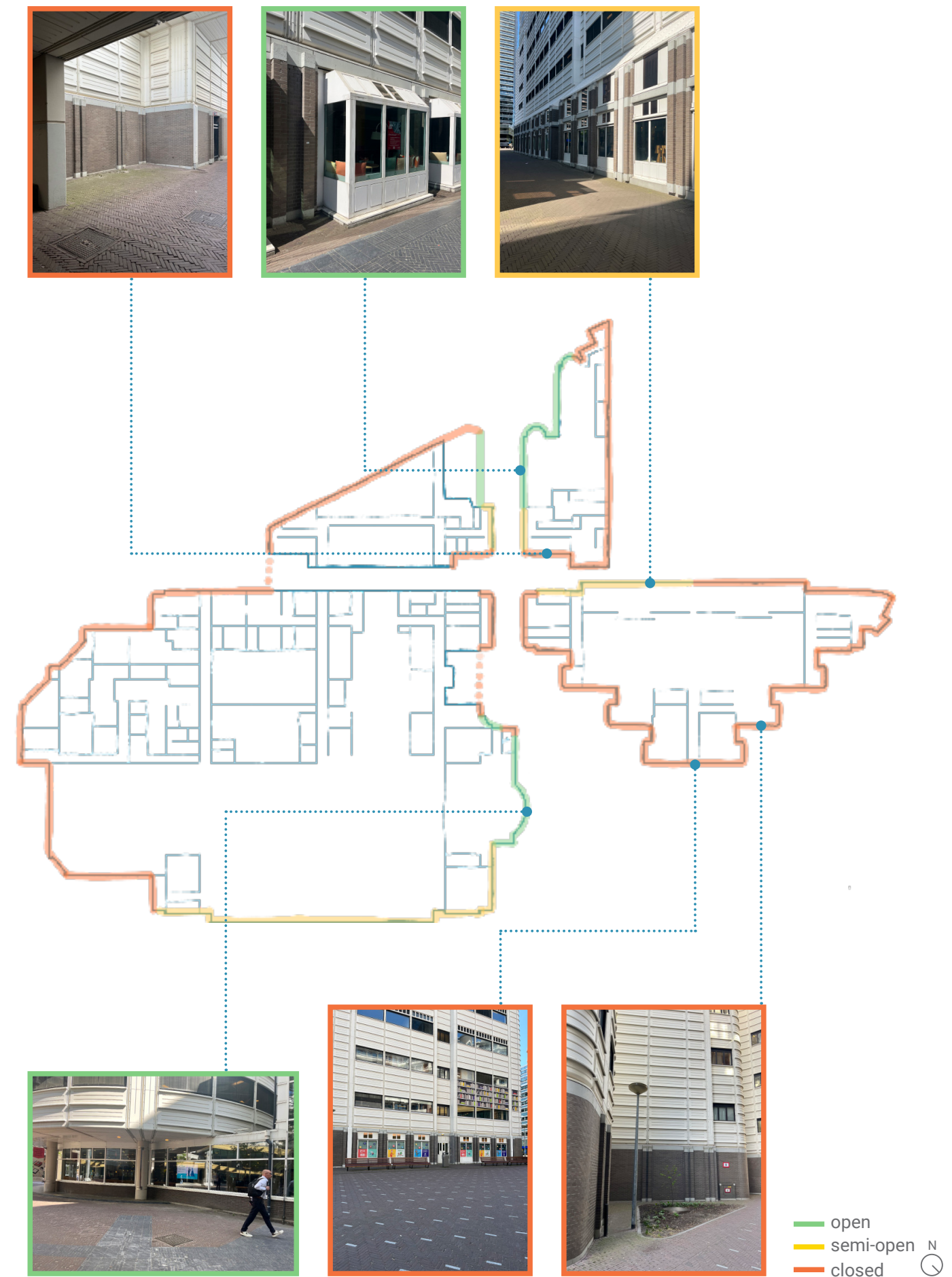




Figure 19: Interactive versus passive façades

3.1.3. Vision

Examining axial lines within an urban context, representing the longest lines of sight, is a simple yet effective way to model and analyse public space networks. This method corresponds directly with how people perceive spatial networks (Karimi, 2012). It is also a useful tool to revisit during the design process, as it allows for comparative analyses between new proposals and the existing context (Dursun, 2007).

To apply this method to the KB's urban context, the site was analysed in two ways, using a programme called DepthMap. First, visual connectivity was analysed by calculating the number of axial lines that connect at each point. DepthMap performs this analysis per square meter, using a color scale from red (for high visual connectivity) to dark blue (for low visual connectivity (Figure 20).

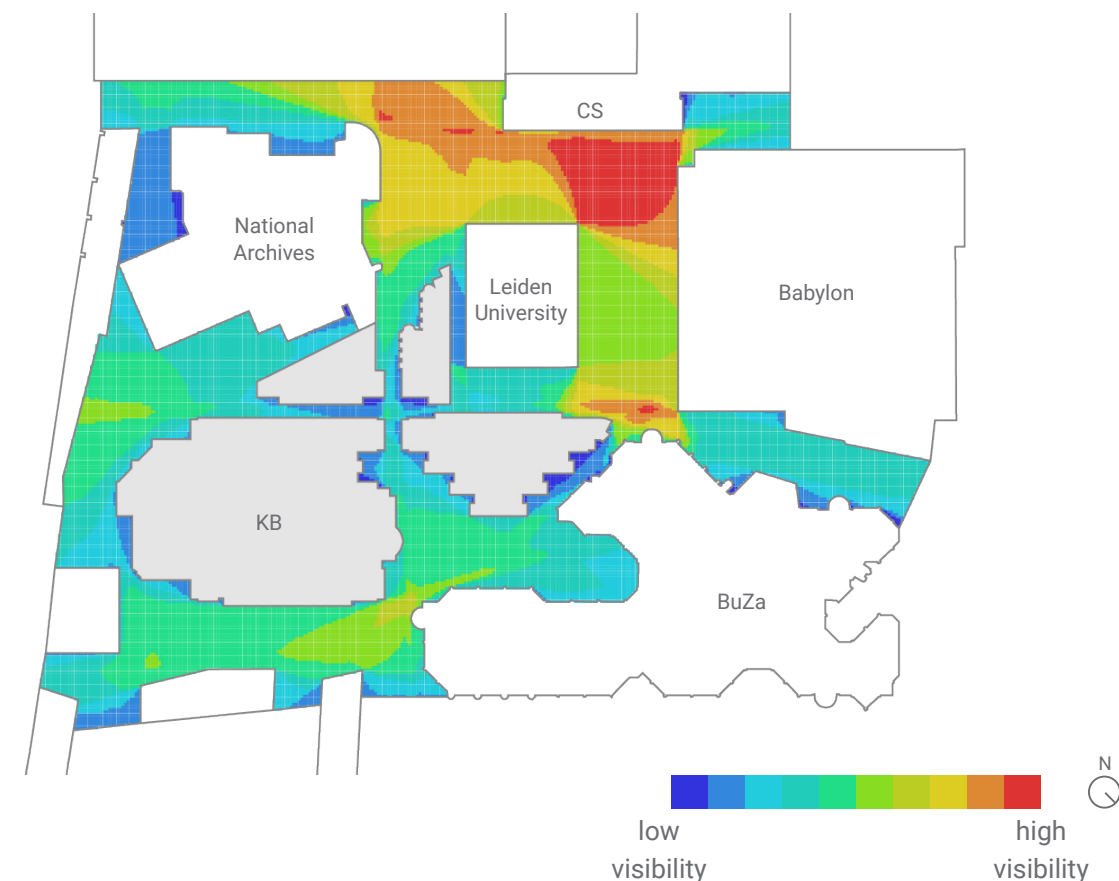


Figure 20: Visual connectivity urban context

Next, an isovist fieldmap was generated, mapping 180-degree fields of vision from various entry points to the site (Figure 21).

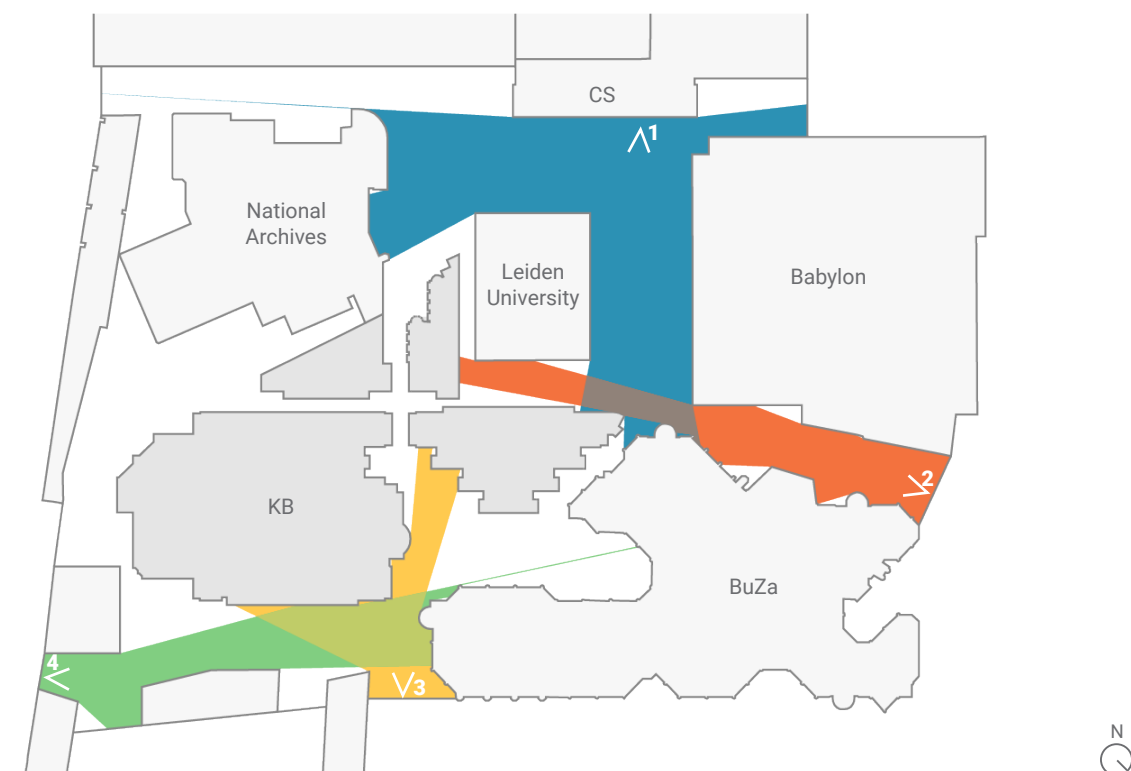


Figure 21: Isovist fieldmap from entrances to site

From these maps, it becomes clear which areas of the KB are visually prominent. For example, the northwest corner between Babylon and Leiden University (on the Koekamp side) is highly visible. This could be used as a point of strength when making the redesign of the KB. On the other hand, areas like the alleys within the KB crossway and between the KB and BuZa/First Chambre are far less visible. These less connected areas highlight opportunities to improve accessibility and routing in the redesign.

3.1.4. Daylight

A solar study has been conducted to assess the amount of daylight throughout the KB's urban context. Using a 3D model of the site's buildings, shadow patterns were mapped for both a winter day (the shortest day of the year) and a summer day (the longest day) (Figure 22 & 23). Shadows were simulated from 08:00 to 18:00, then layered over each other to create a color gradient, ranging from white (indicating the most light) to dark purple (indicating the most shade).

This analysis visualises the impact of the sites high building density (including high rise buildings), which results in a large amount of shaded areas. Nonetheless, some parts still get quite some daylight, such as the square north of the National Archives and the current KB staff parking area to the west of the National Archives. A more detailed analysis of daylight exposure on the KB's façades and entrances still needs to be conducted.

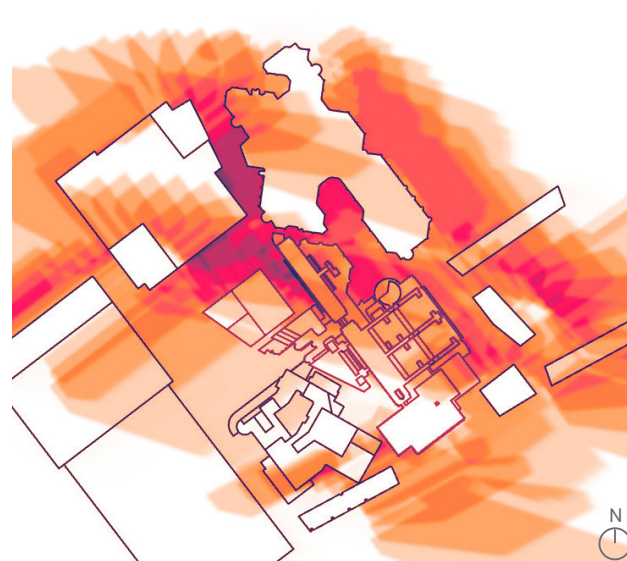


Figure 22: Solar study summer scenario

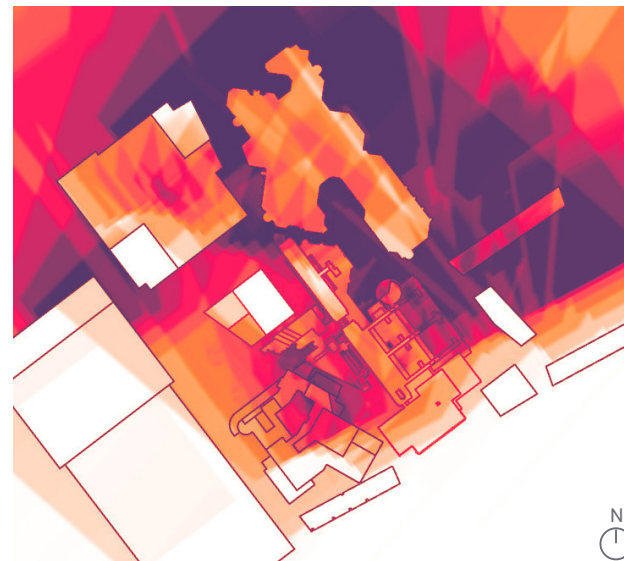


Figure 23: Solar study winter scenario

3.1.5. Furniture & green

As the presence of furniture and green in an urban context plays an important role in supporting social interactions, these elements have been mapped for the surroundings

of the KB (Figure 24). Furniture is marked in orange, while greenery is shown in green. Observations from multiple site visits, combined with insights from a user behaviour study (Chapter 3.1.6), allow for conclusions of this map.

Well-used areas include the square in front of the National Archive, which has a large and varied selection of seating, ranging from benches around a play fountain to public tables and chairs and a large restaurant terrace. Benches throughout the area all generally well-used. However, considering the size of the site, the overall number of benches is relatively low, and there is little multi-purpose furniture.

In general, the area has a large amount of paving and a low amount of green spaces. Where green is present, it is often in the form of small patches that do not lend themselves to active use. Around the KB itself, green areas are often placed directly in front of the façade, which creates distance between the building and passersby.

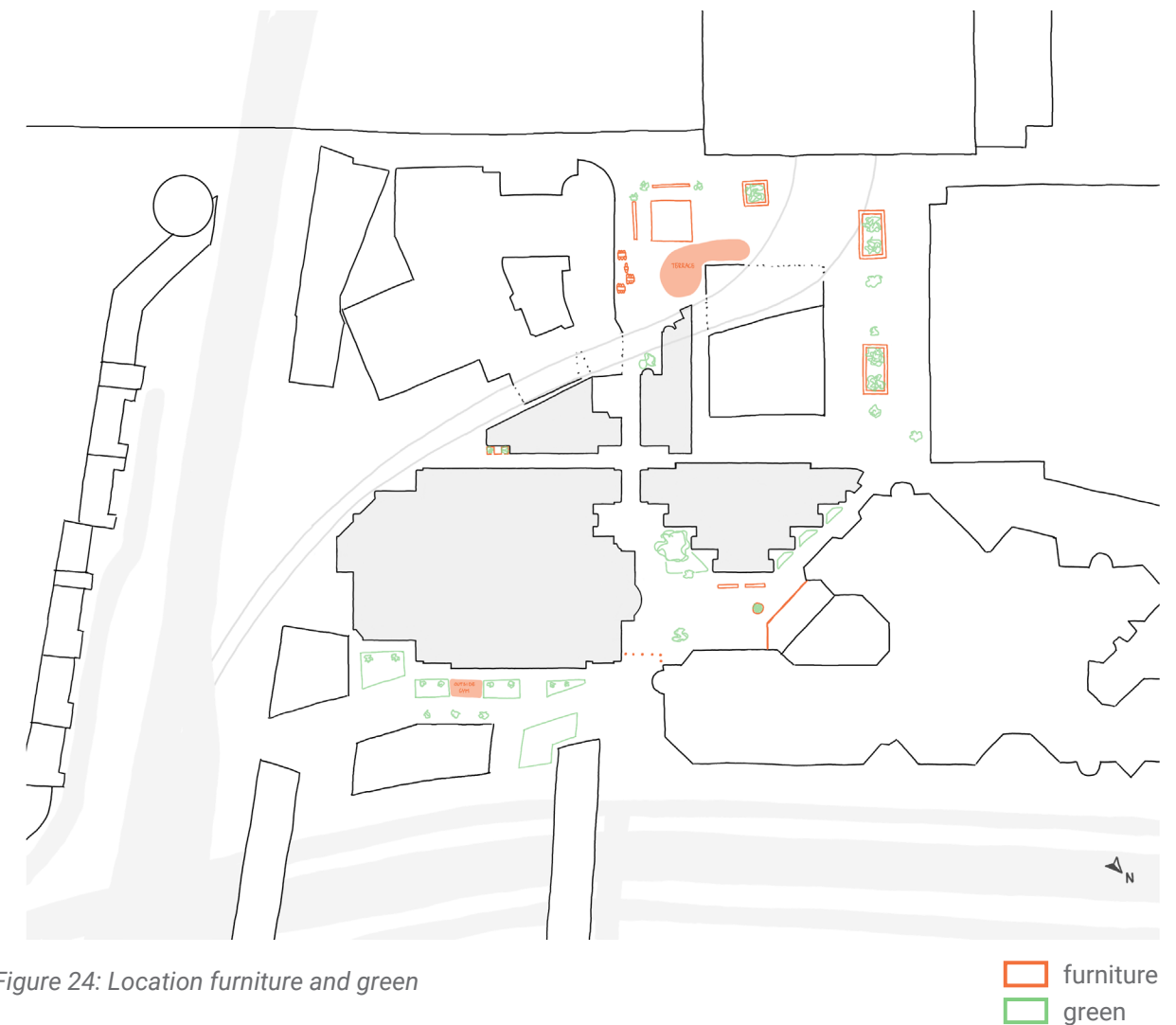


Figure 24: Location furniture and green

orange furniture
green green

3.1.6. Use

A user behaviour study offers valuable insights into the concept of 'city life' (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). To better understand life within the KB's urban context, such a study was conducted, focusing on three key elements, as suggested by Gehl & Svarre (2013): counting people, tracking movement, and mapping the locations of different activities.

Counting provides quantitative data that can support the decision-making process. It is particularly useful when results can be compared, such as by collecting data at different times of day, on different days of the week, or in different seasons.

Tracking movement and identifying where people stay can reveal unexpected behaviours. While planners and architects may intend for people to use public space in a certain way, this is not always how it plays out – trampled footpaths across lawns are a common example. Analysing movement patterns can help uncover barriers and guide where pedestrian paths or places to stay should be placed.

Finally, understanding which activities take place and where can help guide the design to support social interaction. Although the list of public space activities is almost endless, the primary activities are walking, standing, sitting and leaning (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). For this research, the additional activity of 'social interaction' was also included and mapped.

For this research, the site was visited, mapped, and counted at three different times of day: in the morning at 09:00, early afternoon at 13:00, and late afternoon at 17:00 (Figure 25). The study reveals that the site is primarily used for movement, with few people stopping to sit, lean, or socially interact. Two main routes dominate the site usage, connecting the Central Station to the Theresiastraat, but a limited amount of people pause along the way. The site currently functions more as a 'place along the way' than a 'place to be'. Many office workers use it to commute between the station and nearby office buildings.

The quantitative study further emphasises this, showing the highest number of users at 17:00, right after standard work hours. The study also indicates that some routes, such as one of the KB tunnel's cross-routes, are significantly less used.

Due to time constraints, observations were limited to three moments on a single summer day. For more reliable conclusions, a broader study should include varying weather conditions and observations after dark.

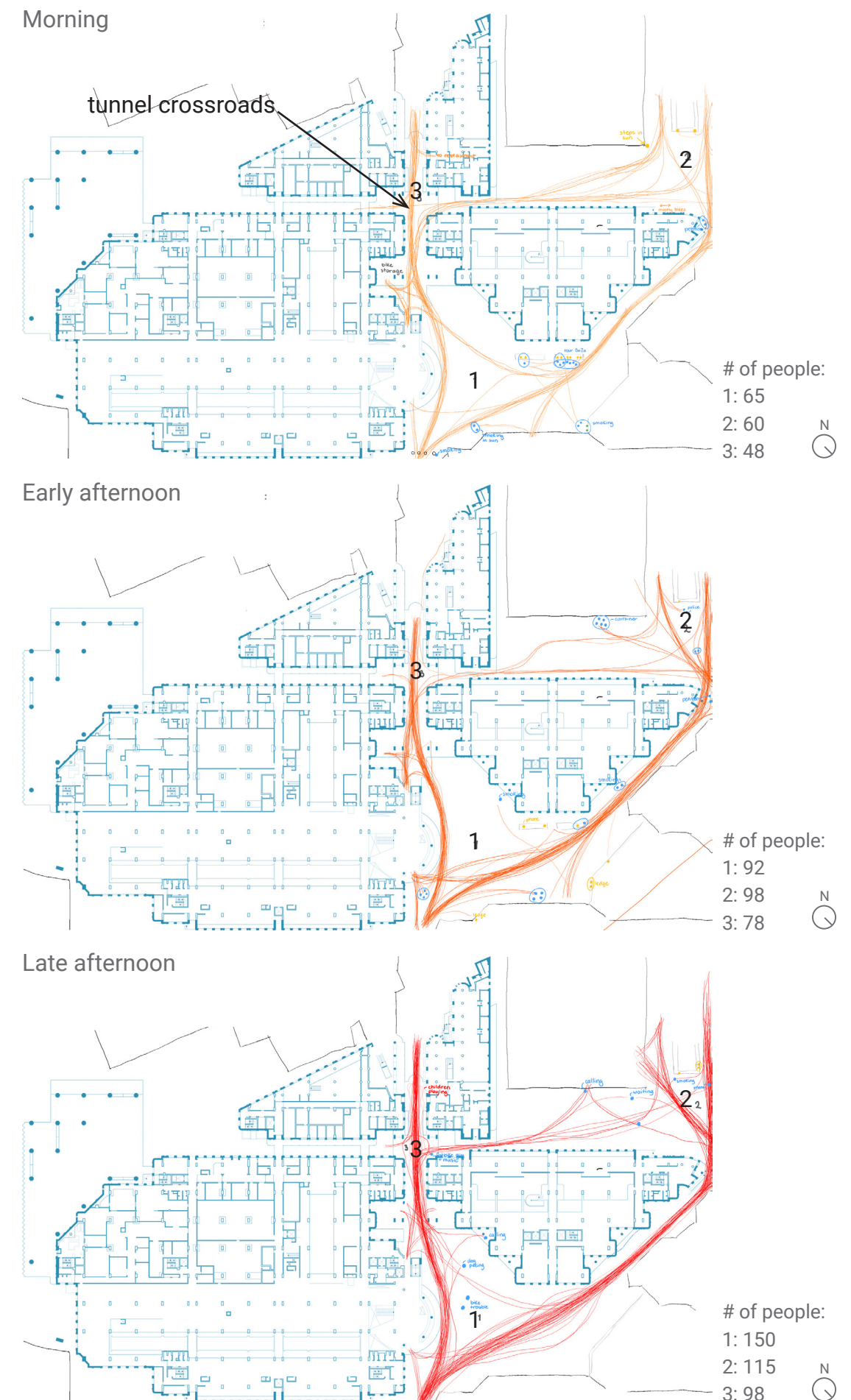


Figure 25: User behaviour study urban context

3.2. Interior transitional spaces

3.2.1. Route/circulation

Because buildings divide space into separate but connected areas, they shape the way people move and meet, and therefore directly influence the possibility for social interactions (Fisher, 2009). This can be analysed through an access analysis, which helps determine how connected, or accessible, a building's spaces are to one another and to the entrances. This reveals which spaces are more likely to support social interaction.

In the access analysis, each of the building's spaces, in this case the interior transitional spaces of the KB, is assigned a number (Figure 26). Whenever there is a barrier between spaces, like a door or a staircase, the connected areas are given separate numbers.

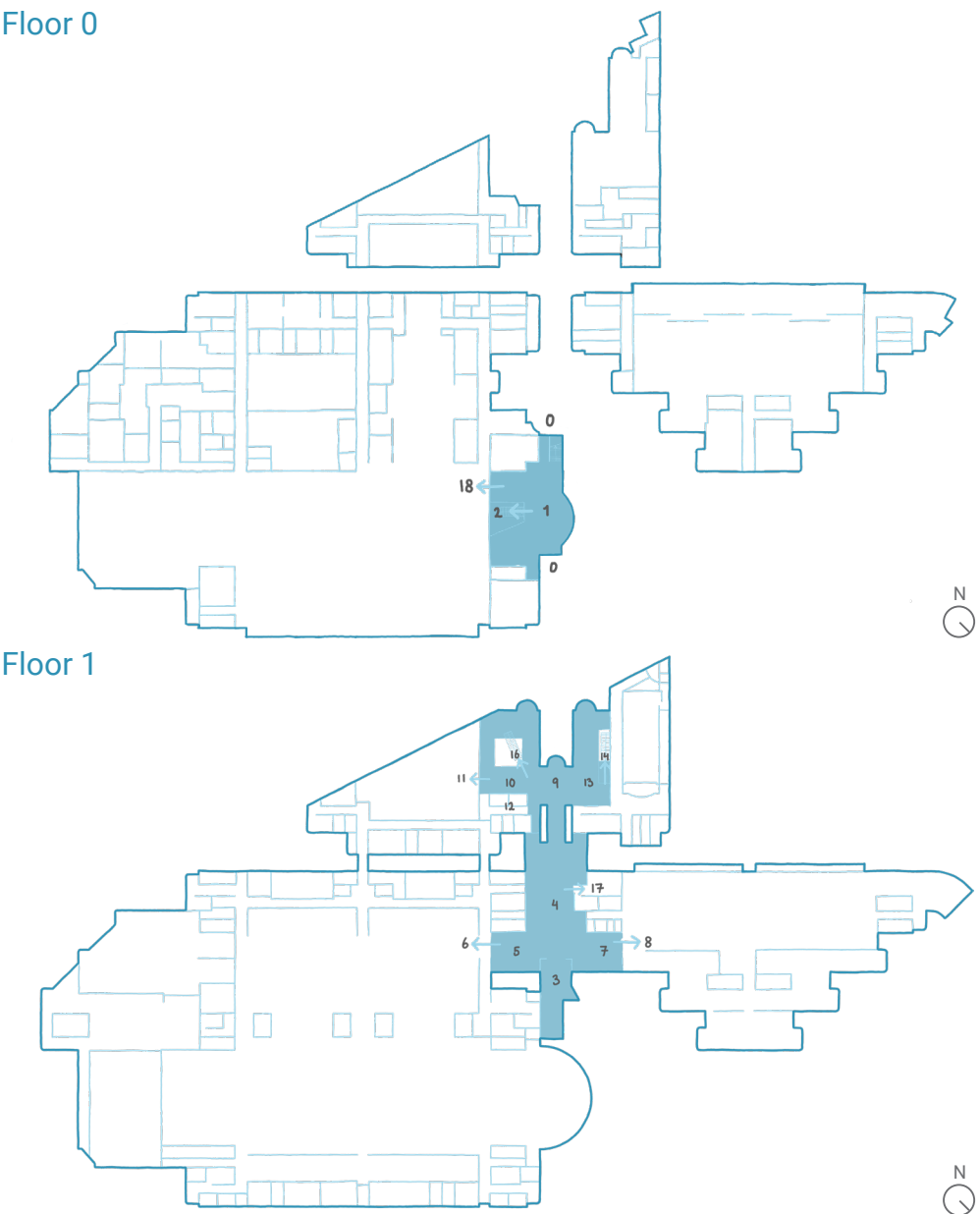


Figure 26: Numbered spaces within the interior transitional spaces of the KB

Next, the spaces are placed in a graph (Figure 27), in which each space is represented by a circle and the connections between them are represented by line segments. The space outside the building, called the carrier, is numbered 0 and is always treated as a single space, no matter how many entrances the building has. In this research, the different building functions are outlined in orange, and the KB is highlighted with an orange fill.

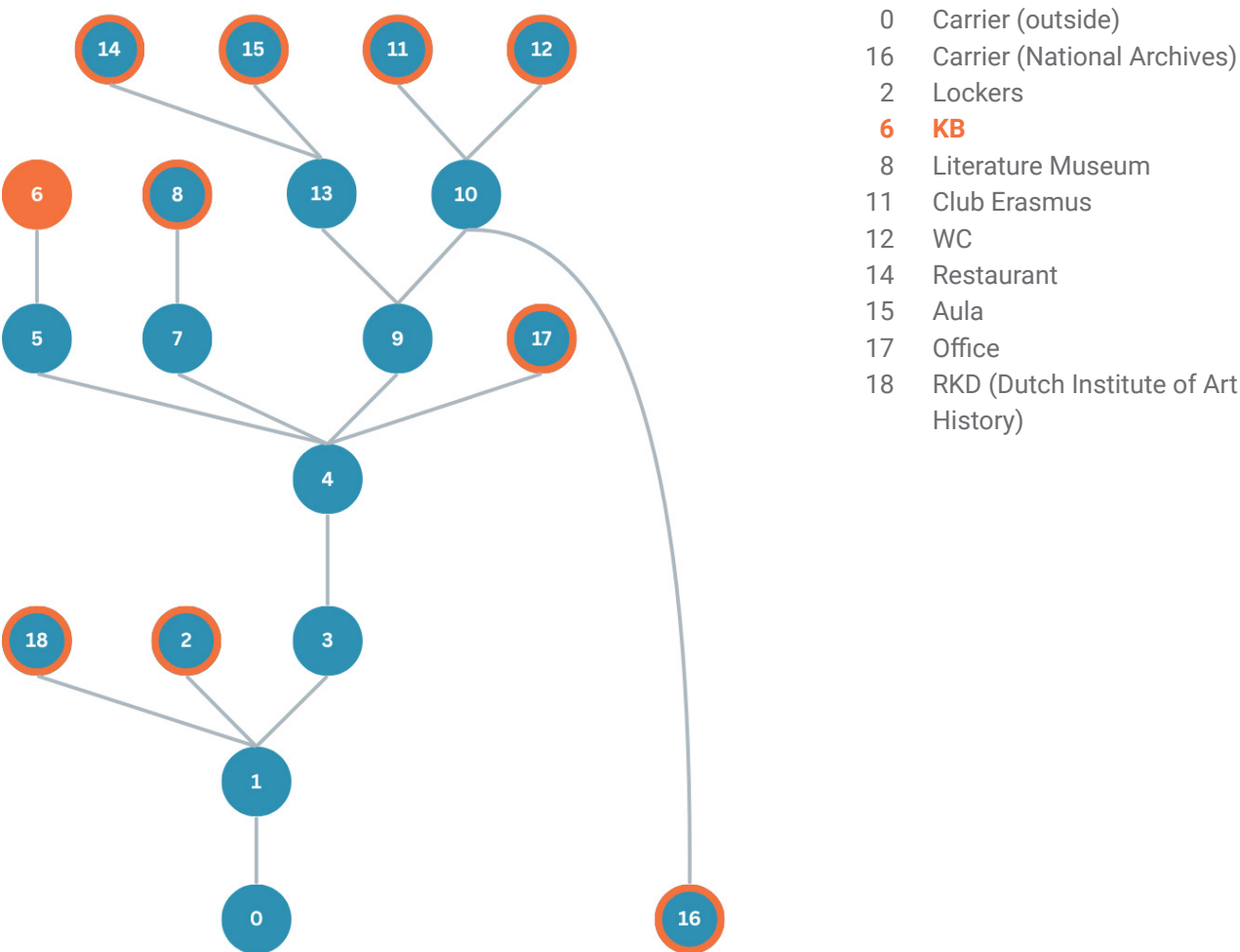


Figure 27: Access graph

From this graph, both the depth from the exterior (carrier, 0) and the distance between functions, especially those that are related, can be examined. It becomes immediately clear that the hierarchy of spaces within the building is high. When looking at just the KB (6), it is five steps removed from the exterior, meaning a visitor has to pass through five barriers to reach it. This is quite a high number, showing that the KB is very separated from the surrounding urban environment.

The graph also shows that some spaces related to the KB are located far away from it. For example, the lockers (2), restaurant (14), Club Erasmus (11), and public restrooms (12) are all five steps away from the KB, highlighting the spatial distance between them.

3.2.2. Vision

As with the analysis of the urban context, examining axial lines within a building can give valuable insight into how people perceive its spatial networks (Karimi, 2012). For this, the programme DepthMap was again used.

First, visual connectivity was analysed by calculating the number of axial lines that connect at each point. DepthMap performs this analysis per square meter, once again making use of a colour scale from red (for high visual connectivity) to dark blue (for low visual connectivity) (Figure 28).

Next, an isovist fieldmap was generated, mapping 180-degree fields of vision from the building's entrances (Figure 29).

From these maps, it becomes clear that the entrance space on the ground floor and the centre of the central hall on the first floor are generally well or highly visible. However, the specific functions that these interior transitional spaces are intended to connect, especially those on the first floor, are not very visible. This is highlighted in the isovist fieldmap, which shows that none of the functions connected to the central hall are directly visible upon entering the hall via the stairs.

Floor 0

Floor 1

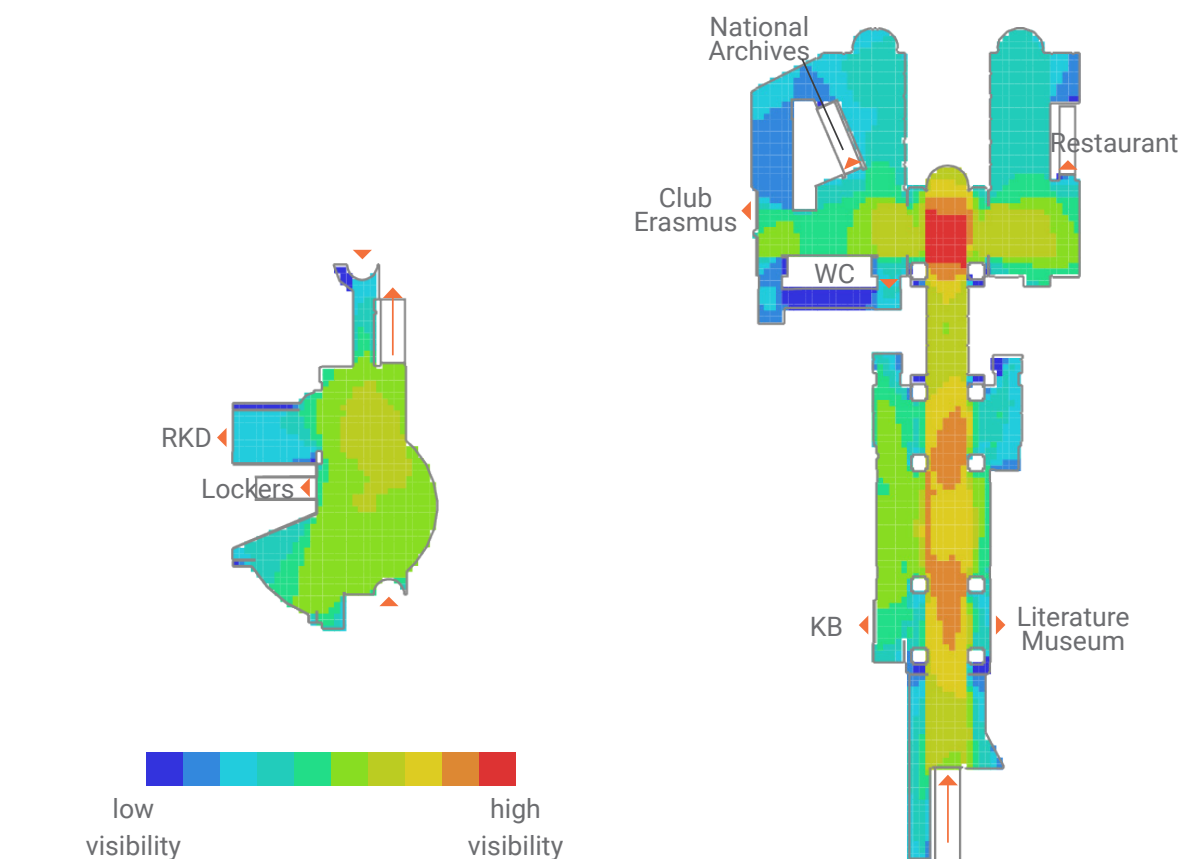


Figure 28: Visual connectivity interior transitional spaces

Floor 0

Floor 1

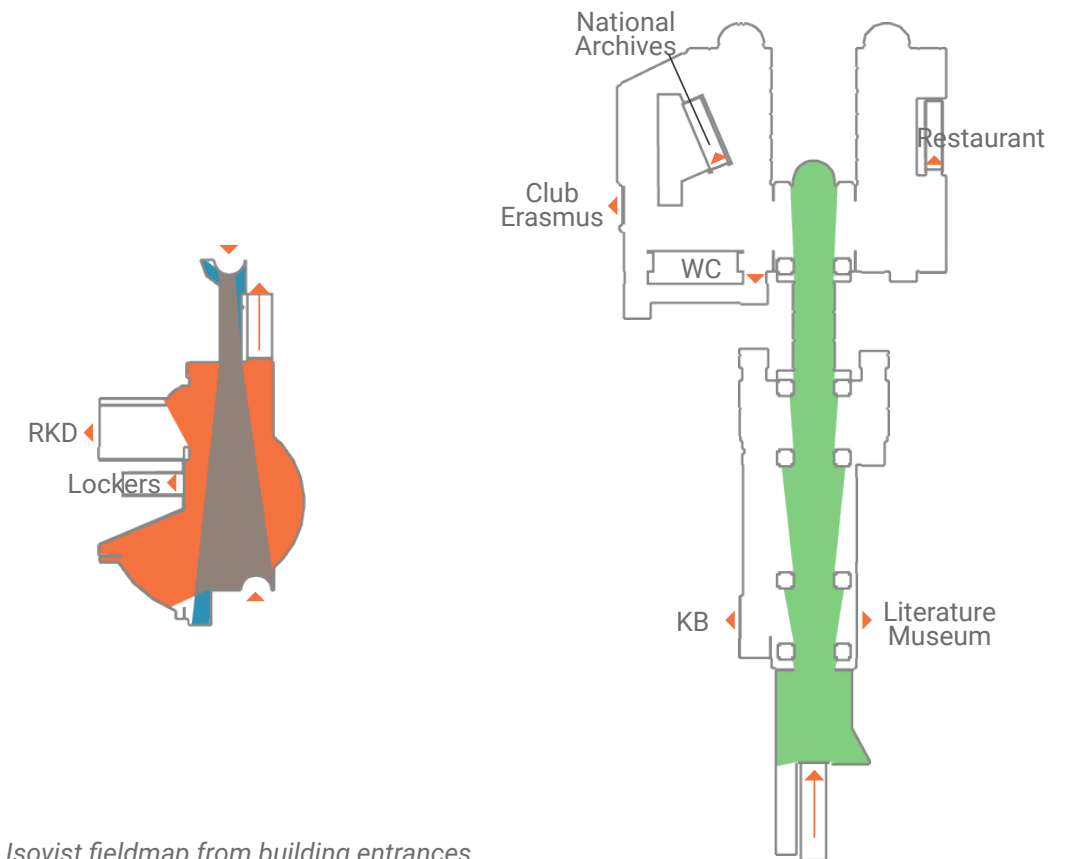


Figure 29: Isovist fieldmap from building entrances

3.2.3. Spatial organisation

To analyse the spatial relationships between the different functions of the KB, the building's floor plans were examined and colour-coded (Figure 30). Given the variety of functions within the building, they were grouped into six colour gradients: blue for KB functions, red for Literature Museum functions, purple for RKD functions, orange for the restaurant, green for private functions, and neutral tones for circulation spaces and restrooms. This highlights both the distance between related functions and the barriers between public and private areas.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. Some KB-related functions, such as the locker room and Club Erasmus, are distant from the KB's core, reducing accessibility and ease of movement. Additionally, in some areas, office spaces are spread out and divided by public zones, making it more difficult to reach co-workers. The restaurant is also completely separated from the rest of the building's functions, which makes it feel disconnected.

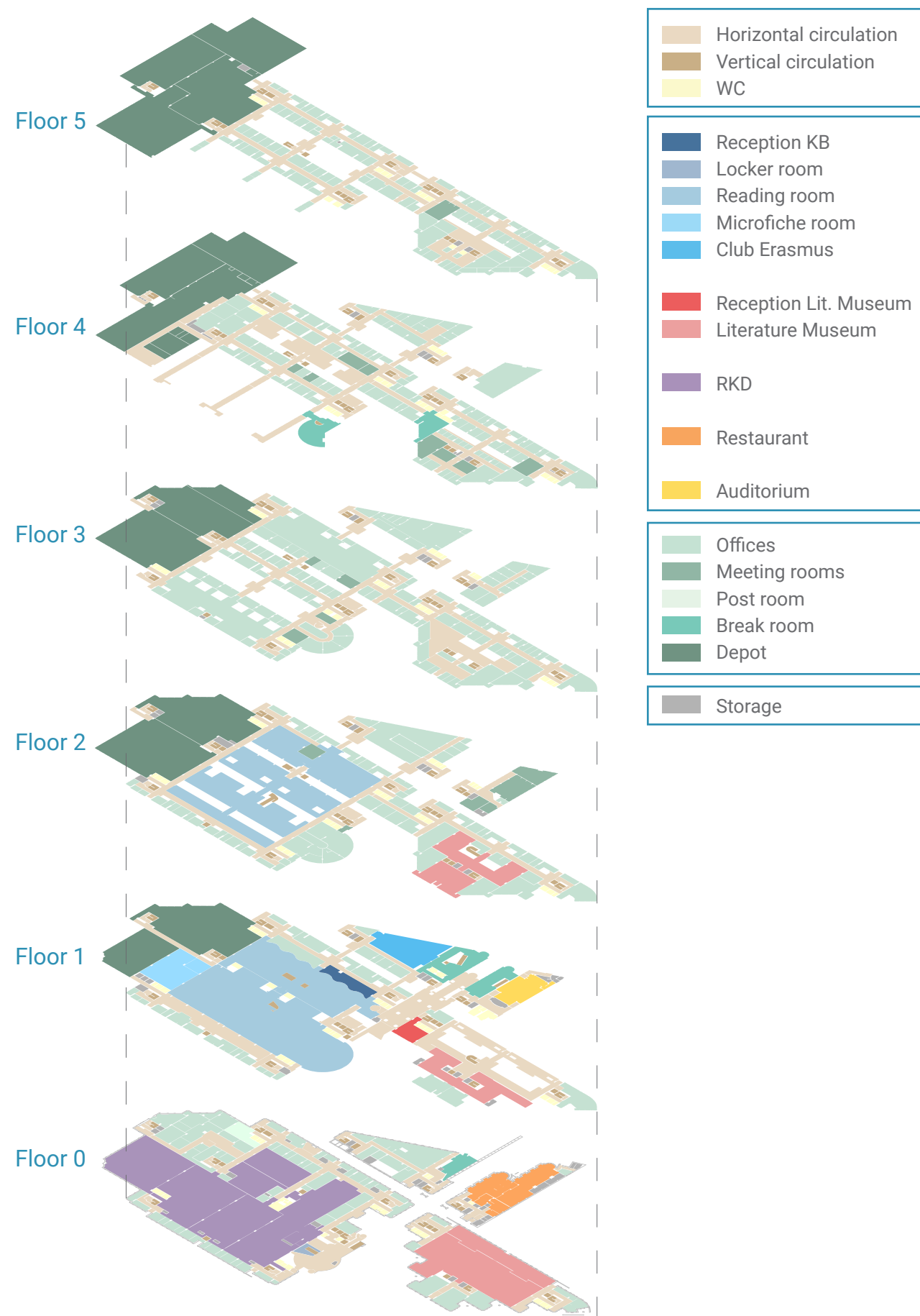


Figure 30: Function clustering in the KB

3.2.4. Daylight

Since daylight is important for comfort and wellbeing, and thus the liveliness of public spaces, it is important to assess it in the interior of the KB. Thus, areas where daylight enters the transitional spaces have been highlighted on the floor plans in orange (Figure 31).

Based on these maps, combined with on-site observations, several conclusions can be made. The entrance space on the ground floor and the staircase leading up to the central hall on the first floor receive a good amount of daylight without too much direct sunlight, making the space feel pleasant and comfortable. However, the central hall itself feels quite dark. Although there are light shafts present, they provide only limited daylight, even on very sunny days.

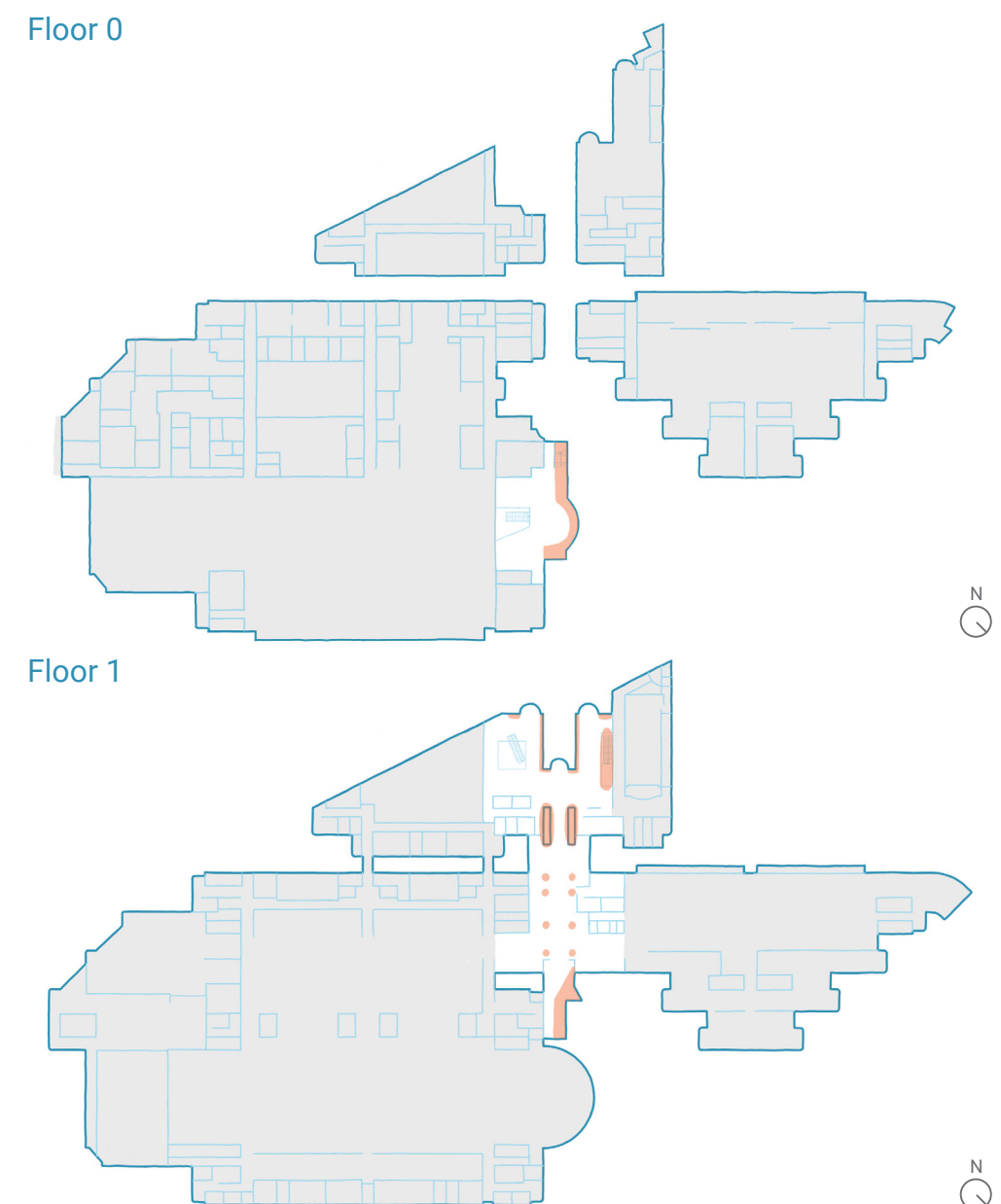


Figure 31: Daylight interior transitional spaces

3.2.5. Furniture & green

As the presence of different types of furniture and greenery is an important factor when trying to encourage visitors to stay longer, these elements have been mapped for the interior transitional spaces of the KB (Figure 32). Furniture is marked in orange, while greenery is shown in green. Observations from multiple site visits, combined with insights from a user behaviour study (Chapter 3.2.6), allow for conclusions of this map.

The main entrance space on the ground floor has a café and a large amount of seating. The window seats are well-used, while the seating near the café, which is more tucked away, is used less frequently. The café itself also sees relatively little use, possibly because it is located far from the office areas.

On the first floor, the few available couches are rarely used. This may be due to a combination of factors, such as limited daylight and noise from several TVs. The children's corner is also not well-used, perhaps because it is not located along the route between the entrance and the Children's Book/Literature Museum, making it less visible to visitors.

At the connection with the Archive on the first floor, there is a large amount of seating and tables. While it is never crowded, this area is regularly used by people for working or studying.

Overall, the transitional spaces in the KB lack greenery, which could contribute to a less inviting atmosphere.

3.2.6. Use

A user behaviour study offers valuable insights into the success and quality of public spaces (Gehl, 2013). To better understand life within the KB's interior transitional spaces, such a study was conducted, in the same manner as for the urban context. The study focuses on three key elements, as suggested by Gehl (2013): counting people, tracking movement, and mapping the locations of different activities, which have previously been explained in Chapter 3.1.6..

For this research, the building was visited, mapped, and counted at three different times of day: in the morning at 09:00, early afternoon at 13:00, and late afternoon at 17:00. (Figure 33). The study reveals that the seating in the entrance space on the ground floor is generally well-used, especially at lunchtime. However, both the ground floor space and the central hall on the first floor are primarily used for movement, rather than a space where people stay. The first floor seating is rarely used, and the hall is mainly used as a circulation space

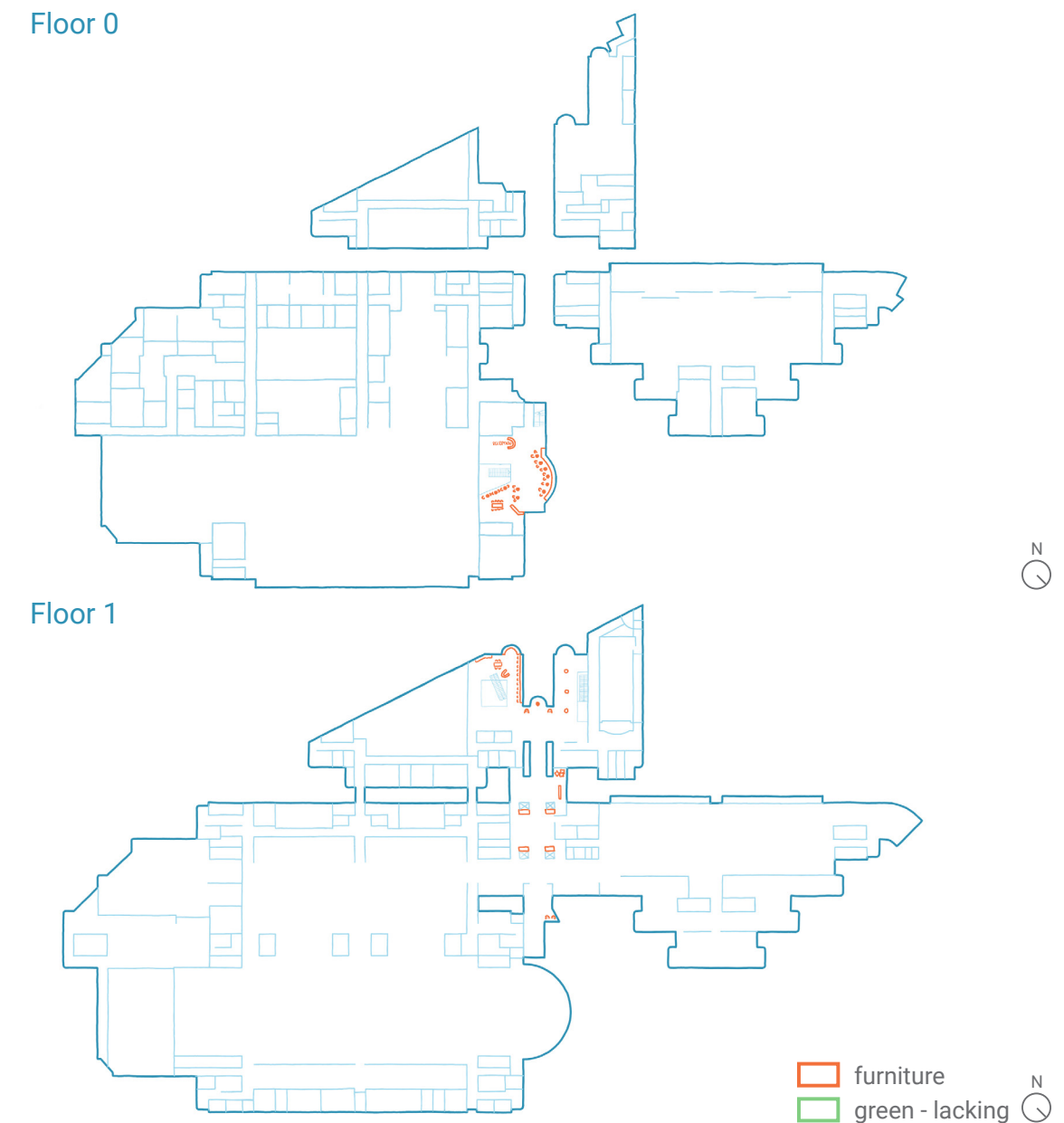


Figure 32: Location furniture and green

in between the entrance and the building's separate functions.

Due to time constraints, observations were limited to three moments on a single summer day. For more reliable conclusions, a broader study should include varying weather conditions and seasons.

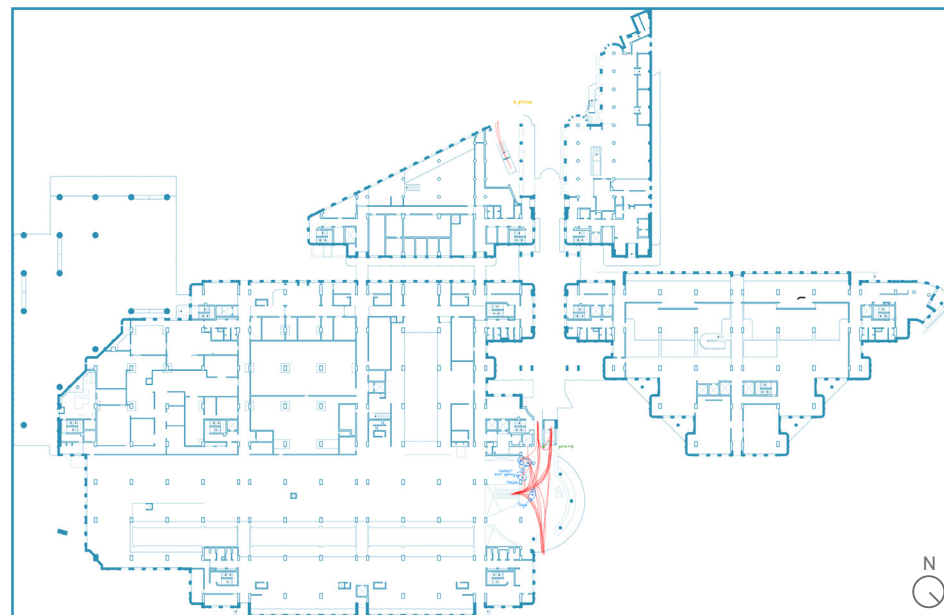
Morning



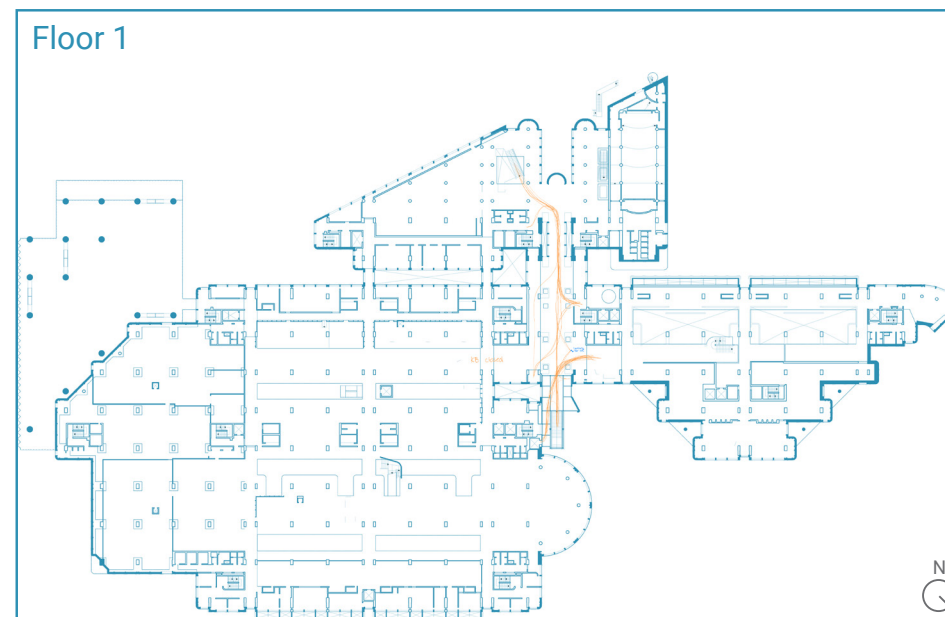
Early afternoon



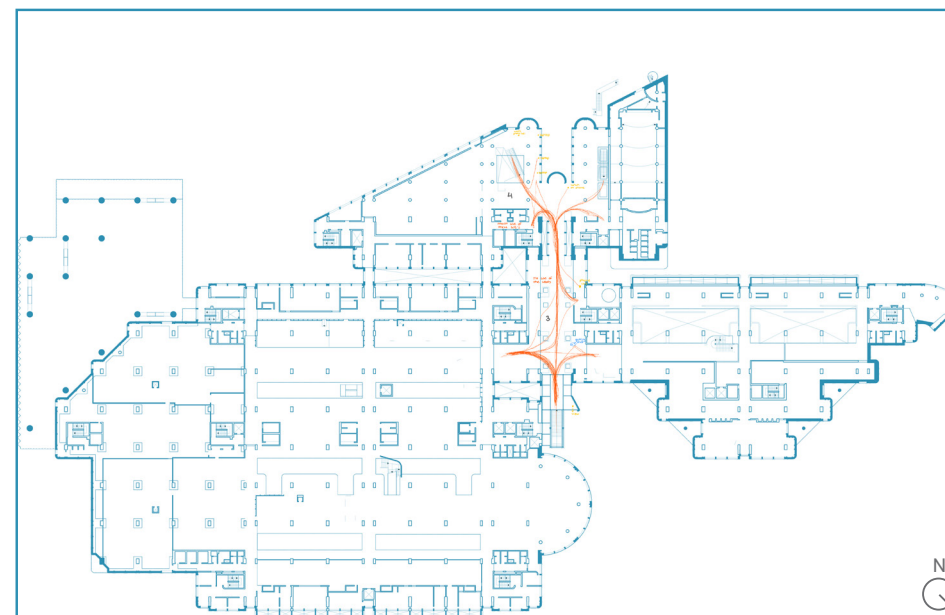
Late afternoon



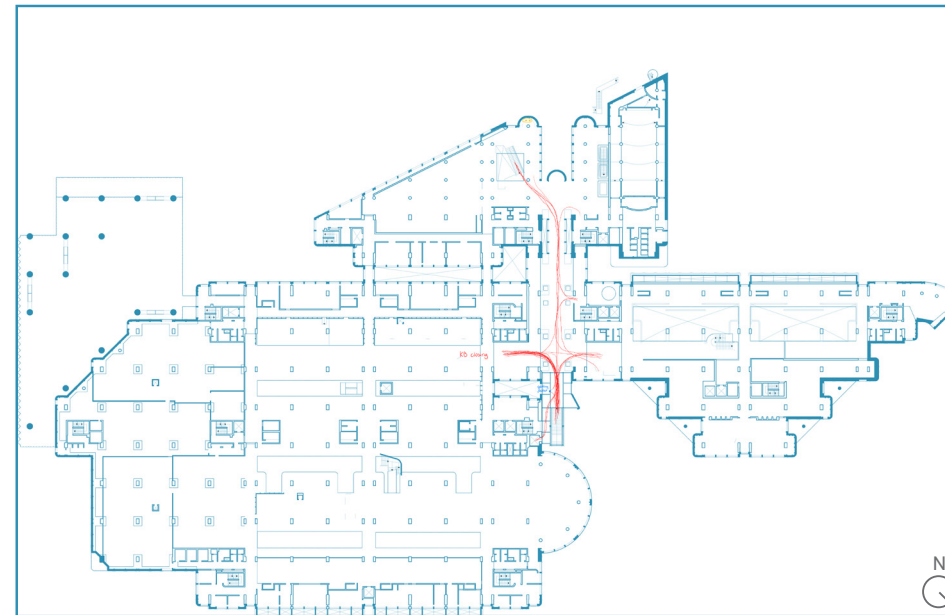
Floor 1



of people:
floor 0: 20
floor 1: 34



of people:
floor 0: 67
floor 1: 54



of people:
floor 0: 23
floor 1: 27

Figure 33: User behaviour study of the KB's interior transitional spaces

3.3. Design criteria

3.3.1. Literature review

The positive and negative aspects of the current KB form a basis for its redesign, as we now understand which physical aspects of its urban context and interior transitional spaces are valuable and which are invaluable. To understand what design aspects enhance accessibility and social interactions, and thus, increase the quality of a third place, a literature review has been executed.

The criteria found in the literature have been categorized into the six topics of design used throughout the research, resulting in the following table (Figure 34):

	LITERATURE	DESIGN CRITERIA
ROUTE/ CIRCULATION	• Brechtel & Churchman, 2002 • Holland et al., 2007 • Fisher, 2009 • Hillier & Hanson, 1984 • Kaarwan, n.d.	• Relationship between entrance site and entrance building. • Entrances should be clearly identified. • Relationship between common destinations (functions). • Clear location of elevators and stairways. • Views to the outside. • Spaces meant for informal gatherings need to be easily accessible. • Reduce unnecessary movement.
FAÇADE	• Gehl, 2013 • Gehl et al., 2006 • Mehta, 2009 • Joyce, 2014	• Engaging ground floor façade. • Opportunities for activity along façade. • No dead spaces, or large blank surfaces at street level. This discourages lingering. • Options for shelter.
VISION	• Fisher, 2009 • Hanson, 1998 • Bechtel & Churchman, 2002	• Fields of vision highlighting significant locations, where people might/should gather. • Views leading visitors in the right direction. • Views to the outside.
SPATIAL ORGANISATION	• Joyce, 2014 • Holland et al., 2007 • Kaarwan, n.d.	• Enclosure of buildings around a public space, gives a sense of importance. • No wide open spaces, people tend to skirt the edges. • Logical, functional relationships, clustering.
FURNITURE /GREEN	• Gehl, 2013 • Whyte, 1980 • Mehta, 2009 • Holland et al., 2007 • Aram et al., 2019 • Jakovlevas-Mateckis et al., 2017	• Seating: more seating means more people sitting. • Provide shade (trees, canopies, overhangs, etc.) • Furniture designed to encourage multiple activities. • Benches positioned in the right spot – visually, environmentally, also based on current user behaviour) • Design for longer stays - comfort: soft furnishing, plants, large windows, balconies, etc. • Provide green space, as this is where people gather.
LIGHT	• Jacobs, 1961 • Joyce, 2014 • Holland et al., 2007	• Provide a variety of levels of direct and filtered sunlight. • Avoid dark spaces. • Integrated lighting design urban setting, as people are drawn to lights in the dark.

Figure 34: Design criteria based on the literature review

3.3.2. Case studies

To further understand how design can help enhance the quality of a third place, two case studies have been analysed: the Nieuwe Bibliotheek in Almere and the LocHal in Tilburg. The case study on the previously mentioned Gabriel García Márquez Library in Barcelona is yet to be executed. To be able to easily connect the case studies back to the KB, the design approaches of each library are divided into the six topics of design used throughout the research.

NIEUWE BIBLIOTHEEK ALMERE

The Nieuwe Bibliotheek (New Library) designed by Meyer en Van Schooten Architects is a multifunctional building in the centre of Almere, housing a public library, apartments and a shopping area (MVSA architects, n.d.). The building is located on the Stadhuisplein, a very central location in the city. The library itself is located on the first to fifth floor of the building, an escalator at the building entrance leading up to the welcome hall of the library. The New Library's main goal is to evolve from a book-borrowing facility into a living room of the city – to become a place for interaction, learning, and development (Uyterlinde et al., 2023). Thus, it strives to be a third place in the city of Almere.

To maintain this goal, both the design and activities of the building have been developed accordingly. Visitors looking for social contact and connection can find this by taking part in the range of activities that take place at the New Library, such as workshops and lectures (Uyterlinde et al., 2023).

Meyer en Van Schooten Architects have developed their design around this concept of the third place. They have used different approaches to enhance social interaction and create a sense of connection.

Route/circulation:

The building's entrance is placed in the middle of the Stadhuisplein, making for a prominent and clear entrance point. To add to this, the entrance façade is made of large glass panels, acting as a placemaker.

The entrance to the library itself is situated on

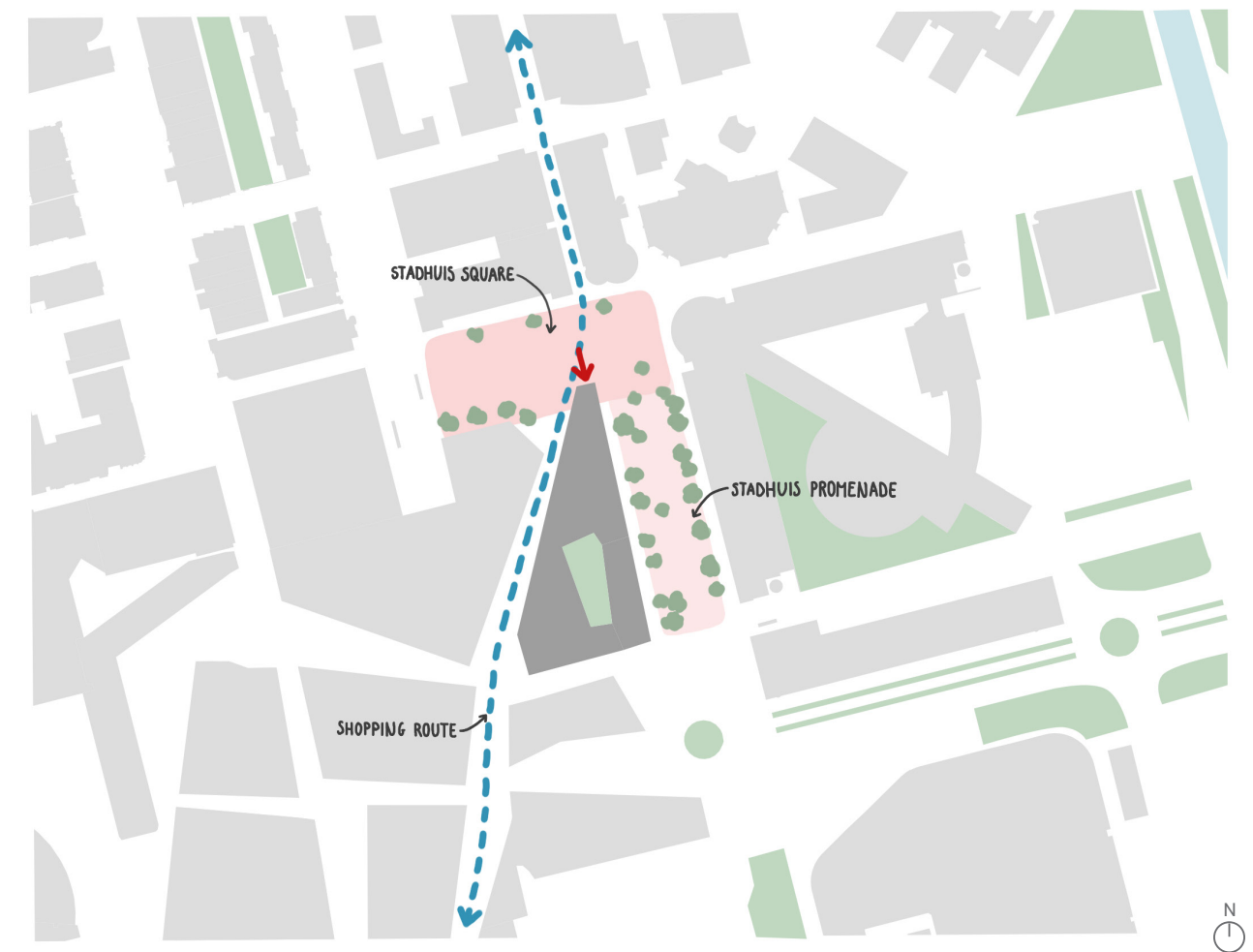


Figure 35: Urban context Nieuwe Bibliotheek

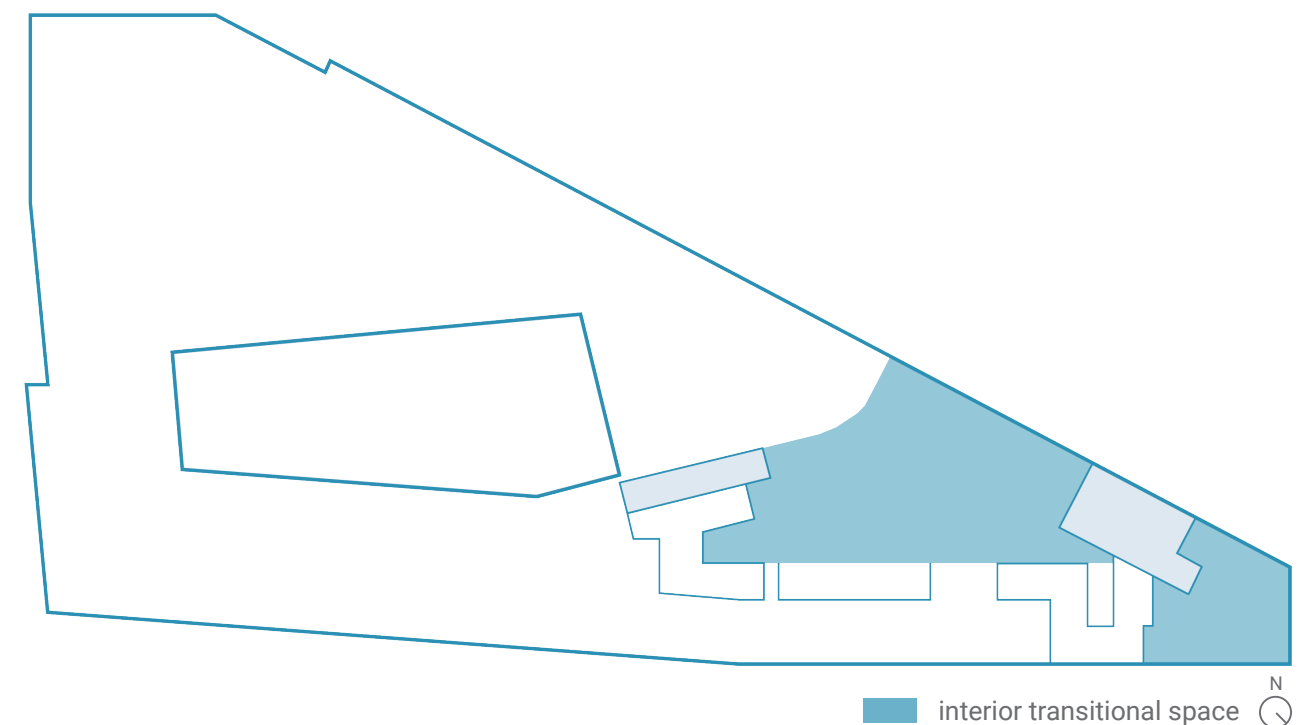


Figure 36: Interior transitional space Nieuwe Bibliotheek

the first floor. The stairs/escalators leading up are placed prominently. However, this does cause more of a disconnection between the library and the exterior urban space.

The routing throughout the library is circular (Figure 37), making circulation and usage clear and flexible. This form of circulation makes the possibility for social interactions greater. In addition to this, the rooms that aren't part of the open space are interconnected to one another, adding to the flexibility of the building.

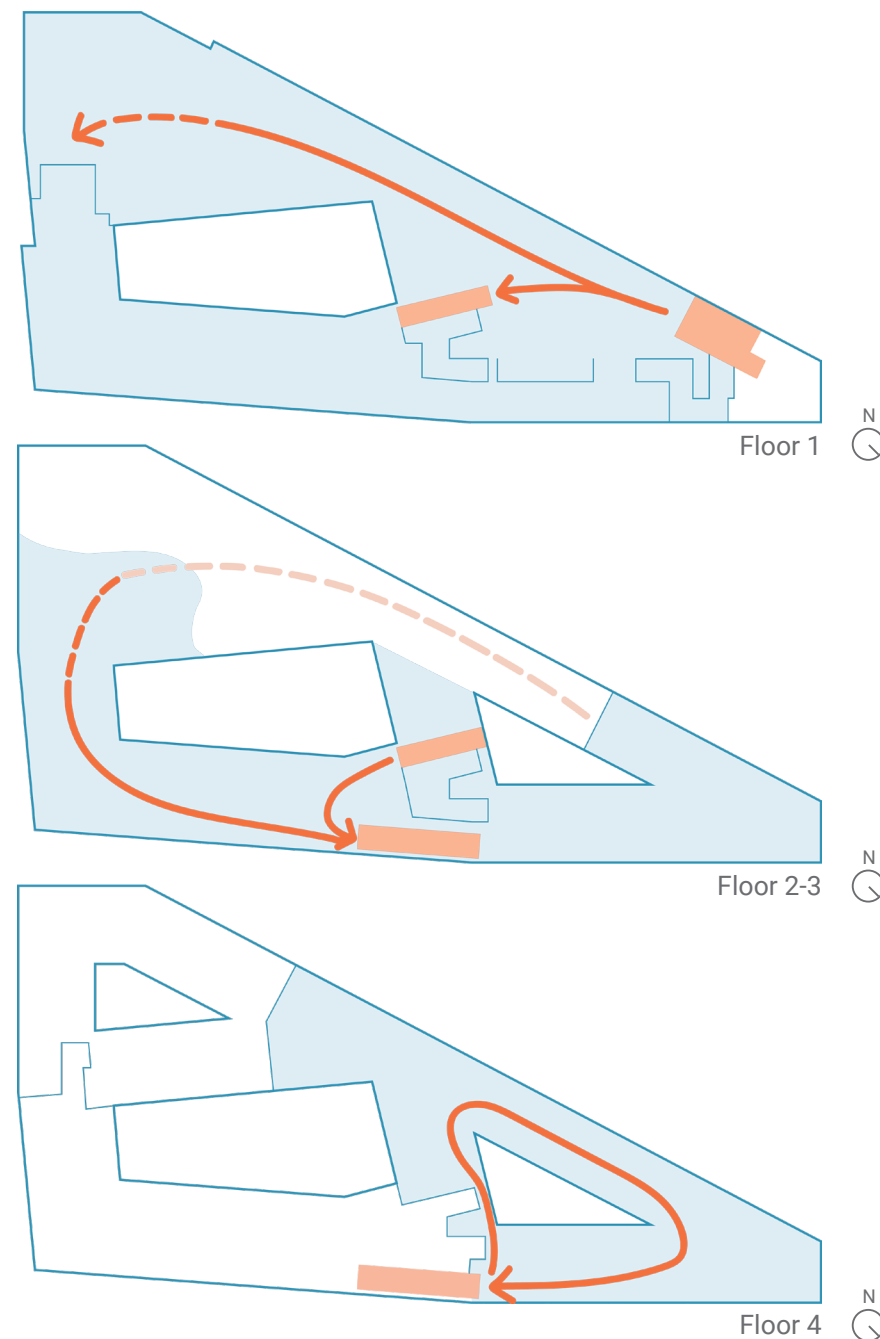


Figure 37: Route/circulation inside the Nieuwe Bibliotheek

Façade and furniture/green:

As previously mentioned, the entrance façade is made of glass, making the building feel open and accessible.

A large section of the ground floor's western façade is dedicated to shops, making for an interactive façade with much possibility for edge activity during the day. However, at night, when these shops are closed, this side of the building has no interaction with its surroundings. Especially in combination with the lack of furniture or green on this side, the possibility for activity and interaction at night is low here.

The ground floor façade on the east side of the building, where the apartment entrance is located, is closed off and blank, making for a low possibility for edge activity here. However, this façade does have an overhang which can be used for shelter. There is also a promenade on this side, which has green spaces and sometimes holds activities like markets. This makes up for the lack of interaction from the façade.



Figure 38: Façades Nieuwe Bibliotheek

Vision and spatial organisation:

Since a large part of the ground floor façade is made of glass, there is a strong visual connection between the interior and exterior. Within the building, the spatial organisation includes terraced floors, atriums and high ceilings, all contributing to a high amount of visual connections, making for a larger possibility for social interaction.

As for function clustering, there is a segregation between public and private, with the entrance to the apartments on a different side of the building than the library entrance and shops.

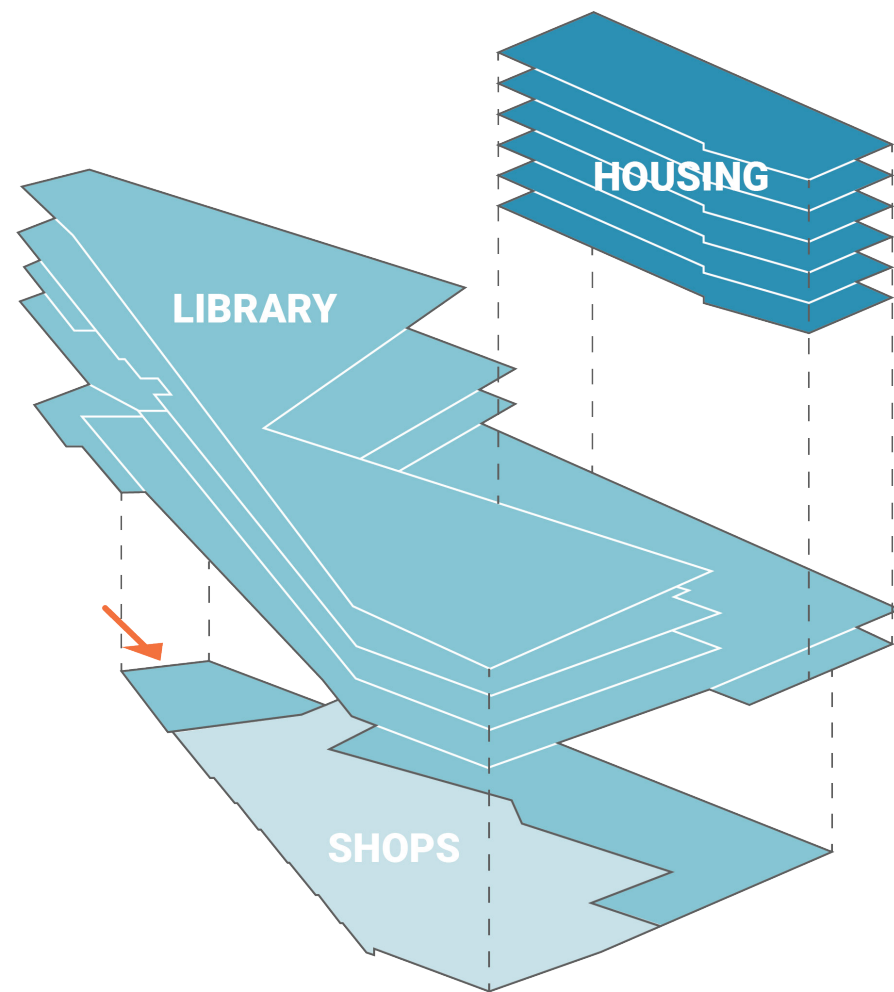


Figure 39: Spatial organisation Nieuwe Bibliotheek

Interior furniture:

The books in the library are divided into different lifestyle-oriented sections and presented frontally to accommodate a modern retail concept, rather than a traditional library structure (Concrete, n.d.). The bookcases are multifunctional, incorporating functions such as seating, workplaces and lighting and they have organic shapes, meandering through the library. The merging of functions and unexpected routing adds to the possibility for chance encounters.

Light:

Individual components of the building are connected through skylights and roof gardens, adding to the visual connection and clarity of routing throughout the building.

LOCHAL TILBURG

The LocHal, designed by Braaksma & Roos, Civic, Inside Outside and Mecanoo, is a transformation of an old locomotive workplace dating from 1932 into a public city hall (Braaksma & Roos Architectenbureau, 2023). Its location in the railway zone aims to connect the area with the rest of the city. To do so, the building houses different public functions, including a library, arts organisations and co-working facilities. There is also space made available for lectures and public events, and smaller spaces for workshops (Civic Public Architecture, n.d.). The different functions are not separated from one another by hard boundaries but make use of the same large open space.

The LocHal strives to be the new living room in the city, and thus a third place for the railway zone of Tilburg (Braaksma & Roos Architectenbureau, 2023). It is a place for connection and interaction, where visitors can come with or without a specific need.

To accommodate this goal of becoming a third place, different design approaches have been made to enhance social interaction and create a sense of connection.

Route/circulation:

The building's main entrance is placed facing the railway, and thus, also facing the city centre. This façade is made of glass, acting as a 'display case', making it a clear placemaker.

Upon entering, visitors arrive in a corner of the large hall, demarcated by a large textile curtain. Passing this point, the hall



Figure 40: Urban context LocHal

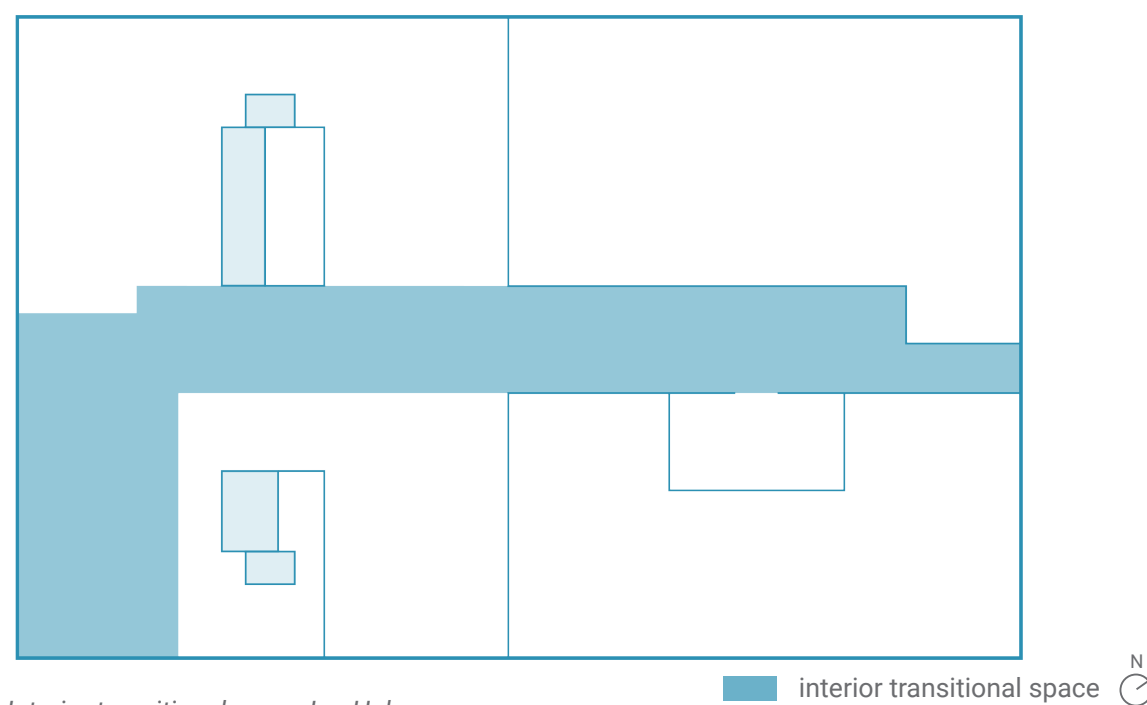


Figure 41: Interior transitional space LocHal

functionally takes on the form of a covered city square with large reading tables, an exhibition area and a coffee kiosk. There is a landscape of stairs that are not dedicated to one specific function, making for more possibilities for interaction between the functions (and thus between people making use of these) on, at and under the stairs. On the ground floor, an internal street crosses through the building, connecting the public with the more private functions.

The combination of the open space and the many stairs in the building make that there is not just one route that visitors can take, but they can choose their own path. This makes the possibility for chance interactions larger.

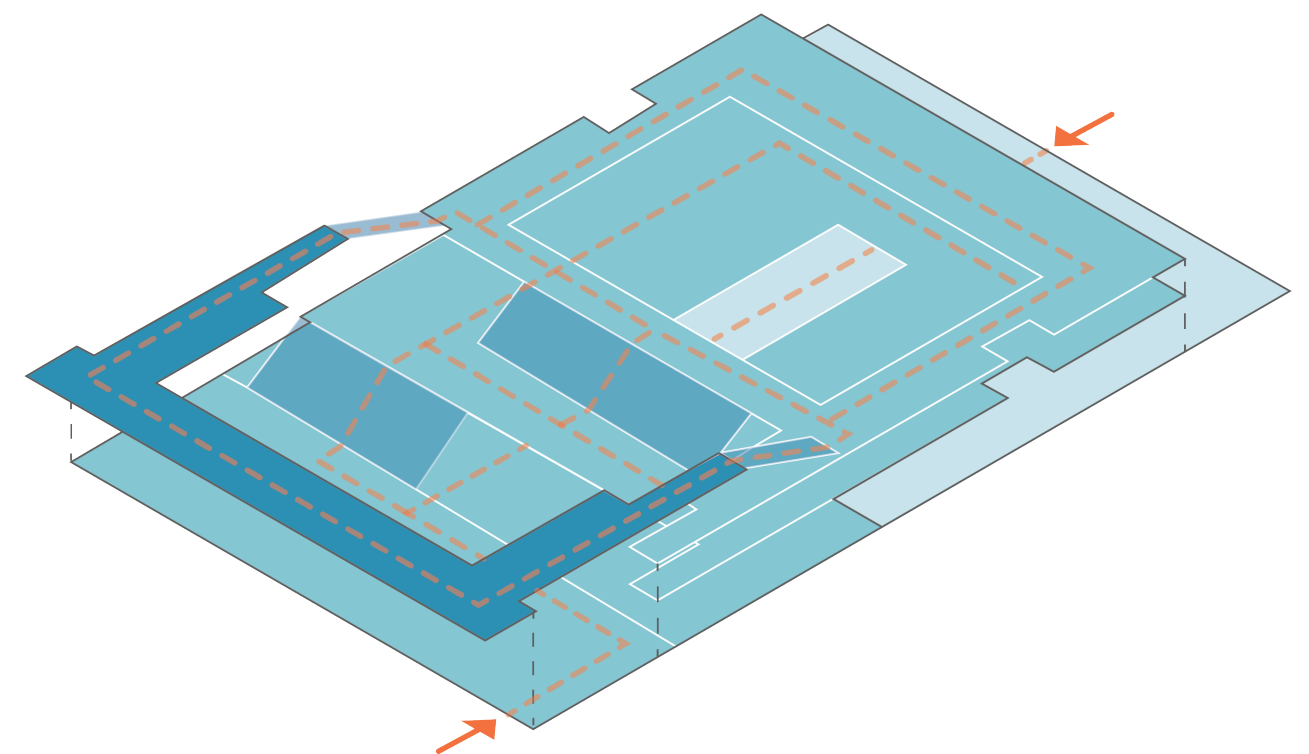


Figure 42: Route/circulation LocHal

Façade:

As mentioned above, the main entrance façade, or the railway side façade is made of glass, and therefore has a very open and inviting appearance. After dark, the combination of the glass façades and interior lights make the building stand out.

The north façade of the building has a heavier material and less windows, making it less transparent and inviting, although there are still views to the inside of the building, creating some connection. The entrance on this side is not highlighted except for a relatively small logo and it appears dark. It becomes clear that this is the back of the building.

While the façades interact through visual connections between the interior and exterior,

there is little other direct interaction with the surroundings. The façades are quite 'flat'.



1 Main entrance - South façade

2 North façade

Figure 43: Façades LocHal

Vision:

The landscape of stairs and terraced floors within the large space make for diagonal sightlines throughout the building, increasing visual connections. While there is a physical boundary at some of the more private spaces, these walls are often made of glass, so the visual connections stay intact.

Spatial organisation:

A large part of the building has remained as one large space. However, the addition of moveable textile curtains/walls divide the space in a flexible way. In addition, different terraced floor levels divide the space into very public and lively areas on the lower levels and more intimate spaces with quite reading areas at the upper levels. This way, the space is flexible for different types of users, while avoiding hard boundaries between them.

Furniture/green:

Near the entrance of the building, an eye-catching café, with coloured tiles and a large neon Lochal sign, is centrally placed. This location and appearance are positive aspects, as the café is an important function for enhancing social interactions.

The stairs in the building have moveable seating elements, making them flexible for different uses and users. Thus, the stairs can be used by individuals, but they can also be adapted for event seating (Mecanoo, n.d.).

The colour palette used for the building's furniture is made up of warm tones, like reds and oranges, making for an inviting atmosphere in which people want to stay.

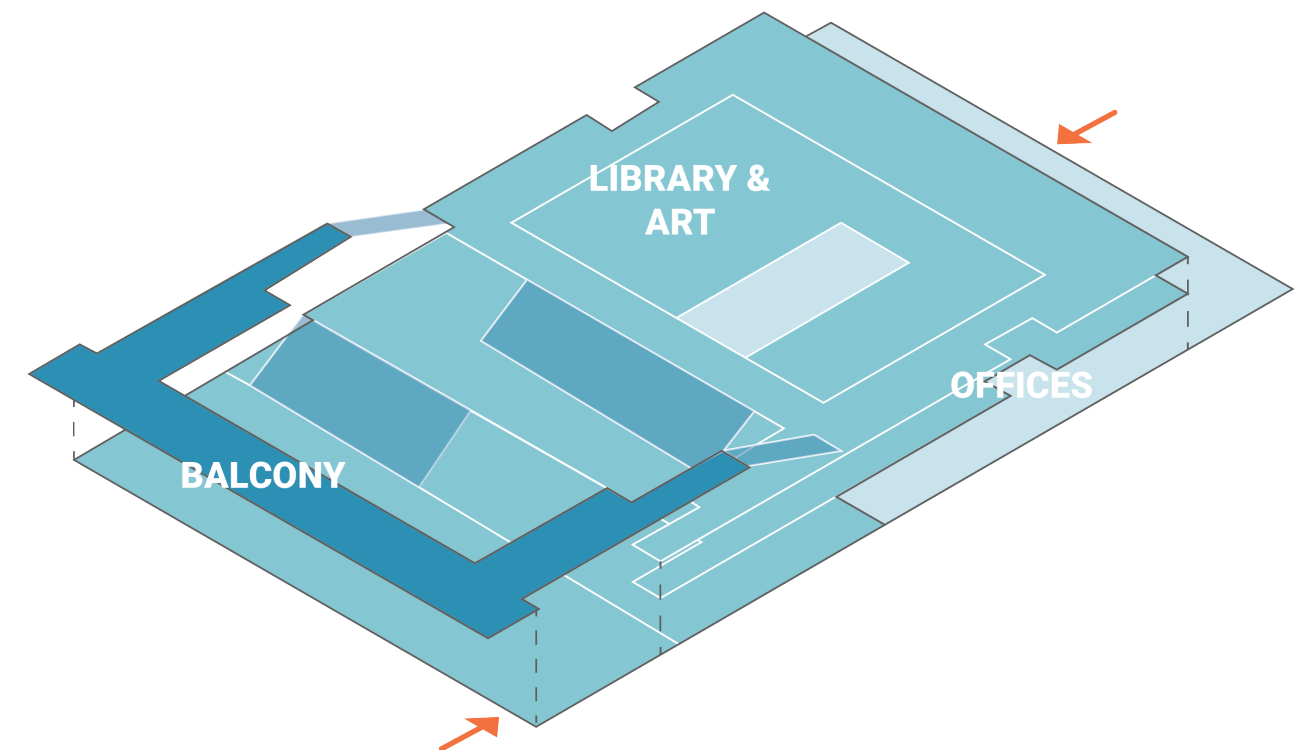


Figure 44: Spatial organisation LocHal

Light:

Most of the windows of the original building are placed at the top of the façade. While in the past, one had to look up to look at these, the newly added floors bring the users closer, even to the same height as the daylight.

While a large amount of direct sunlight can come into the hall, the textile curtains/walls filter this, adding to the comfort of the space.

3.3.3. Conclusions

The design choices made in the case studies are similar to the criteria as mentioned in the literature, but the analysis gives a clear insight into possible ways these can be executed in a design. Location, context, and existing building structures, to name a few, can all influence the design in a positive way, while still strongly taking into account the concept of the third place, with accessibility and social interactions in mind. The case studies show that, even when taking into account many of the design criteria, there is no one way to design a third place. This means that the design process still has a lot of freedom.

CHAPTER 4. DESIGN CHALLENGE

4. DESIGN CHALLENGE

Following the research, a personal design challenge can be set up. However, from the perspectives of both the KB and the Municipality of The Hague, there are also broader design challenges that must be taken into account.

The analysis of the KB and the study on designing for a third place have helped shape a personal design challenge for the building's redesign (Figure 45). This includes improving wayfinding to the entrance, reducing dark and uninviting areas, improving the way functions are clustered, enhancing visual connecting to important parts of the building, shortening the access hierarchy, adding more greenery and flexible furniture, and creating more interactive façades. The goal is to improve accessibility and encourage social interactions, ultimately making the KB a more effective third place.

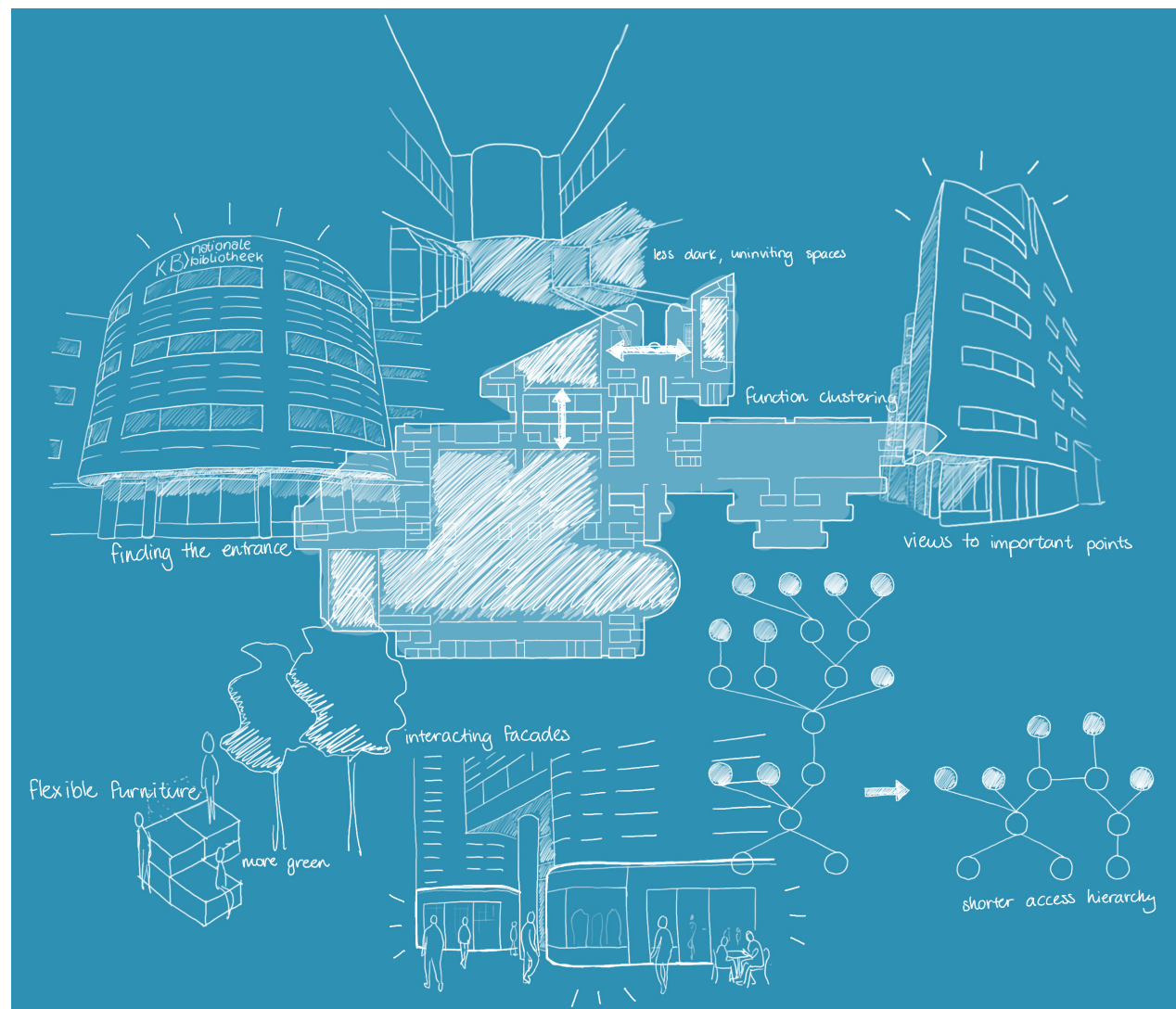


Figure 45: Personal design challenge

A major challenge for the KB is that many of its current functions are leaving (Figure 46). The depot, which takes up 27.000 m², along with the Literature Museum and the RKD, will no longer be housed in the building. In addition, internal studies at the KB conclude that both its public and private spaces require less floor space. As a result, only about 34,500 m² of the current 78,000 m² will be needed. The KB's response to this is to demolish the excess space and keep only the structural core of the building (Figure 47). However, taking into account heritage and sustainability, there is potential to use the excess space more effectively. Thus, the design challenge here is to reclaim as much of the original floor space as possible while still improving the building's overall design.

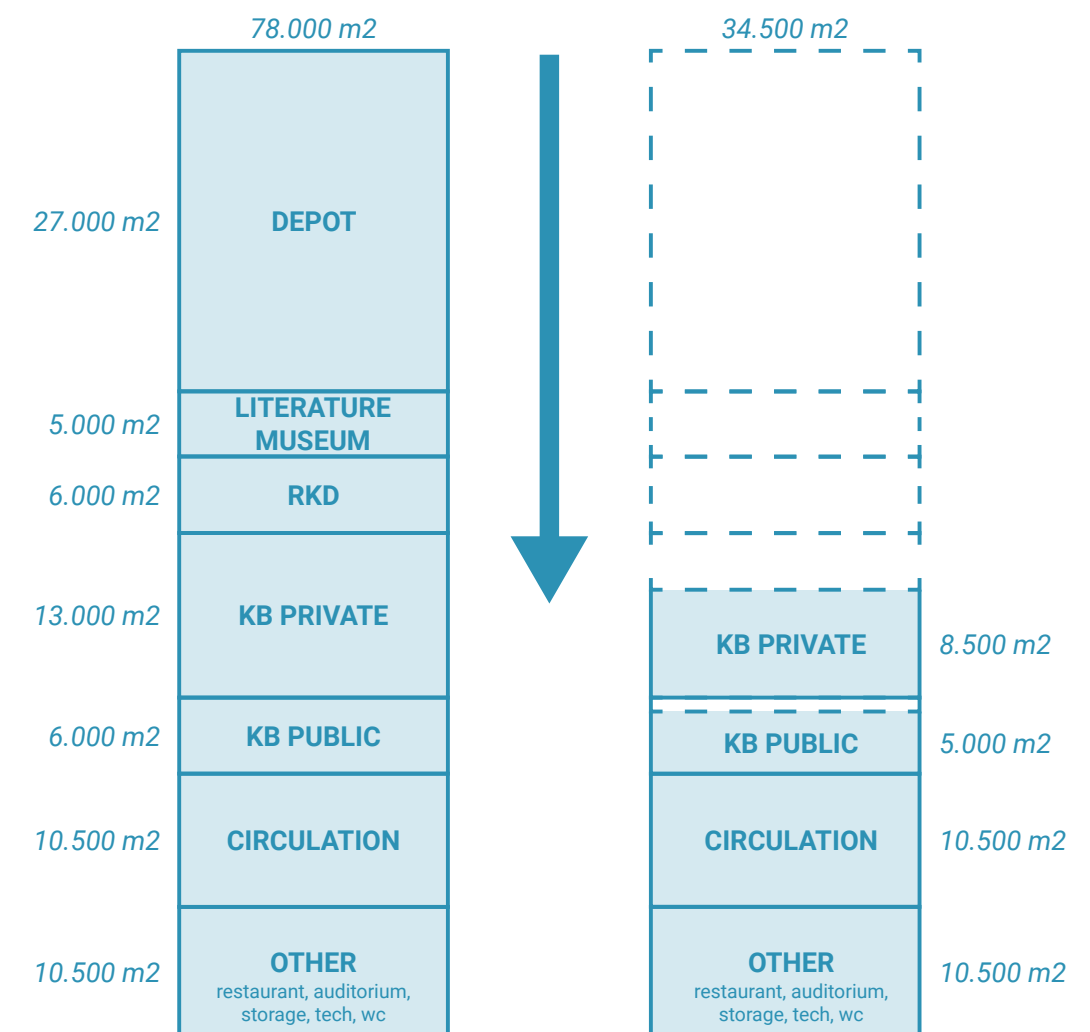


Figure 46: Floor space leaving the KB

Lastly, the Municipality of The Hague already has plans for the site and its surroundings (Het college Den Haag, 2024) (Figure 48). One of their goals is to strengthen the site's connection with the city. To do so, they propose a 'Haagse loper', a pedestrian route connecting the Central Station with the Theresiastraat, with shops and activity along the way. Their other goal is to add more greenery in and around the site. This includes covering the Utrechtsebaan with a park, replacing the Central Station bus platform with a park, and adding patches of green throughout the area. The design challenge here is to incorporate

the municipality's ideas into the urban design of the KB, thus creating making an active and green environment.

Together, the personal design challenge derived from research, and the design challenges posed by the KB and the municipality, provide clear starting points for the design process.

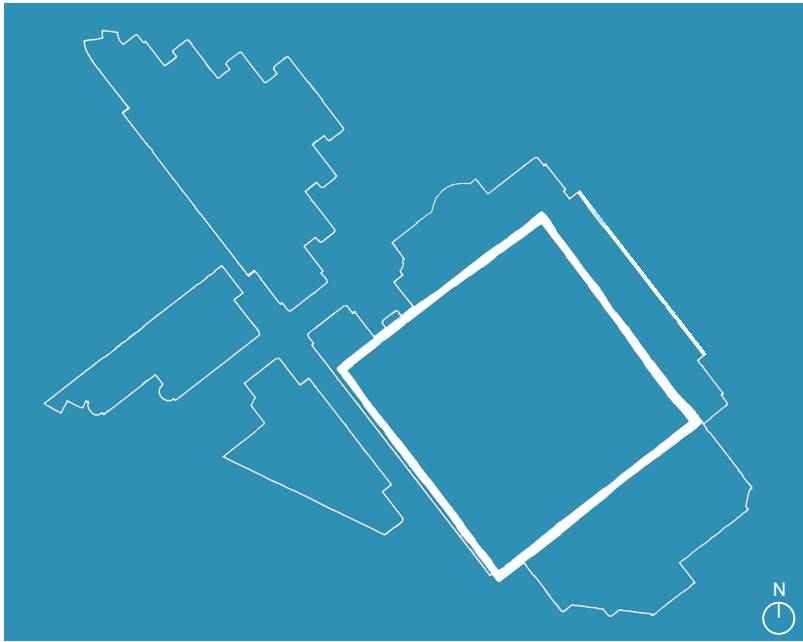


Figure 47: The KB's vision

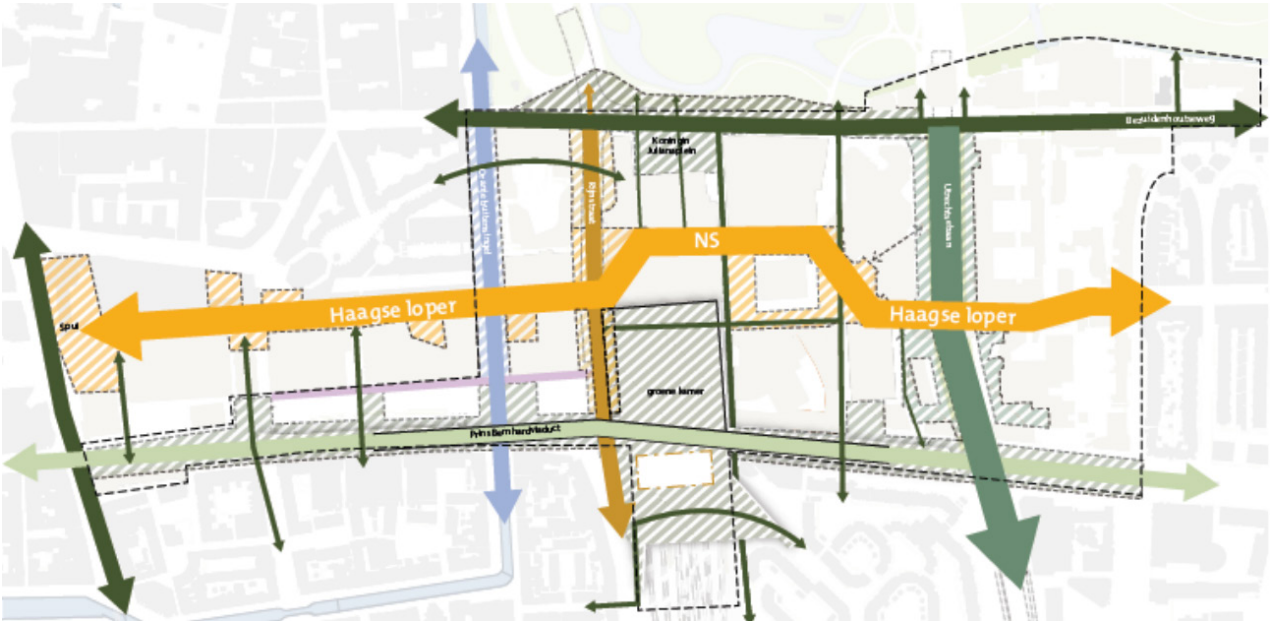


Figure 48: Vision of the municipality of The Hague for the Central Station area. (2024). Den Haag Raadsinformatie.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Social scientific impact

This research highlights how form, access, and spatial connections can influence how people move and connect. The aim is not to *control* how people interact, but to create the conditions in which social interactions become more likely. In doing so, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how architecture can enhance community, belonging, and the social function of public space.

5.2. Research limitations

While spaces may be designed with a specific intention in mind, such as stimulating interaction, the reality is often more complex. People do not always use spaces as intended. For example, a space designed to encourage conversation may instead be occupied by individuals scrolling on their phones or reading, not engaging in interaction at all.

According to Holland et al. (2007), the presence of certain groups, such as teenagers, can also shape how a space is perceived and used. Even if a space is designed to promote inclusivity, this does not always translate into practice; different groups may share the same space without actually interacting. Designers and planners must therefore accept that control over how public spaces are used is limited.

5.3. Methodology limitations

The methodology mainly uses spatial analysis, mapping, and on-site observations of the KB. While these methods help to understand how spaces are organised and used, they rely on interpretation and only show what is visible, not why people behave in certain ways. In addition, the user behaviour studies were carried out at a limited number of moments, which means that differences between days, seasons, or user groups could not be fully explored.

The selection of case studies was limited to two Dutch public libraries that explicitly aim to function as third places. While this allows for a focused comparison and clear translation of design principles, it also narrows the scope of reference. Both case studies operate in different urban, social, and institutional contexts than the Royal Library in The Hague, and their success cannot be directly replicated. Furthermore, the limited number of case studies means that alternative library typologies or international examples are not considered, which may exclude other relevant design approaches.

5.4. Transition from research to design

The research provides a clear understanding of the positive and negative values of the KB's urban context and interior transitional spaces in relation to the concept of the third place. This, in combination with the study on design criteria for third places, has helped formulate a personal design challenge that can be referred back to throughout the design process.

Some of the analyses carried out on the KB, such as the daylight analysis, access graph, and visual analysis, can also be tested again during the design process. In addition to the criteria that have been set up, this can support design decisions aimed at improving accessibility, encouraging social interactions, and thus, hopefully, helping the KB serve as a more effective third place for the city of The Hague.

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