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La Trinidad:

From Satellite City to Urban Node

TUTOR

Prof. Arch. Alessandro Armando (Italia)

CO-TUTOR

Prof. Arch. Jose Santana (Venezuela)

AUTHOR

Ramon Yepez

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*Architecture is
a hazardous mixture
of omnipotence and impotence.*

BRUCE MAU + REM KOOLHAAS

A B S T R A C T

Satellites cities were the answer given by several Latin-American capitals to the unstoppable city growth. Unexpectedly, many of them were swallowed by the major city that they served. La Trinidad, a former satellite city in the south-east part of Caracas, was designed as a North American sub-urban neighbourhood that prioritized the accessibility mostly to cars. In the past five decades, several geographical and infrastructural factors contributed to the transformation of La Trinidad into a virtual portal to Caracas.

As many satellite cities, public space was not prioritized in La Trinidad. The use of land was strictly segregated between housing and industrial, and few connections between them were encouraged. Additionally, the presence of a creek was completely ignored, emphasizing the virtual limits of the parts composing the satellite city. These factors are the starting point of the present thesis, which aims to propose the creation a public space that serves as a joint between these unconnected parts of La Trinidad, but more important, arranging this public space to be suitable for the construction of a Subway station that was announced more than a decade ago by the central government, expecting to better connect the south-eastern part of Caracas.

Social, commercial, spatial and urban opportunities were identified to create a one-kilometre linear park that amalgams three sectors of the city, having the subway station and its surrounding squares as the central catalysers of activities, and supporting the revitalization of a commercial depressed zone by setting a plan of pedestrianization of the mentioned Kilometre. Another not less important intervention is the recognition and transformation of the relationship with the creek, a natural element that not only enhances the experience of this new public space, but also contributes to the ecological balance of the zone.

The kind of urban and architectural interventions proposed within this thesis serve as a reflection for a city that grew in a former rich oil-country and, consequently, designed its urban relationships focus on the scale and capacity of the vehicles, almost ignoring the existence of pedestrians. Improving the accessibility also serves to promote a more diverse use of the public space, formally and informally, which in the end creates new centres that reliefs the dependency of historically important downtowns.

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01. La Trinidad Billboard, restored by Panasonic of Venezuela on 2015.

PART 1

THE GROWING CAPITAL:

*The vehicle, the street
and the new Boundaries*



MOBILITY

in an Oil Country

There is one unquestionable fact that has shaped nearly every aspect of Venezuela history: oil. In less than a century of its discovery, the country became the fifth largest oil exporting company, with the largest reserves of conventional oil (light and heavy crude) in the western hemisphere and the largest reserves of non-conventional oil (extra-heavy crude) in the world” (Wilpert, 2003).

Despite having some historical and regional importance related to few agricultural products, Venezuela turned completely its eyes to oil at the beginning of the twentieth century. Known by the economists as the “Dutch Disease”, as with many other oil countries, it affected Venezuela mainly declining the agricultural production to almost nothing while industrialization was the goal to follow.

This led to a series of urban drastic adjustment that seriously shaped Caracas as we know it today. A relevant amount of people moved from the country following the dream of working in a wealthy capital ruled by oil. The city started to grow, both in dimensions and in density. New urban planning needed to be commissioned and radical changes were proposed -luckily some of them never came to life- for better connecting the city since traditional public mobility systems -such as trams- were incapable of serving the unstoppable demand.

Even with the problems related to the over-supply of oil of 1950s, state’s income continued raising after the first relevant adjustment to the initial oil policies, concessions, and customs, expressed in the Hydrocarbons Act of 1943. The New National Ideal was crucial at this stage. That was the name given by Marcos Perez Jimenez -a former Venezuelan Dictator between 1953 and 1958- to his right-wing movement. Even though it is historically recognized and demonstrated to

be a cruel and ruthless period of government, a big chunk of history also recognizes the immense labour done in works of Infrastructure. La Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, El Hotel Humbolt, Caracas’ cableway and the Military Circle of Caracas are just a few between the hundreds of recognized projects that required not only a significant cash flow, but also the better qualified minds of its time. Within these projects, some shaped irreversibly the city: the highways.

Some recent studies show how important was the car in Caracas by the end of the Twentieth Century. According to Ana Laura Morais, in her essay “Mobility in Caracas”, more than half of the population had a car by 1980s. “Traffic in Caracas can cost an individual an average of 1 to 2 hours inside a vehicle just to move from one point to another 15 km away, 5 million trips a day in all directions have been calculated; the vehicle fleet has increased by more than 80,000 vehicles per year (there are about 2 million vehicles registered in Caracas alone), 62% of the vehicle fleet are private vehicles that move 20% of the total daily passengers”.

This also reflects why many unreachable neighbourhoods or extremely ambitious projects hasn’t been questioned, and walkability is a topic that is being discussed just in the last decade. La Trinidad, the selected neighbourhood where the intervention proposed of this thesis happens, is a place unbeatable designed to serve the car, and the future presence of a Subway station permits to question and propose major changes in neuralgic zones that can be occupied by pedestrians.



03. The Caracas-La Guaira Highway -that connects the capital to the International Airport- was one of the most advanced civil engineering projects of the mid 50's. The November of 1952 edition of Popular Mechanics published it as "the expensier road of the world".

04. The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas was declared UNESCO World Heritage in 2000. It was a project where modernist explorations were developed at its peak.



05. Paseo Los Proceres was one of the typical Military Urban Monumental interventions requested by Dictator Marcos Peres Jimenez. It is located in the perimeter of Fort Tiuna, and there are statues of the heroes of the Independence of Venezuela, as well as fountains, stairs, squares, roads and walls.

06. Located at the top of the Avila Mountain (recently re-named to Waraira Repano), The Humbolt Hotel was done in less than a year. Restored on 2019, it was recently reopened.

07. Towers of Centro Simon Bolivar. Serve as the perspective en of Avenida Bolivar, the place where monumental urban reforms where proposed, and many alterations have been implemented in the last decades.



Highways: the role of infrastructure and its virtual limits.

As many other Latin American countries, industrialization was forced to happen rapidly. From East to West, North to South, massive quantities of concrete were poured into the new ways of communication in a vigorous promising city. But these highways will become more than just a way of connecting points.

18 They define Caracas, create new boundaries and the way we flow through them.

As expressed by Reyner Braham in his 1971 book named *Los Angeles. The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, the automobile is now the absolute protagonist of the contemporary metropolis. Not only because of its capacities to democratize the mobility, but for the whole experience that it embodies. The *Autopia*, as he called the utopia of the automobile, represents the now irrevocable role of the vehicle in the mental image that we have of our cities.

It can be denied that everyone was fascinated by the limits surpassed by the highways. The movement and speed provided by the car changed completely the image of the city. “The culture of speed relative to the use of the car is the “cult” of car ownership and dependence, nurtured by the aesthetic fascination towards the machine and the obsessive tendency of modernity for speed” (Tomlinson, 2007). The sense of nearness or detachment of landmarks, the sequences of vast metropolitan areas, and the emotions related to surveying new landscapes in movement were some of the topics examined by Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch and John Myer in the book “The View from the road”. The enchantment of these modern infrastructures motivated them to question the implicit value of the highways as a means of education, “a way of making the driver aware of the function, history and human values of his world” (Appleyard, 1971). They even anticipated, maybe in a paradoxical way, that the highway was the great neglected opportunity in the city design.

08. The landscape of Caracas is both composed by the original and the built landscape, where highways are always visible and played a crucial role in the definition of the urban fabric.

But there was another germ that contributed to the prioritization of motorized vehicles in Venezuela, both by the state and the people: a policy of nearly-free gasoline that was sustained for almost half of a century. The cult of ownership and dependency of the car is present in the contemporary history of Caracas, where protecting pedestrians was a question that municipalities have tried to answer just in the last couple of decades. Between the 50’s and the 70’s all the important highways of Caracas were built. These represented an opportunity to create new neighborhoods that were promised to be properly connected -and very fast- by these impressive infrastructures. The “Prados del Este” one can be said to be the youngest, and it’s the only high speed connection for the south-eastern part of the city.

There are many places in the world where important highways cut through the middle of the city. In Caracas this situation is pretty evident, and important heavy duty motor vehicles crossed daily Autopista Francisco Fajardo, and also minor roads due to the lackness of peripheral roads, like the ones developed in many European cities, serving as rings that don’t obligate the vehicles to completely cross through the middle of the city. The absence of this peripheral highway is one of the factors that give a relevant mobility and traffic importance to La Trinidad -the city case study selected for this thesis-, since it became the only way to connect with Caracas, if the only interstate highway (Autopista Regional del Centro) collapses for any reason.

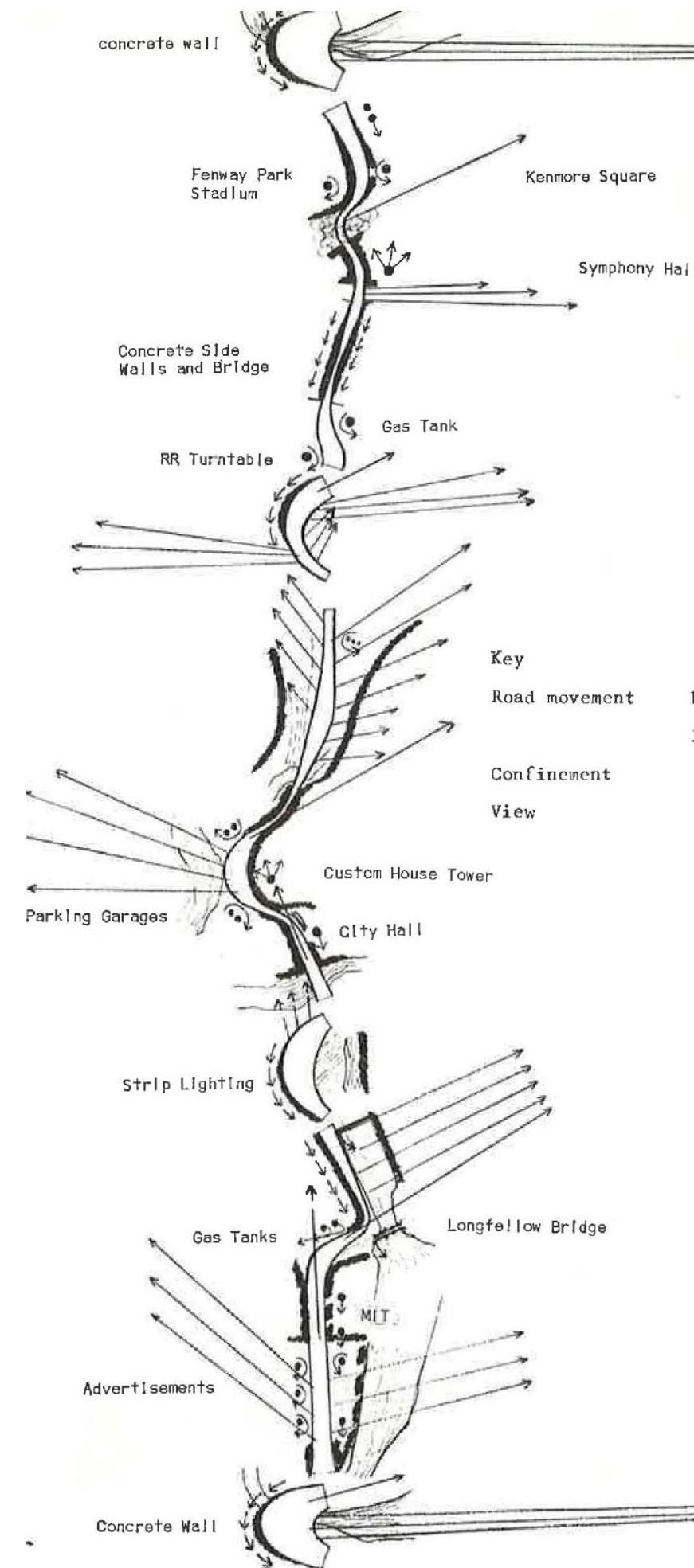
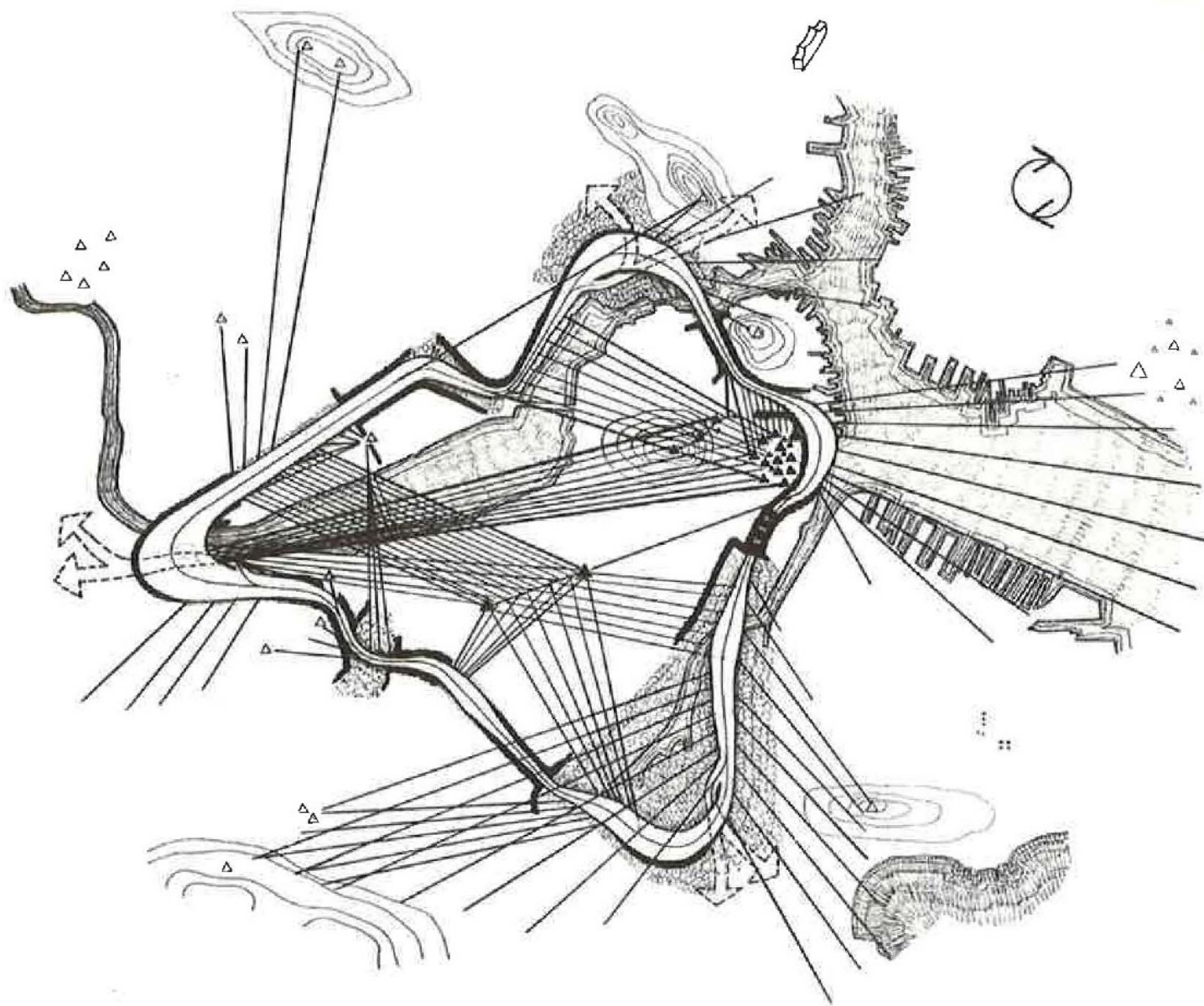
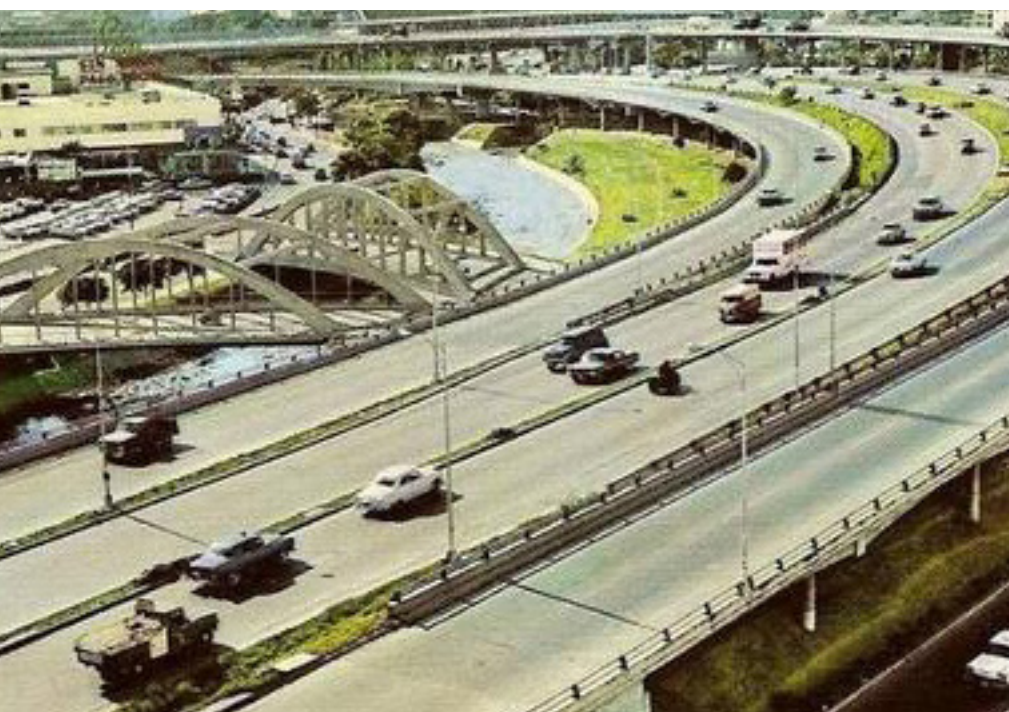


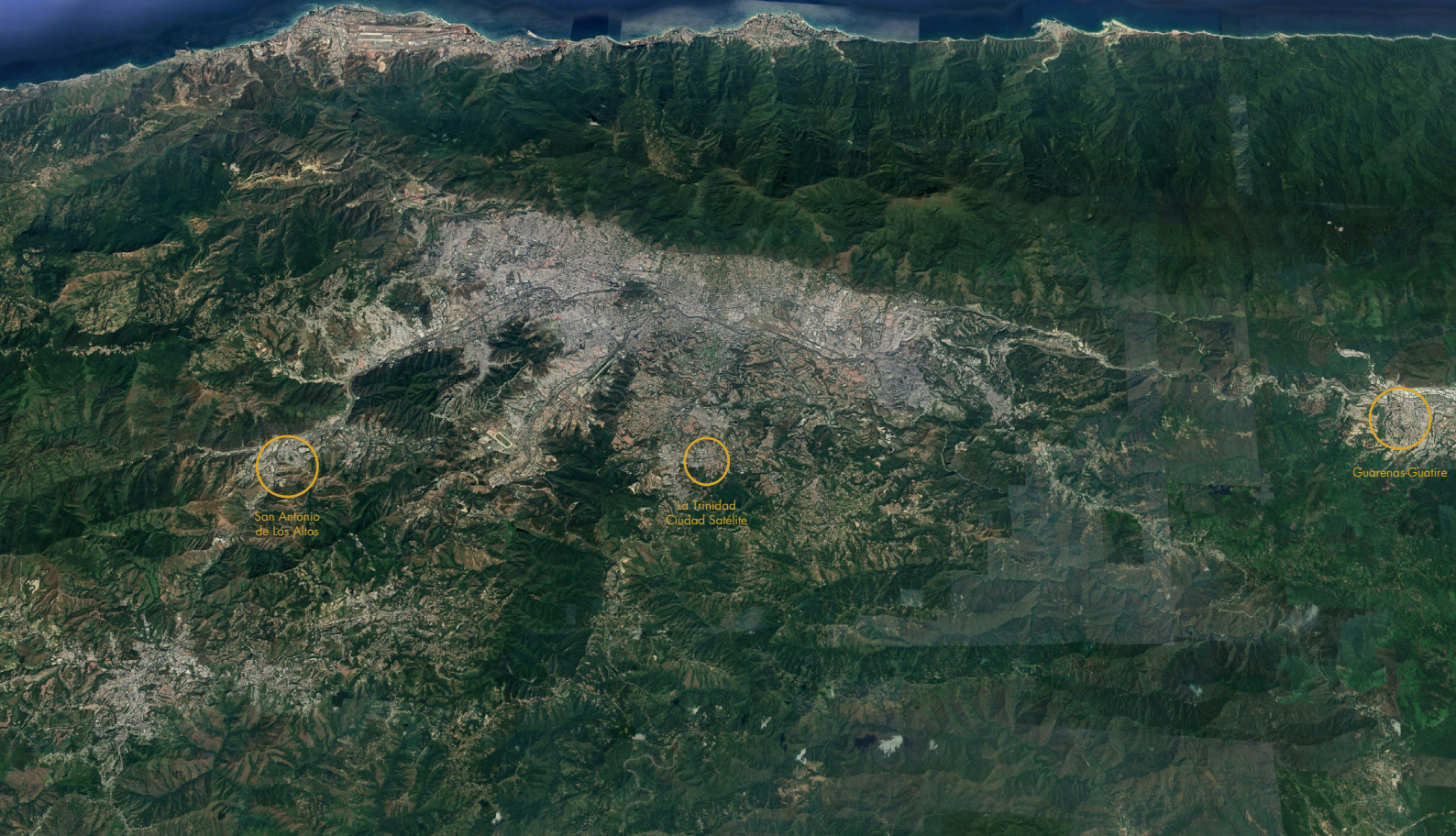
Figure 4. Space-motion and view diagram.

09 and 10. Illustrations from the "The View From The Road". The book served as an experiment searching for aesthetic values in the movement experience provided by the use of vehicles and highways. Elements of attention, rhythm, continuity and value of sequential forms are just few of the elements analyzed and discussed in the publication. The book, the questions and affirmations done by Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch and John Myer revealed the state of fascination -and also optimism- with the new protagonism acquired by the vehicular mobility, but also acknowledging the potential problems related to the scale of the pedestrian and what the car and the velocity represented to them.



It is relevant to point out that different from what happened in the North American cities, “these road projects were carried out at the same time as the construction of the city, so its fabric grew at the same time as its sophisticated road system (...) The appearance of the new fabric in Caracas was largely made from the existence of highways and large avenues.” This was pointed out by Frank Marciano Requena, on the Essay: La Ciudad: Un laboratorio de la modernidad, explaining how “the symbiotic relationship between road structure and buildings explains the appearance of a formal correspondence between the space of speed and the rest of the space of the city” (Marciano, 2015).

La Trinidad limits are abruptly defined by the ending of the Prados del Este highway. The city planning responded naturally to his infrastructural limit, and the consequences are at plain sight. This not only affected the accessibility -many people are encouraged to arrive by car or terrestrial public transportation-, but also affects the quality of the spaces. The relationship with the Highway is one of the key factors confronted in this thesis, and how the adjacencies properly coexist -and solve the unexisting connection- within the main infra-structural element.



13. An aerial view shows the distance from the city center to the dormitory cities.

IDENTITY

of the periphery

Remarkably influenced by its nearness to the United States of America, Venezuela not only adapted its traditions and ways of consumption, but also its aspirations and ways of living. And this is the point in history where the sub-urban residential neighbourhoods were at its peak. “Bucolic scenes urbanized with the American model of the garden city that favored the mobilization in private cars, with separate functions as befitted modern times” (Peña, M. 2007). Cities planned to serve a centrality were built in all Latin America. From small to high density neighbourhoods, these developments were created with the primary needs solved, but always linked to the city business or industrial centers, where most of the activities should happen.

From the contemporary urbanism point of view, the specificity of these urban developments caused huge problems in the urban healthy development. The lack of urban milestones, like important public spaces or business districts, led these satellite developments to grow without an identity. “Dormitory” or “Satellite” city are in the mind of the people like something far away, occupied only at nights -sleeping time-, and emptied in the useful hours of the day. The distance also played a huge role in the way we move. People living in these new developments like Guaremas and San Antonio de Los Altos -not as wealthy as the people populating periphery projects like La Trinidad- could easily take a couple of hours to arrive to their jobs. Stimulate community making is very challenging, and this is a key factor to get some attention for deeper urban “adjustments”.

Satellite Cities like La Trinidad were identified as middle-high class suburban development, with few public spaces or any iconic place that can encourage the creation of a local identity. But its strategic location caused many other neighbourhoods to cross it, eventually diversifying and occupying near spots. Just a couple of landmarks really identified La Trinidad: one is the important P&G building, which is clearly recognizable by its prominent out of scale; the other one is the “Polideportivo La Trinidad”, where important sports activities of the district happen daily. Finally, the small Firefighters Station, “Bomberos de La Trinidad”, is another urban reference for people to easily locate or give directions. These three urban references happen to occur within a kilometre, and they are included in the selected plot of the project contained in this thesis.



14. Chacaito Mall (1965-1968), designed by architect Antonio Pinzani. “The building is a successful building typology almost extinct in the range of commercial buildings in Caracas: the commercial center integrated into the city” (Gonzalez Viso, 2015).

THE MALL:

The New Public Space in Latin America

One can think that, in tropical climate, it is not only recommended but emphasised the experienced of being outside. There is few need for Air conditioner during the year, so buildings can be designed understanding this context privilege. But openness usually means less control, and in a violent un safe country this is usually a problem.

From the 70’s, Caracas started to build massive structures to suit the traditional American mall. Enclosed and autonomous, almost negating the city, it became an opportunity for people to spend time without the worries or threatens of being in an open public space. It became common for people to arrange meetings in these malls, and youth started to use this spaces as the public space is meant to be used, becoming very challenging to encourage building private owned public spaces in a different way.

The Centro Comercial Chacaito, a popular mall at the beginning of Boulevard de Sabana Grande, is a recognized modern project that recognize the climate opportunities and encouraged an open shopping experience that somehow blended with the public space. “The building is a successful building typology almost extinct in the range of commercial buildings in Caracas: the commercial center integrated into the city” (Viso, 2007). Wide pedestrian corridors, protected from the

open, separated from the car, but next to it, was an avant-garde proposal that is being revisited in recent years due to the genuine concern about the unfriendly city for pedestrians that Caracas has become. Recent projects like Centro San Ignacio, a project designed by Carlos Gomez de Llarena, also rethought the experienced of shopping by emphasizing the tropical experience.

The amenities lost in the street were rescued by the contemporary mall, and a mixed use is necessary in order to motivate people to stay in open public spaces. This means conciliate the Private administration with local government incentives, avoiding the autonomous self-centered projects that usually respond to the lack of maintenance that surrounding public spaces have. Finally, these mixed use spaces should be properly planned with the participation of communities; placemaking is crucial in these spaces were the absence of a clear responsible creates an atmosphere of anarchy that can only be controlled by the appropriation of the space that residents or transit people can participate of.



There is a major intervention proposed within the selected study lot which includes understating and opposing the issue of the closed self-centered Mall, as the preferred place used as “public space” for interaction in dangerous cities like Caracas.

An open air commercial space is possible in La Trinidad, encouraging a renewed way of walking the zone. Unfortunately there is not to much bibliography related to walkability in latin America, and this gap is still needed to be filled in order to better understand the specific characteristics of the pedestrians in city like Caracas. Some guidance can be used from European and North American cities related to the physical characteristics of the new street design, and the proper relationship with the undeniable need of vehicles to fulfill many neccesities of the city. As mentioned before it is crucial to recognize the specificity of this place, were insecurity is a dealbreaker when deciding where to spend the freetime, where to celebrate important events, or even the place were important community decisions should be taken.

15. Chacaito Mall (1965-1968), designed by architect Antonio Pinzani. “The building is a successful building typology almost extinct in the range of commercial buildings in Caracas: the commercial center integrated into the city” (Gonzalez Viso, 2015).

16 and 17. Typical enclosed Malls of Caracas -Centro Comercial Líder and Centro Comercial Sambil respectively-, usually overcrowded during the weekends due to its wide offer in products and services.



18. An artistic wall designed by Patricia Van Dalen (Mural Jardín Luminico) goes next to the Prados del Este Highway, defining the limit of a walking path that virtually no one uses.

FROM HIGHWAYS TO WALKWAYS

*An Essay about the Walkability Challenge
in a Dangerous City: Caracas.*

“In Latin America, walking means to confront many fears: fear to the city, fear to public space, fear to break the law, fear of appropriating common space, fear to exceed barriers that often are nonexistent, fear to the citizens, usually perceived as potential enemies. The simple act of walking is scary, and therefore one stops walking, who walks is homeless, junkie or marginal.” (Careri, 2017. p.162)

*The curse of Modernism for urbanism:
The automobile*

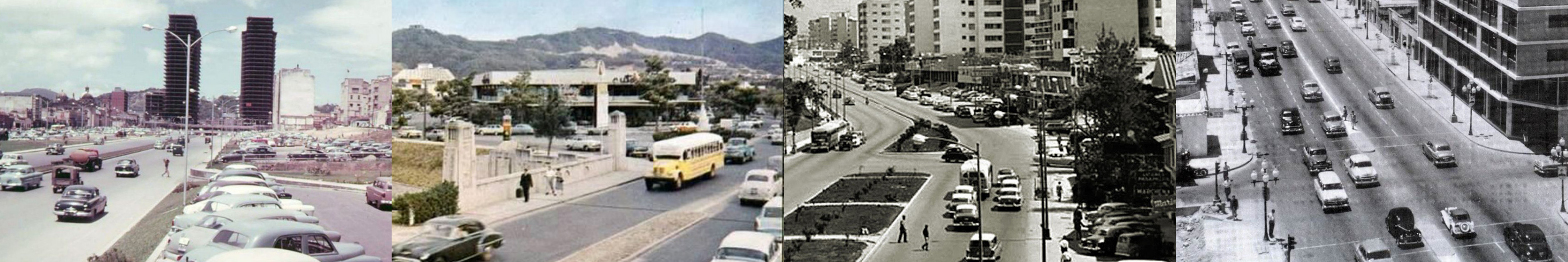
Mid XIX century was, for many Latin American countries, an era of prosperity. The premises of Modernism -characterized by industrialization, rapid social change, and advances in science and the social sciences (Kuiper, 2021)- were colonizing not only the minds of the ruling groups, but also the architectural identity of the cities, and as expressed by Iván Gonzalez Viso, its presence acquired an heroic and symbolic dimension, becoming a clear sign of progress. In cities like Caracas, a scenario where architecture was free from history’s weight, experimentation was not only celebrated, but also became “a physical manifestation of opening up toward “the new” (Viso, 2017).

After the first Oil Boom, the growth of Caracas challenged any 19th century plan-

ning. The city became the ideal territory for exploration and testing European ideas of the modern movement. This, of course, included a main feature: mobility. And mobility in the mid-twentieth century means drastically adapting the city to the automobile necessities.

When one thinks about the automobile, immediately thinks of the landscape create by the sub-urban sprawl: “Soulless subdivisions, residential “communities” utterly lacking in communal life; strip shopping centers, “big box” chain stores, and artificially festive malls set within barren seas of parking; antiseptic office parks, ghost towns after 6PM; and mile upon mile clogged collector roads, the only fabric tying our dissociated lives back together...” (Speck, 2000). Even though this fatalistic description is precise for a lot of North American cities, the desires of growing and replicating models from that American dream also affected Latin America, creating a similar scenario where car was the centre and more relevant element for this kind of urbanism.

The Office for Venezuelan Mobility Planification released a study done of Mobility in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas and the Capital Region, reveal-



ing that by 1982 in the city existed almost half of a million of private vehicles and more than 50% of the households had at least one. This was just one of the factors that contributed to a “model of development without vision, one that is aggressively modern, almost blindly progressive, and grows like a cancer” (Brillenbourg, 2015). This led to an exponential grow that could never be predicted by the urbanists just a few decades before, revealing that between 1936 and 1971 the population multiplies by 9, the area of the city by 6, and the transportation needs by 8.5 (Imbesi, 1995).

But even in a moment of fascination related to the car, Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard, who released a famous book named *The View From the Road* - an attempt to show an aesthetic value of the highways and the cars circulating the new landscapes created by them- evidenced the contrast between the expectations of drivers against the pedestrians: “When the driver wants an elevated platform from which to view his surroundings, while the stationary citizen wishes the road to be out of sight, how do we arbitrate the issue?” (Lynch, 1965). This was just a small evidence, long time ago, of a problem that will transcend and define the way we perceive our cities, especially Caracas.

Physical Barriers, perceived limits and the imminent isolation of the components of the City

Caracas, like many Latin American cities, evolved from a simple and elementary scheme of street and blocks -evoking a small urban centre set amidst extensive territory- into a “complex and stratified scheme of meshes and fragments from different periods, encompassing the city’s watercourses, mountains and valleys and triggering a constellation of events” (Rosas, 2017). Connecting these growing parts of the city was essential, and wealthy countries like Caracas were able to implement the most sophisticated system of highways, which almost half of a century later are still relevant in the urban landscape. “The global image of the city is a Caracas lined with modern highways that brings some together while separating others”. (Imbesi, 1995).

Frank Marcano Requena, on the Essay: *La Ciudad: Un laboratorio de la modernidad*, accurately exposes how “From the road that maximizes the crossings and therefore the possibility of contact, we move on to the road that favors speed and reduces interchange points”. It is relevant to point out that these new physical barriers were normally adopted by the citizens

19, 20, 21 and 22. A city that was fascinated with cars adapted its scale to fit them everywhere. Even though it looks obviously hostile now, at the time no one was surprised that even in residential neighborhoods you can find up to six channels of circulating cars.

because, different from what happened in the north American cities, these road projects were carried out at the same time as the construction of the city, so its fabric grew at the same time as its sophisticated road system (...) The appearance of the new fabric in Caracas was largely made from the existence of highways and large avenues. The symbiotic relationship between road structure and buildings explains the appearance of a formal correspondence between the space of speed and the rest of the space of the city. (Marcano, 2015, p.195).

Encouraged by the aspirations brought from recently applied American Urban models, Caracas’ “modernization process led to new models of single-family housing, building typologies and suburban developments with garden city criteria which were designed by great foreign architects and planners.” (Viso, p.6). This implied a physical distance from the city centre, that was not seeing as a problem due to the existence of the highways, where the inhabitants “...enter their cars and embark on a journey of banality and hostility that lasts until they arrive at the interior of their next destination” (Speck, 2000. p.41). Also, this was seen as an opportunity to

engage with a new moving landscape that is provide by the progress of the automobile and the engineering efficiency of the Highways. These highways, as happened in other countries “...not only fulfilled the new requirements ..., but also enable ... to savor the beauty of their “German Heimat” (p.17, Traffic Space). Its understandable the impulse and optimism of the times, but its now evident how this was more than just physical barriers, they transcend into the citizens way of understanding and living the city, and sadly “What could have been a pleasant two-minute walk down a residential street becomes instead an expedition requiring the use of gasoline, roadway capacity, and space for parking” (Speck, 2000. p.25) There is an implicit declaration in the suburbanization process, which shaped the city sometimes in irreversible ways. “Unlike the traditional neighbourhood model, which evolved organically as a response to human needs, suburban sprawl is an idealized artificial system” (Speck, 2000. P-4). Clearly stated by Becky Nicolaidis in *The Suburb Reader* , “The rise of suburbia was inextricably linked to ideas about class, race, and gender, changes in American political culture and the role of the state, the evolu-



tion of success ideologies, opportunities for social mobility, and the construction of American culture itself”. And this was tried to be replicated by a wealthy Venezuelan state of mid-century, that resulted into Metropolis that simultaneously shows the most advanced technology alongside great poverty, where the areas of the regularized city and those irregular areas can be clearly identified, but in fact recognized by local administrations.” (Imbesi, 1995. P.26).

As expected, in the absence of proper connections, mixed used building -negated by the suburbanization- and walkable public spaces, insecurity appears. It is the easiest way to loose what Jane Jacobs famously named “eyes on the street”. This is a widespread problem that affects all sectors of the population and that has become an obsession of citizens. It has created new patterns of behavior and leaving its mark in a fragmented city where the walls are being rebuilt.” (Foley, 1995. p.167). There is nothing new on saying that “the social interaction among such variety of personality types in the urban milieu tends to break down the rigidity of caste lines and to complicate the class structures, and thus induces a more ramified and differentiated framework of social stratification than is found in more integrated societies” (Wirth, 1938)

In a city where politics take a lot of attention, corruption is a variable that don't help in the construction of these spaces of interaction, or even helping on better connecting the city. This is when the role of the privates become crucial, giving a new opportunity by creating private owned public spaces that release the tension of the city while being explored. But the reality is that “Architects often bury themselves in individual building projects, ignoring any responsibility to the public space of the city; planners work at a scale where the street is seen only as a traffic channel or emphasize social and economic factor that cut through urban phenomena in such a way to allow streets to remain unrecognized and lost in their negative connotations” (Anderson, 1978). Ana Lasala, a recognized Venezuelan architect, dedicated a chapter to this phenomenon in her recent book *On The street*. By studying a specific chunk of Caracas neighbourhood -Chacao-, she evidences how some buildings are “often self-centred and deny the presence of

the street completely. They take advantage of the services and the central location without giving anything in return. These buildings disallow any enrichment of the street's physical space, such as fostering activities and services in exchange for what they gain from the street. These are called bloodsucker buildings and neighbourhoods”. (p.114) These buildings are not only affecting the experience of the pedestrian, which sometimes faces more than a hundred meters of no activity in front of the street that is walking, but also is an evidence of the existing conflict between private and public administrations, and who should take responsibility for these not-always clear limits.

Added to that, there is a precarious situation related to public transportation. Ana Laura Morais wrote an essay named *Moving in Caracas*, and she describes a critical sum of circumstances that denigrates the public transportation and should be faced in order to aspire for a better connected city which, at the moment “its characterized fundamentally by a lack of planning, regulation and control, which means that the superficial modes operate anarchically and in a disjointed way, there is no shutdown system, there are no formal terminals, the units are not very comfortable and often have precarious hygiene conditions and dubious security, frequencies are random, and capricious schedules, network coverage is a function of profitability and in the absence of the most primitive public information system, it is very, very difficult for the eventual user to discover how to use it. (Morais, 1995. P.217) Some observations made in mid 1950s by Edgar M. Hoover and Raymond Vernon in the book *Anatomy of a Metropolis: New York Metropolitan Region Study*, affirmed the impact of a high-speed interurban trolley or a sub-urban railway; where these existed, the houses and the neighborhood stores were strung out a little farther beyond the city limits or clustered tightly about the passenger stations. This meant that a city grows healthy when mobility is assured, democratized, and properly administrated.

“

The city will occupy the entire system of hills to the southeast of the great valley, geography ceases to be a guide and reference and becomes a simple context of an overwhelming urbanism”.

Juan José Martín Frechilla

The future was half-century ago?
A multidimensional problem: Physical, social, and psychological observations towards a walkable city

When Caracas urbanism is reviewed, there is an evident nostalgia from other times when the richest country of America was taking drastic decisions for its urban future. “The Caracas of the late 1950s will be the last project of a modern city. You have never been closer to an organic urban system, designed and built: popular housing, water supply and treatment systems, urban roads, food storage and free markets ... a modern city of the twentieth century. Everything seemed to indicate that it was possible to smooth, blur, social inequalities in an urban space that is less crystallized, more heterogeneous, less segregated in opportunities and benefits” (Frechilla, 1995, p.101).

Exist two physical components that are crucial in understanding the problems of connectivity produced in the past. One is the absence of “barrios” in the official City plans until 1966, but its progressive study was not really taken in count until a couple of decades ago. Elisa Silva published a book in 2014 named CABA: Cartografía de los barrios de Caracas, a huge effort of mapping the informal settlements, and noticing that “half of Caracas citizens live on informal settlements, even though in terms of territory it only represents one fourth of the urban footprint”. Even worse is realizing that, when studies are carried out, based on their strategic locations, “low-income zones have higher walkability indexes but present lower potential pedestrian accessibility” while, on the other hand, “the highest potential pedestrian accessibilities were located in high and medium-income zones, where people rely more on private transport modes. This imbalance regard-



- 25. La Avenida Principal del Country Club, which connects two important neighborhoods, has literally no sidewalks.

- 26. Precarious state of the system of sidewalks is a common problem that not only limits the use of the space for the pedestrian, but sometimes even puts them in serious risk.

ing supply and demand conditions for walking trips suggest that unfortunately, zones with the highest potential of being walkable are the ones that face more barriers to walk.” (Larranaga, 2019). The second revealing component is noticing how the “road reserves” appear in the official plans, that is, the polygons demarcated to preserve the areas necessary for the construction of future road devices to complete the road system. The priority given to roads over other urban elements is evident through a generous provision of urban space that will merit large investments” (Frenchilla, 1995).

It might seem obvious that this preference to the car ended up relegating the pedestrian to a situation where is no longer encouraged to walk, but it’s even worse as Careri expressed, the pedestrians need to confront many fears, some which might not even real. Also, “In the absence of walkable public places -streets, squares, and parks, the public realm- people of

diverse ages, races and beliefs are unlikely to meet and talk” (Speck, 2000. p.60). This is the challenge in Caracas: properly connecting the existing public spaces by eliminating the evident barriers, openness that will encourage citizens to interact, and finally, progressively dilute the aura of fear that justifiably surrounds the act of walking.

A recent study done in Porto Alegre showed that “The most important barriers, obtained from worst responses, are connectivity, topography, sidewalk surface and absence of policemen.” (Larranaga, 2019). Many papers and study that uses The Walkability index as their topic agree that subjective Security and Traffic Safety are the most crucial factors influencing walkability in these kinds of cities, which is different from what is found in the literature from cities in developed countries where Sidewalk Condition and Attractiveness are the most important factors. This



27.
Chacao Municipality was pioneer in Caracas after deciding to expand their original sidewalks, protecting the pedestrians and reducing the space reserved for the cars.

is an important issue to be assessed: a lot of successful bibliography related to ideal street design -such as the respected work of Jan Gehl- need to be revised understanding that violent and insecure countries need a different level of interventions that not only prepare physically the space, but also serve as educators for the citizens.

There is an interesting example on how non-spatial interventions can be relevant for a city in changing the way the inhabitants behave and respect their own public space. Antanas Mockus, a controverted Philosophy and Mathematics professor, and former mayor of Bogota decided to change the mind of the Bogotanos. He wasn't so interested in infrastructure or leaving a visible legacy (and he lacked the money to do either), so he focused on changing people's behavior. "... His political initiatives rarely left a trace, or at least not a visible trace. Mayors typically measure their legacy in infrastructure and other tangible works. They like to cut tape. But the legacy of Mockus is inscribed in the minds of the citizens of Bogotá. It was internalized. What he did was an intervention in the moral DNA of the city (McGuirk, 2015. p.211). Bogotá lived a physical environment that was very similar to Caracas: the streets, and even the parks or other public spaces, were fenced off and controlled through sentries in sentry boxes, sometimes with specific hours of use and not clear authority that sets up these conditions. When there is no sense of collective ownership, everything that should be public is inevitably attached to private, commercial or authoritarian interests (McGuirk, 2015. p.215).

The political actions carried out on the city have produced its image. Each actor has built a piece of the city, the vision of the collective does not appear either explicitly or implicitly as state policy. The concrete public action was developing the ideology of

individualism, while the role of collective function of the city, although it existed in the first attempt of the Planning Commission, was surpassed by political decisions. The use that citizens give to these built pieces are not necessarily those conceived by the designer, the builder or the user, the dynamism of urban life will possibly give another use different from the one that was conceived, if the public authority does not control the process, which is what generally happens in Caracas today. (Marcano, p.249)

The way we see our city influences the way we behave, and it can't be denied that the role of politicians can be crucial in nations like Venezuela. Esther Elena Marcano, on the essay ¿Una ciudad, o pedazos incoherentes de una actuación publica? reveals a worrying situation, which is that "the social stratification of Caracas is spatially delimited and municipally institutionalized" (Marcano, 1995, p.256). To acknowledge this is to understand how citizens perceive its own disconnection, who in front of the ineffective -and even undesired- lack of connectivity and proper mobility, fortified their isolation in a sort of ghettoization. And this not only happens in the gated communities of the middle class, where the limited accessibility is a declaration that "You will not be welcome there, not that you would ever have reason to visit its monotonous moonscape." (Speck, 2000), but also happens in the more vulnerable settlements as a defence mechanism before a city that virtually negates the existence of these communities. This situation threatens the unity of society, not only by the use of gates, but by the uniformity and exclusivity of the people behind them" (Speck, 2000. p.45)



28. Sabana Grande Boulevard is a clear example of space appropriation for commerce, which drastically evolved to a controlled pedestrianized space in less than ten years.

In cities like Caracas, a paradigm shift is necessary to achieve a walkable city. Other cities might be worried about the environmental impact of cars, which is also a topic deserving its own discussion. Also, cities like Sao Paulo face the problem of the protagonism of the car in terms of time, and recent studies show that “On average, citizens lose a cumulative total of 27 full days per year stuck in traffic” (Brillenbourg, 2015). But Caracas, as Medellin, is a city that needs to encourage a more compact social interactions, which will have a huge impact not only in the image of the city, but in the way people appropriate democratically urban spaces. “The heightened mobility of the individual, which brings him within the range of stimulation by a great number of diverse individuals and subjects him to fluctuating status in the differentiated social groups that compose the social structure of the city, tends toward the acceptance of instability and insecurity in the world at large as a norm” (Wirth, 1938). It seems that most of “Caraqueños” tend to isolate for security and mobility reasons, but “The search for isolation is somewhat hypocritical, since people seem to want to live hermetically inside their private paradises while still enjoying the privileges and comforts offered by the streets and the city centers” (Lasala, 2018). In Residential terms, a higher level of security is expected in order to encourage a bigger openness to the city. North American neighborhoods, specially the violent ones, where studied last century in order to provide the proper safe environment. This was an utopic challenge, but some learning was cultivated into what was called the Defensible space: is a term used to describe a residential environment whose physical characteristics -building layout and site plan- function to allow inhabitants

themselves to become the key agents in ensuring their own security.” This can be achieved by some spatial recommendations, but behavioural sciences play an important role in the proper conduct expected of their citizens. “Defensible space therefore is a sociophysical phenomenon” (Newmann, 1972). In a more contemporary sense, “It seems a banality, but the only way to achieve a secure city is by having people walking on the streets: only this allows a reciprocal control without the necessity of fences or surveillance cams.” (Careri, p.163). But when talking about private commercial spaces, the solution is usually more related to political will. This is to set up incentives that avoid offices and other private buildings to just be, as named by Lasala, city “bloodsuckers”. North America has outstanding example of incentives related to Privately owned Public Spaces practices. There is a specific anecdote on Philadelphia narrated on the book 99% Invisible, where people didn’t know why some messages can be found on the sidewalks in front of the most important private building; these messages used to say “Space within building lines not dedicated” or “Property behind this plaque not dedicated”. As explained by Mars, “In property law, dedicating means giving over to another party -the public, for example. The wording on these plaques varies not only on Philadelphia, but in many cities of the United States, but the basic message of these so-called easement markers is the same; you pedestrians are welcome to walk here for now, but just a heads-up -this is actually private property” (Mars, 2020). This a healthy differentiation that shows how private entities can take care of cities’

interstices which are usually between their building and the formal city public spaces. What Louis Wirth assured almost a century ago is still valid, and every urban situation“... may be approached from three interrelated perspectives: (1) as a physical structure comprising a population base, a technology, and an ecological order; (2) as a system of social organization involving a characteristic social structure, a series of social institutions, and a typical pattern of social relationships; and (3) as a set of attitudes and ideas, and a constellation of personalities engaging in typical forms of collective behaviour and subject to characteristic mechanisms of social control” (Wirth, 1938). Its quite evident that the social dimension seems to be even more relevant in the circumstances of the latin American cities, like Caracas. As revealed by the paper Urban walkability considering pedestrians’ perceptions of the built environment, “security appeared to be strongly associated with a subjective dimension, represented by the fear of crime or perceived risk for crime, instead of the actual occurrence of crimes. This result evidence the importance of the physical attributes of the real world and how they are captured, judged, and processed by pedestrians”. (Arellana, 2020). The urge of a multidimensional interventions of the city is particularly evidente in Caracas; Ignacio Cardona, in his article #latiurbe (2010) points out that the successful strategies implemented Rio/Sao Paulo and Medellin demonstrate that “architects, urbanists and designers are not who make the city”, and results are more relevant when the ideas are assumed as strategies...”.

Some architects like Alfredo Brillembourg, which his works if focused on the informal city, state that “The city is divided in many ways, but most importantly, into areas for a wealthy elite and areas for the poor masses”. This, as shocking as it sounds -and not very accurate- is easily connectable with another negative situation within the architectural academy. Francesco Careri testifies that “In the architecture faculties I realized that students -the future ruling class- know everything about urban theory and french philosophers, they consider experts in cities and public space, but in reality, they have

never experimented playing ball in the streets, meeting with friends at the square, making love in a park, breaking into an abandoned industrial building, crossing a favela, stopping to ask for directions to a passerby. What kind of city can this people produce if they fear walking?” (Careri, 2002, p.163).

Of course, one cannot deny the relevance of the architectural strategies and how proper spatial interventions change the lives of citizens but solving the issue of fear can create not only a more vivid city, but also encourage space appropriation which tends to be a healthy practice that genuinely protects public space. Meaningful destinations, safe streets in terms of proportions and use of car, comfortable and interesting components within this roads, are all precepts studied by important urbanists like Jeff Speck, can be used only understanding that inequality and violence are decisive factors that can dramatically modify the desired public space. This is the place of negotiation between meeting, trading and traffic, and for a better walkable city and “infrastructure would no longer be simply approached from the perspective of efficiency, with the aim of moving from A to B as quickly as possible, but would be understood as an element that influences the quality of the space between A and B. The traffic space would no longer simply connect public spaces -these elements would come together to form one public space. In this space, top priority must be given to creating quality of life, even more than to traffic and economic aspects, which have dominated the discourse up until now” (Bendiks, 2019 p.29). This, hopefully, can help to unmask the media discourse -sometimes exaggerated- about unsafety, and to accomplish a vivid and democratic city by allowing walking as a reflect of the Right to the City. Careri reminds us how the physical realm is surpassed by the perceived realm, saying that in Latin American cities like Caracas, fear has nothing to do with getting lost, but with finding the other.

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30.
Old neighborhoods like Los Palos Grandes are succesful case of walkable parts of the city. Recent urban renovations like Plaza Los Grandes emphasized the existent pedestrian culture, having a vivid life in different timeframes of the day.



P A R T 2

SEARCHING FOR AN ACCESSIBLE CITY: *Mobility shapes the city*



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31.
On January 2nd of 1983,
President Luis Herrera Campins
officially inaugurated the Linea
1 of Metro de Caracas.

EL METRO:

La Gran Solución para Caracas

Even though many scholars agree that “The true element that structures the urban space of Caracas in this century was made through the construction of its road infrastructure” (Marcano Requena, 1995), this is just a visual perception that hides an important mobility necessity of a big part of the city inhabitants. Between 1965 and 1967 studies were carried that demonstrated that the Caracas’ transportation issue wouldn’t be properly solved without planning and incorporating a new massive system.

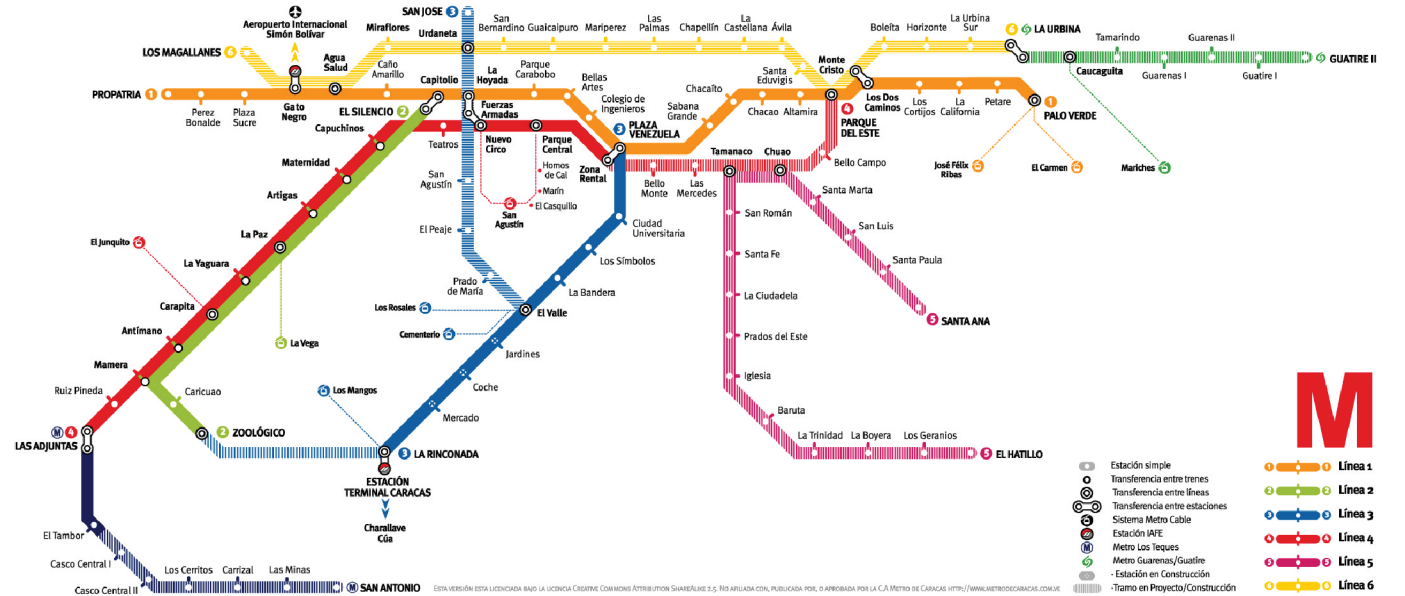
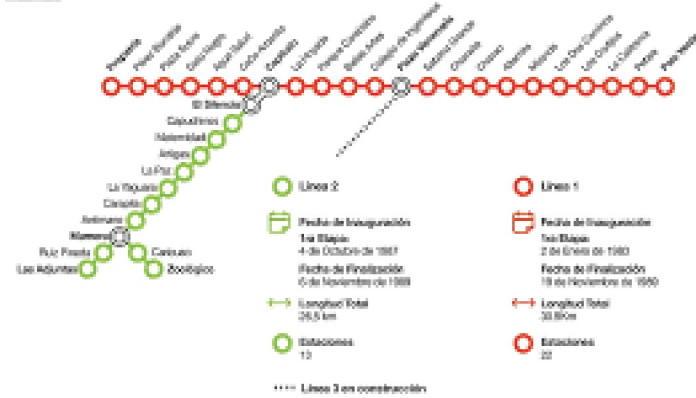
There is some fortune when realizing that the Monumental proposal made by Maurice Rotival -a renowned French urbanist- at his return to Caracas in 1959, was never built. The utopy of an avenue as a instrument to define the carácter of a capital was already a questionable idea. Acknowledging that Caracas’ city centre was imploding, and new infrastructure should accompany its inevitable growth, only diminished the attempts of Rotival in adorning its proposals with ideology: revitalize “the true character of the heart of the city” with a “monumental complex consecrated to the Bolivarian cult and of the Americas”, conceived so that Caracas becomes “the moral and even religious center of an entire region From South America”(Frechilla, 1995). There was a need of increasing mobility capacities, but the approach presented by the French was far from what Caracas really needed.

Some evidence shows that, by the end of 1950’s, the city was starting to talk about the upcoming necessity for public massive fast transportation. But it was until 1968 that Metro de Caracas project started by the creation of an International Consortium composed by two American experienced companies that will served as the initial consultants: Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade & Douglas, from New York, and Alan Voorhees from Washington D. C.

Projected with four lines, the expropriation of the buildings affected by the upcoming Metro started at the end of 1970s, and the 12th of March of 1975, the president Carlos Andres Perez announced the start of the engineering processes of the Linea 1. On 1976, Named Oficina de Proyectos y Obras del Metro de Caracas, officially started to work by publishing an international public biddingfor the equipment needed to start Linea 1: the West-East connection of Caracas valley (Propatria at the west, Palo Verde as the last station on the East).

The biggest urban transformation that Caracas has seen so far happened in front of the surprised eyes of the neighbours. Describe by Gianfranco Perri in his Essay “Construyendo el Metro de Caracas: El Precio de lo Bello”, even the most distracted of neighbors soon learned that it was not a new office tower or a new distributor of the chaotic automobile traffic: it was the subway! But how long this work lasted! When would the mess, the dust, the noise, the gaps, the awkward detours and traffic interruptions end? Would all that “saperoco” be worth it ...? (Perri, 1995)

But in less that a decade, On January 2nd of 1983, the first part of the project (Propatria-La Hoyada) was inaugurated, with a short trip properly photographed by the media, with President Luis Herrera Campins seated in one of the unpolluted subway cars. Lines 1 and 2 were completed by 1988, and on December 18, 1994 the Plaza Venezuela-El Valle section of Line 3 was inaugurated: a total of 45 kilometers of lines and 40 stations. (Perri, 1995) Taking advantage of the tropical weather, some stations became iconic not only for their public spaces, but for the openness which is not very common in subways around the world. Sometimes overcrowded, these open spaces often surrounded by the benevolent vegetation of the tropic, soon developed into city centralities full of life.





33. Odebrecht, a recognize brasilian engineer and construction company, commissioned for the construction of the new lines of the Metro de Caracas. On 2016, after years of investigation, it was revealed that the contracts given were part of the largest corruption cases in the recent history of Latin America.

There is a superficial dynamic that is perceived when studying the urban fabric of Caracas. Commanded by the colossal highways, subtly hides an active phenomenon, crucial for many, that activates the city from West to East. There are almost 1.5 million people using one or many of the five existing lines. The magnetic effect of this stations created an opportunity for a new urban physiognomy: Bulevares in Catia, Sabana Grande and Caricuao; Squares in Chacaito, Altamira and Petare; a beautiful fountain and gardens in Plaza Venezuela; works of art in parks, squares and stations (Alvarez, 1995).

The existing plan to build a Metro Station on La Trinidad, part of a system of new lines dramatically delayed due to the corruption scandal of Odebrecht (a Brazilian Engineering company that Venezuelan Government hired for the extension of the Metro), which pretends to connect a partially isolated town, evidently dependent of the superficial independent means of transportations, serves as an opportunity to bring back the hype of those golden years where Linea 1 was being designed. Also, as exposed by Maria Laura Morais in her essay “Move in Caracas”, public transportation in Caracas has been in a precarious situation for the last three decades: ...lack of planning, regulation and control, which means that the superficial modes operate anarchically and in a disjointed way... there are no formal terminals (bus stops). But it is not only a problem of the physical environment, as she continues, the service providers enhance the perilous situation because the units are not very comfortable and often have precarious hygiene conditions and dubious security, frequencies are random, capricious schedules, network coverage is a function of profitability and in the absence of the most primitive public information system, it is very difficult for the non-frequent commuter to discover how to use it.

As architects and urbanists, many of these factors are out of our influence, but giving the priority to the pedestrian and building public spaces that understand the privileges of the climate usually promote natural concentrations of people which, in the end, create a healthy city dynamic with spaces suited for the culture, interaction and community representation. These are few of the many considerations took in count for La Trinidad Station, the catalyst intervention proposed in this Thesis.



URBANIZING THE SOUTH

34. Prados del Este Highway,
looking to the north where Waraira
Repan mountain is located.

The southeast of the Guaire River was a place for discovery. As expressed by Federico Vegas in *Una ciudad en sus redes y en sus tramas*, “The city will occupy the entire system of hills to the southeast of the great valley, geography ceases to be a guide and reference and becomes a simple context of an overwhelming urbanism”.

In the introduction of “Caracas Memorias para el Futuro”, Giuseppe Imbesi and Elisenda Vila described this process: “The great city continued its growth in various directions, to the East it surpassed the territorial political limits between the Federal District and the state of Miranda, “mocking” in this way one of the ways that man has created to circumscribe spaces, without taking into account the reality of the growth that he himself has inflicted on the city. This is how today we see a city that extends about 25 kilometers along the narrow valley of about 8 kilometers wide, intercepted by small secondary valleys and hills to the southeast and southwest, which gives shape to that particular spatial expression of the location of the city that suggests an “amoeba” to many”.

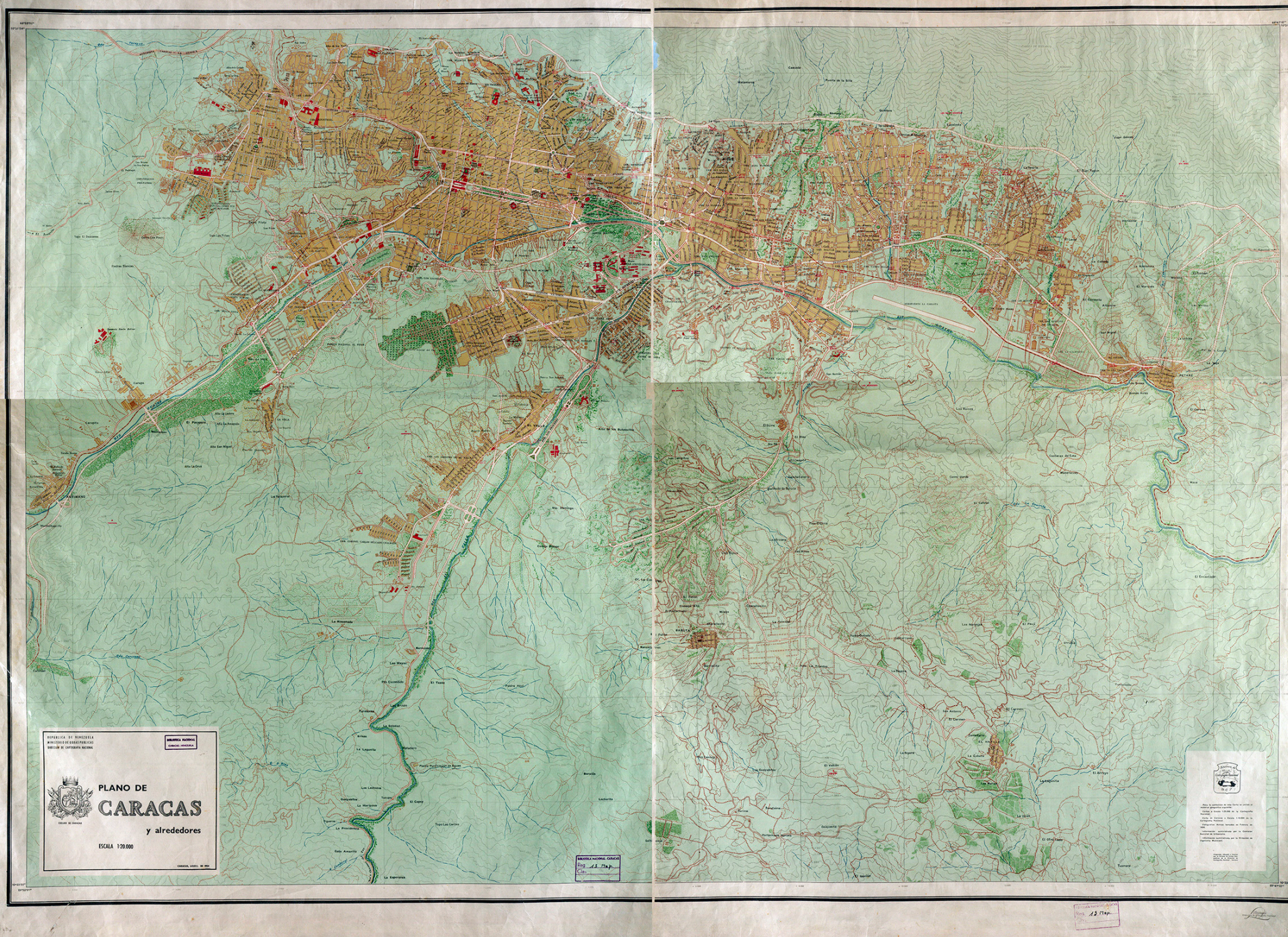
Virgin hills with unsurpassable views to the iconic Avila Mountain encourage several important urbanization projects. The appearance of gigantic roads allowed movement “through green and sinuous paths, along hills and small valleys, as an extension of the city to have people living in villas with large families with servants...”. These new landscapes “... allowed the testing of brilliant architectural projects of unique and multiple houses,

shopping centers, clubs and wide freeways, such as the one in Prados del Este (1962), which opened the growth of the valley with towards satellite cities such as La Trinidad and single-family housing developments such as Cumbres de Curumo, and Prados del Este, based on the 1951 road plan” (Peña, 2015, p.432)

Originally owned in 1740 by the priest Ignacio Rengifo Pimentel, the Ranch La Trinidad was dedicated to cattle herd, and it was progressively adapted to the increasing demand for agricultural products. On 1919, Dr. Rafael González Rincones acquired the Ranch; Wheat, Coffee and Sugar cane where the essential goods produced by the end of the Nineteenth century. Parque Cultural Hacienda La Trinidad, a recent initiative to rescue a preserve those abandoned spaces that now serve for cultural and commercial activities narrates that “the spaces where agricultural activities were practiced are still preserved, such as the Auxiliary House, a coffee processing and storage center; the Casa del Trapiche, where sugar cane juice was extracted”. Neighbors called informally “Los Secadores”, a name that is referred to the process of tobacco dehydration or curation of tobacco leaves, the final main activity done within the Ranch. It was only by 2005 that the Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Baruta Municipality declared it as an Asset of Cultural Interest. Just this small part of the original Hacienda La Trinidad remained after Gonzalez Rincones sold it for the construction of a middle-class suburb, following the patterns of the satellite cities.

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“The city will occupy the entire system of hills to the southeast of the great valley, geography ceases to be a guide and reference and becomes a simple context of an overwhelming urbanism” Federico Vegas



35. An official Map from 1954 shows the existence of two old towns in the Southeast: Baruta and El Hatillo. Between them, traces of planned urban developments show the upcoming urbanization of the zone.



By mid-50s, an suburban typical American project was being advertised in recognized newspapers. “Water, a lot of water” was part of the premises to catch the attention of families that, concerned by the potential chaos of an unstoppable growing city center, wanted to move to a periphery that will guarantee not only the comfort, but also a proximity to the center.

On November 30, 1958, history was made. That day was the first time that the roads of the Ciudad Satélite La Trinidad urbanization were used for a car competition, representing not only the proper infrastructure developed for this new neighborhood, but also the importance that the car will have in the years to come for the inhabitants of this southern part of Caracas, where some sort of “Sprawl was happening. As expressed by Jeff Speck, this kind of urbanizations “unlike the traditional neighborhood model, which evolved organically as a response to human needs... is an idealized artificial system” (p.4, The Rise of Sprawl Suburban and the Decline of Nation). Other observations made by him in his book also responded to the problems that became evident in La Trinidad: “Even at relatively low population densities, sprawl tends not to pay for itself financially and consumes land at an alarming rate, while producing insurmountable traffic problems and exacerbating social inequity and isolation”.

The urban centrality of La Trinidad was also emphasized by two main urban “events”. Universidad Simon Bolivar Project and the Centro Médico Docente la Trinidad. Both projects happening in mid-1970s, both encourage an increased of circulating citizens. In a period of less than a couple of decades, these two projects became recognized and prestigious institutions, both mainly accessible through La Trinidad nod, which is the architectural circumstance analysed in this thesis.

As imagined, a lot of traffic gravitates through La Trinidad, and it has resulted in one of the worst accessibilities to the central valley, despite the construction of a second floor in the connection with the eastern highway. (Imbesi, 1995). Non less important, the lackness of public space and the clear delimitation of uses -industrial and residential drastically separated, with few commercial spaces in separated lots- also helped to create a sense of isolation. “Just as it is difficult to imagine the concept of family independent of the home, it is near-impossible to imagine community independent of the town square or the local pub... In the absence of walkable public places -streets, squares and parks, the public realm -people of diverse ages, races and beliefs are unlikely to meet and talk-” (p.60, Jeff Speck). These physical circumstances can be seen with a new scope and provide a big opportunity to create public spaces that promote civic life where, as Cristopher Lasch stated, “people meet as equals”.

36. As a way of inaugurating the roads of La Trinidad, a car race was celebrated.

37. An advertising communicating that a big part of La Trinidad Satellite City has been sold already, but buyers can still get some empty lots.



38. El Guaire River, the most important waterstream that crosses Caracas, next to the Francisco Fajardo Highway.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER:

Caracas' complicated relationship with its waterstreams

The main heritage of a city is its place: a geography that acts as an original support that the citizen molds and transforms over time. Those are words from Martín Padrón, on his essay *La Montaña, el valle y sus ríos: Primer Espacio Público Caraqueño*, where clearly exposes the situation related to Caracas natural context, defeated by the progress: The massive growth of cities and their hectic daily life has made the inhabitants lose the vision that they are part and consequence of an original place that was bequeathed to them to serve as the seat of their existence.

Padrón continues to describes Caracas as a beautiful valley crowned to the north with the presence of the mountainous area that we know today as El Ávila and that more recently has resumed its original toponymy Waraira Repano, to the south with the various hills that make up its intermediate valleys and a hydric complex made up of two rivers: El Guaire and El Valle, tributaries of a set of streams including the sixteen streams along the Sierra Mayor, constitute a whole system that defines our geography: our first public space.

Infrastructure, in the era of progress was strategically placed taking advantage of those physical conditions of the valley. This will change drastically the perception that we have of the natural configuration narrated by Padrón. and today's contemporary urbanism it can be said that the

conformation of urban activity on the territory, is a form derived from the organization of its infrastructure networks, normally supported on its streets; that are at the same time more powerful than their infrastructure..." (Herce Vallejo, 1995). The most important highway, the one that literally cuts through the middle of Caracas, is the Francisco Fajardo Highway. At most of its course it goes next to the Guaire River, a key mass of water that played a significant role in Caracas' history. As expected, this created a clear division between north and south, and the expression "on this or that side of the river" is well established in the Caracas' inhabitants lexicon when giving directions or referring to specific places.

But this venerated infrastructure project, a former symbol of progress and declared in 2005 as an Asset of Cultural Interest of the Nation, is a fundamental aspect on understanding Caracas' configuration. Many rivers coming from Avila Mountain served as "natural" divisions between new urbanization projects nailed within the valley. Razetti, a respected geographer that mapped Caracas in different periods of early twentieth century, pointed the presence of this natural elements as inherent modelers of the city.

“

(...) The opportunities that the beautiful natural configuration of the valley offered has not been taken advantage of, or even respected. Thus, today the Guaire, which could have been the backbone of a longitudinal system of parks in Caracas, is just a strip of concrete and smelly dirt. All the small rivers and ravines that cross the city have run the same fate, and their visitors of yesteryear commented so much” Federico Vegas



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40, 41, 42, 43.
Always ignored, brooks know as
"quabradas" has been occupied
informally. Polluted and risky
soils is the result at plai sight,
but worse problems and activi-
ties like "river mining" happen
daily in these denigrated spaces.



That’s how the Guaire, at the south of the valley, originally marked a clear discontinuity of the city, which was terribly emphasized by a massive infrastructure project. This has been an active questioning exercise within Venezuelan architectural faculties, in the search of understanding how to better connect the city from south to north. Already in 1966, Martin Vegas -a respected architect and professor – explained how “ the opportunities that the beautiful natural configuration of the valley offered has not been taken advantage of, or even respected. Thus, today the Guaire, which could have been the backbone of a longitudinal system of parks in Caracas, is just a strip of concrete and smelly dirt. All the small rivers and ravines that cross the city have run the same fate, and that their visitors of yesteryear commented so much”. Visitors have an undeniable image of El Rio Guaire: It is the principal mass of water that cuts from West to East, but it is also the greatest collector of the residual waters of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas.

The idea of sustainability is at stake. The infra-structural support represents the urban landscape inherited from an overwhelming past that threads a discordant reality (Gaudino Sabrina). Abandonment and inoccupation become part of the Caracas’ rivers and creeks history... those four rivers that bordered it in the colonial period have almost disappeared, they were not valued within the anthropized environment. Today they simply fulfill the function of urban drains, conductors of rainwater and, in many cases, of sewage from urban activities (p.25 Caracas. Memorias para el Futuro, Giuseppe Imbesi, Elisenda Vila). Finally, informal settlements have illegally occupied parts of these urban gaps, leading to a justified negative image and sadly reducing the potential interactions that citizens can have with their rivers.

One relevant factor to be analyzed in La Trinidad is not only how divided is the land use, but also how this natural limit -Guairita Creek- doesn’t contribute to connect and activate this very diverse parts of the city. It is also an opportunity to stake out a new perspective for the rivers, integrating it to the landscape and encourage to be protected and respected, making them essential part of our city, as it happens in many European and North American cities.

A combination between law enforcement and spatial interventions can contribute to a paradigm shift in the minds of the Caraqueños. Even in 1762, where the first legal instrument related to the rivers was published -La Ordenanza de Aguas y Montes- prohibitions, penalties and fines and even corporal punishment where clear and the citizens defended their original public space.

44. When Infrastructure and waterstreams collide, Venezuelan poverty demonstrates to have an immense capacity to adapt and appropriate these “undeprivileged” spaces.

P A R T 3

LA TRINIDAD:

Urban Node



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45.
La Trinidad Tunnels are important in the urban imaginary of the inhabitants of the Southeastern Caracas. It defines a clear transition, and due to the abrupt ending of the highway after the tunnels, traffic jams are quite common.

When the Prados del Este Highway was originally designed, ending abruptly in a suburb roundabout, the capacity of Caracas’ mass mobility infrastructure was still not estimable. This roundabout, for reasons still to be discovered, was never built, and the highway ends up in a traffic light, nearby La Trinidad Industrial Zone. This situation is a very characteristic image of La Trinidad: traffic jams happening where the Highway ends, occupying several kilometres even before the tunnel that separates La Trinidad. Traffic radio stations usually confirm the existence of jams in all the southern communities if there is a jam in La Trinidad Tunnels, which confirms the centrality of this neighbourhood.

As in many American suburbs, the land use of La Trinidad was strictly programmed and no mixed used was indicated. This led to the actual situation, where virtual limits can be seen between the industrial zone, the single-family residential zone, the multi-family residential part, the commercial stripe and the sports complex.

From the original development plan of mid 50s, the space dedicated for the sports complex is still the only relevant public space of La Trinidad. Mass cultural spaces are non-existent, obligating the inhabitants of La Trinidad to drive around 10 Kilometres to reach the closest concert hall or the closest public library. Formerly known as “Los Secaderos”, recently named Hacienda La Trinidad Parque Cultural, is a private owned public space project made by a non-profit civic association that recovered some agricultural working spaces of the original Ranch that occupied a big chunk of what it is now La Trinidad. Unfortunately, this place has a very limited accessibility, and managed by a private, have a tight schedule that limits the capacity and potential uses of the community.

It’s a pity that the more primitive public space -the open space, the nature- was immediately negated when a major avenue followed the path of the Guairita Brook. Nowadays is very difficult to cross it -not only by car, but also walking-, having just to specific bridges that allow you to do so. As expressed in Part 2, “On the other side of the river”, Caracas’ relationships with its rivers is a bit conflictive, and

just a couple of decades ago the debate initiated in order to better understand how to recognized and take advantage of the many water streams that shape Caracas. The infrastructure built half of a century ago only meant to control the flow and the floods, negating any kind of link or interaction with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

Few interactions are encouraged between this evidently separated parts of this small city which drastically affects the presence of pedestrians crossing from each of the mentioned parts. The use of vehicles is almost mandatory due the precarious state of the sidewalks, but mainly because of the urban decisions that provided few -if not none- opportunities for the pedestrians to fully seize their own city. Public Transportation, managed by organized groups that work based on their interests, worsen the situation making very difficult to arrange a proper system of bus stops and stations.

The more circulated avenue -after the highway that radically stops in a traffic light- progressively evolved into a commercial stripe. Non limits or regulations were imposed, so a very heterogeneous kind of business have occupied this stripe -and its secondary avenues- in the last three decades. Added to the mobility challenges, the characteristics of many of the actual business occupying this space discourage La Trinidad inhabitants to constantly visit the area: banks, car dealers, a couple of health private institutions and car workshops. Just a few bake shops and restaurants demonstrate to be the attractive spots and are visited in almost any time of the day. As expected, the underutilization of this zone leads to an state of abandonment and lack of communal space occupation that should occur within this half-of-a-kilometre commercial stripe. It is important to point out that, in the northern part of this commercial zone, the river -and consequently, the avenue- imposes a limit that reduces the accessibility to this high-potential public zone.



Caracas-La Guaira Highway

Avenida Boyacá

Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho Highway

Francisco Fajardo Highway

Francisco Fajardo Highway

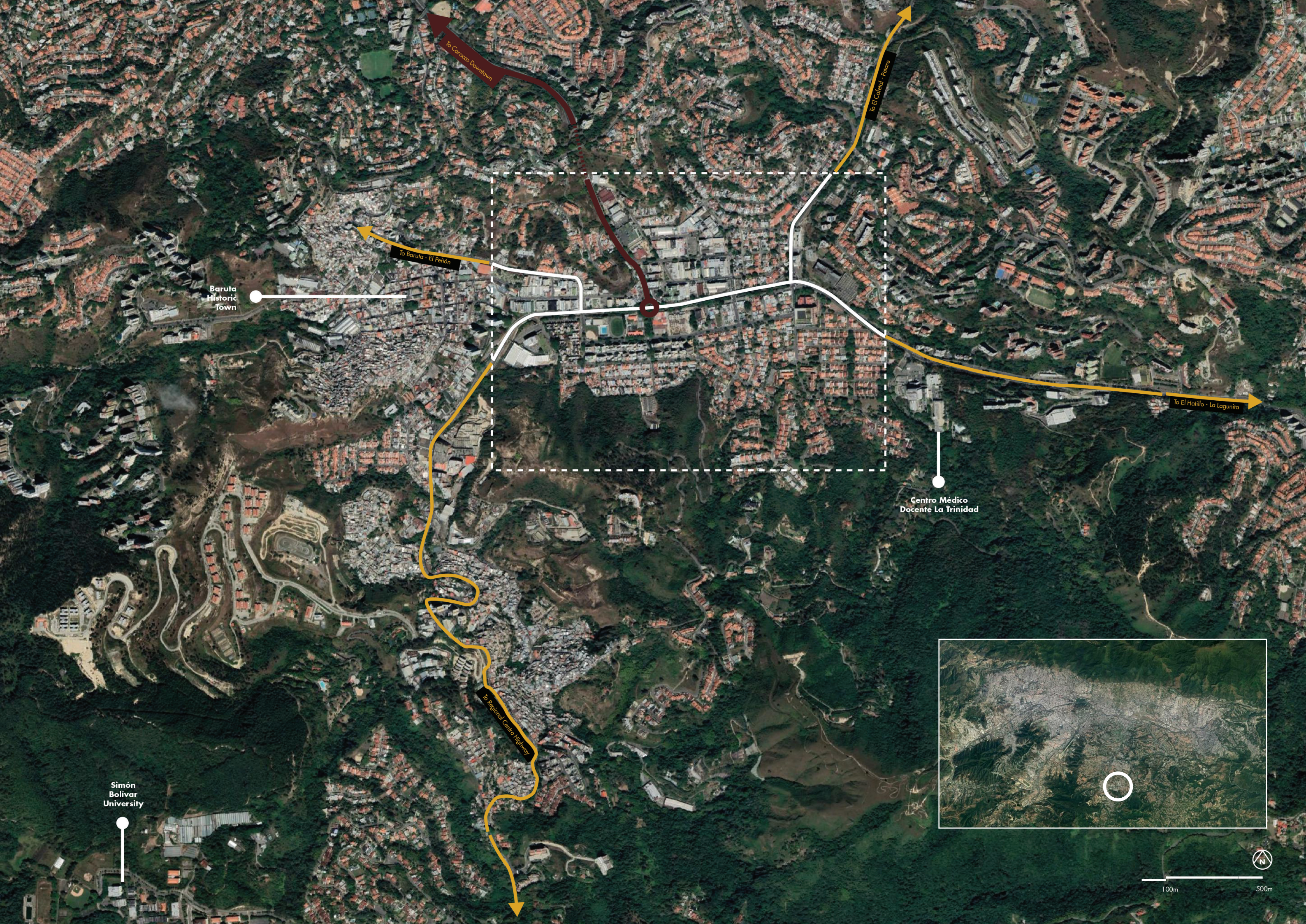
Prados del Este Highway

Autopista Regional del Centro

A HIGHWAY
THAT ABRUPTLY STOPS
IN A FORMER SATELLITE CITY







To Caracas Downtown

To El Catedral - Petare

To Baruta - El Peñón

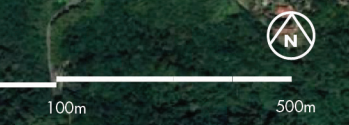
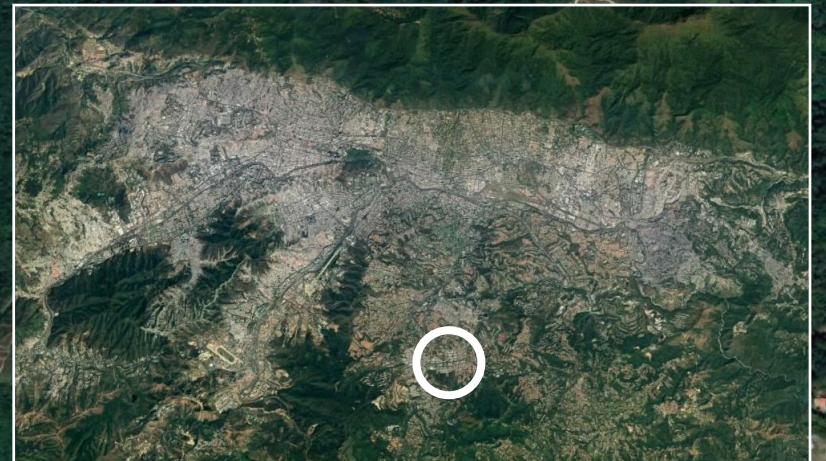
To El Hatillo - La Lagunita

To Regional Centre Highway

Baruta
Historic
Town

Centro Médico
Docente La Trinidad

Simón
Bolívar
University





-
48.
The Guairita Brook is a typical image of La Trinidad: a limit difficult to surpass.

-
49.
A big soccer court is used by several groups: kids and youth teams, runners and athletic teams.

-
50.
Low rise buildings served as an opportunity to develop few plans of Social Housing within La Trinidad Ciudad Satélite.

-
51.
A simple model of suburb house of La Trinidad.

-
52.
Semi-olimpic pool, part of the Sports Complex Rafael Vidal, recently restored.

-
53.
La Trinidad Bingo was an iconic place in the Caracas Nightlife. Stopped its operations suddenly and no use has been defined for this abandoned building.

-
54.
Calle El Hambre of La Trinidad -the Caracas streetfood way of calling streets where many fast-food providers gather/.

-
55.
Traffic jams are quite common in La Trinidad, due to the amount of traffic lights and the lack of planification of vehicular circulations.

-
56.
Recent interventions to La Guairita brook have permitted to control the potential floods.

-
57.
Procter and Gamble, a recognized trasnational company, established its headquarters in a lot of La Trinidad, being the most easily recognisable building of the La Trinidad Skyline.

-
58.
Panasonic Industrial Building was very importante from the 70's until the recent Venezuelan economic crisis.

-
59.
Mall franchises like "Centro Comercial Expreso" have succesfully occupied La Trinidad in two strategic spots.



La Trinidad: Axonometry of Zone for Analysis



Not Intuitive Traffic Program:

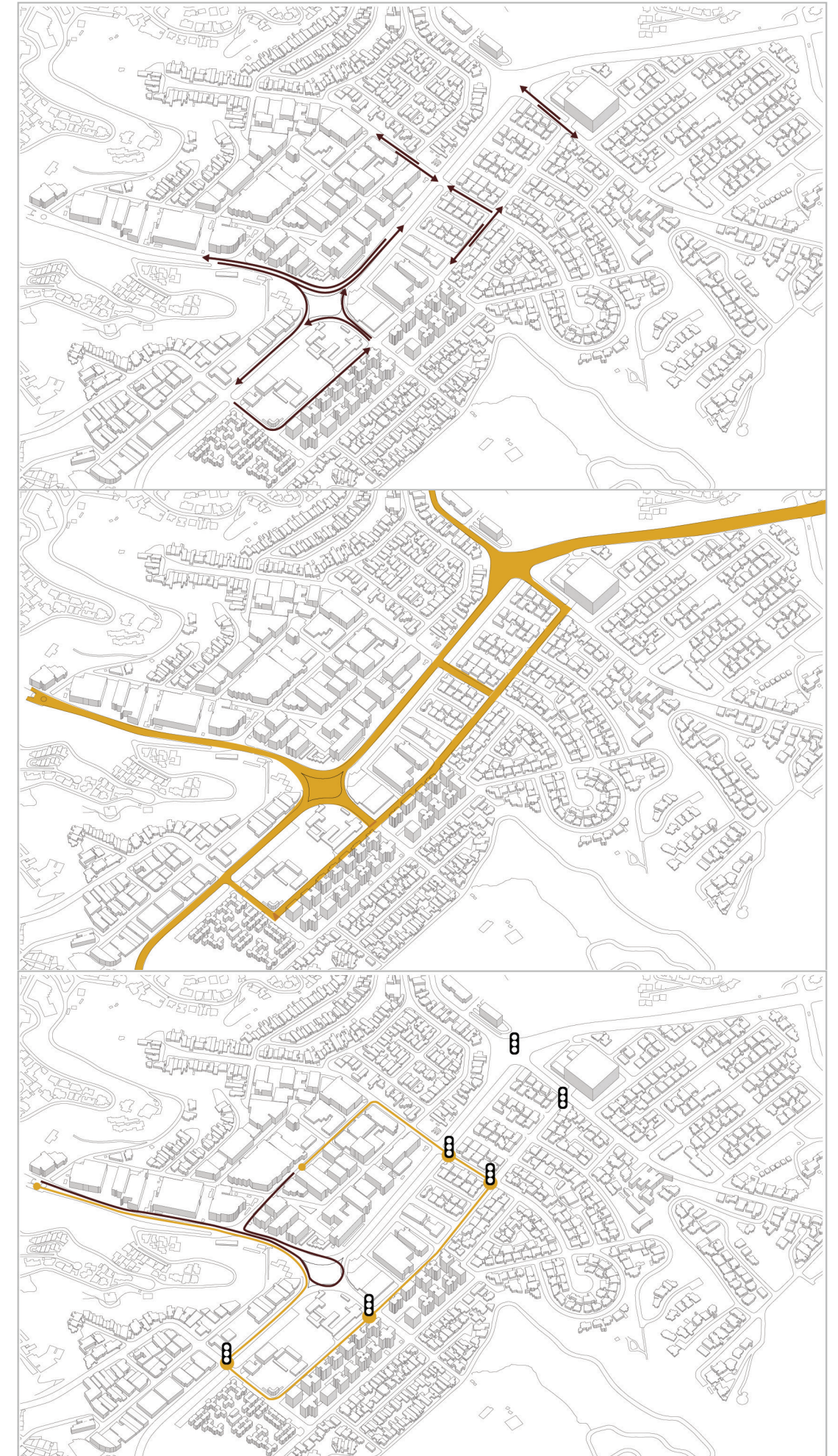
Starting by the most relevant issue that a Highway stops abruptly in a traffic light, the surrounding avenues have directions that doesn't help in creating an easy flow of vehicles, which need to stop many times on the several traffic lights that they face.

Important Avenues Perimeter:

Based on the traffic distributive needs of this centrality, two important avenues surround the plot of intervention, clearly defining its limits based on the priority given to the car

Non-sense Essential Routes:

All the users of the Industrial Zone that came from the Highway need to cross several streets from the southern part in order



Few Amenities = Dependence on other cities:

The evidence lack of public spaces is reduced to the limited use of an Sports Complex, a Heritage site -Secaderos de La Trinidad- and a Mall (which, as expressed before, has been assumed as a public space in dangerous cities like Caracas)

Sub-urban sprawl = segregation

A quick analysis of the current use of land, which hasn't changed that much since the foundation of this satellite city, reveals the absolute lackness of mixed uses, with clear boundaires between industrial, residential and commercial zones.

Multifamiliar vs. unifamiliar

Density in the zone is low due to the reduced presence of multifamily residential units. This is imperative to be solved in order to better activate the potential new public spaces.



Physical Limits=Reduced Connections

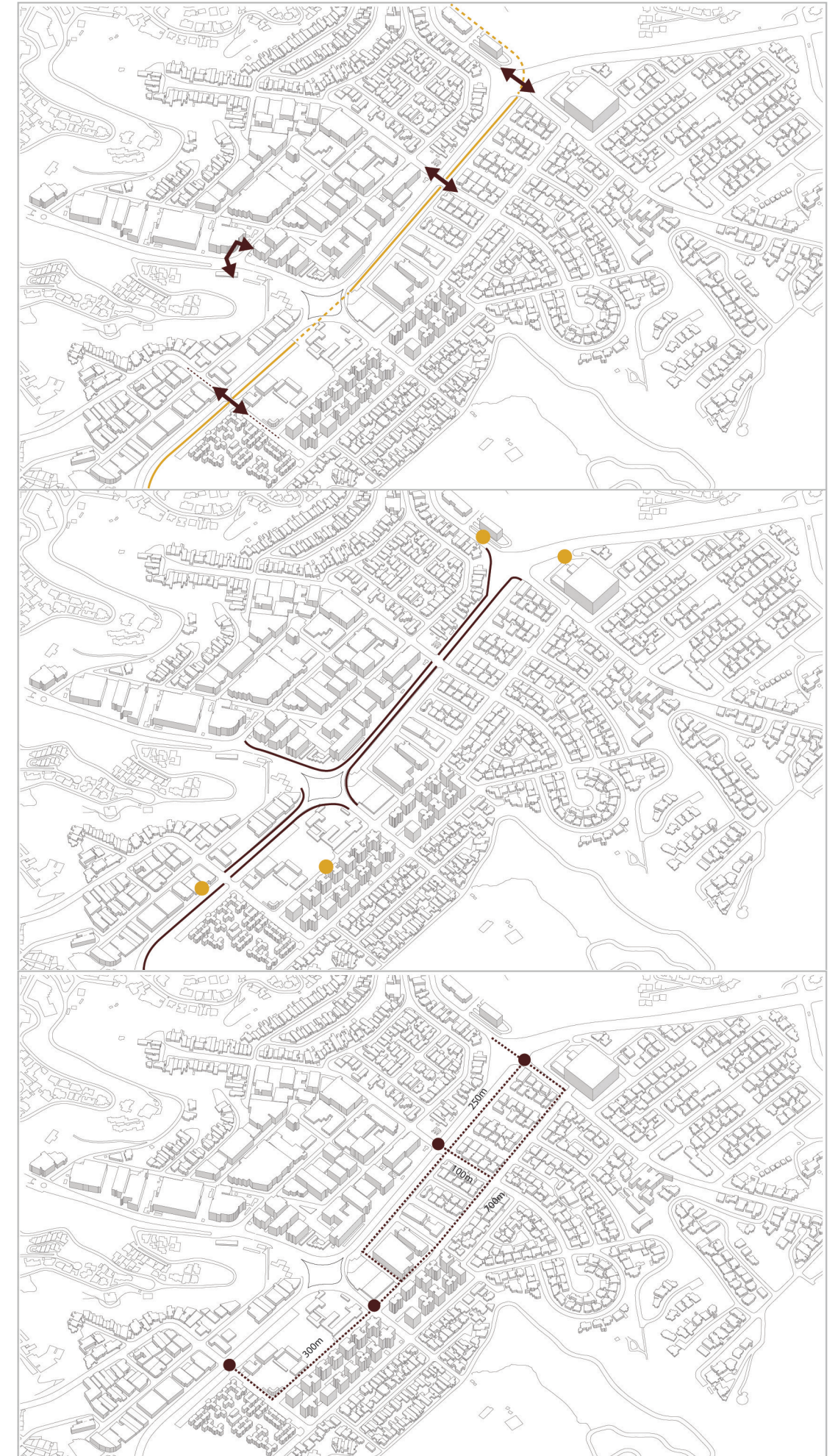
Not only the highway -and the avenues- complicated a proper pedestrians connections with all the zones of La Trinidad, but also the River is an element that need to be surpassed (confronting all the problems that represent a waterstrem in the history of Caracas)

Inappropriate Sidewalks

In crucial zones where walking cannot be avoided, precarious conditions can be found in the existing sidewalks, and even worse, at some spots where its neccesity is undeniable, sidewalks are inexistent.

Walkable distances

A 1 Kilometre length plot represents an ideal opportunity that doesn't signifies a challenge for whoever wants to enjoy or cross the whole project.

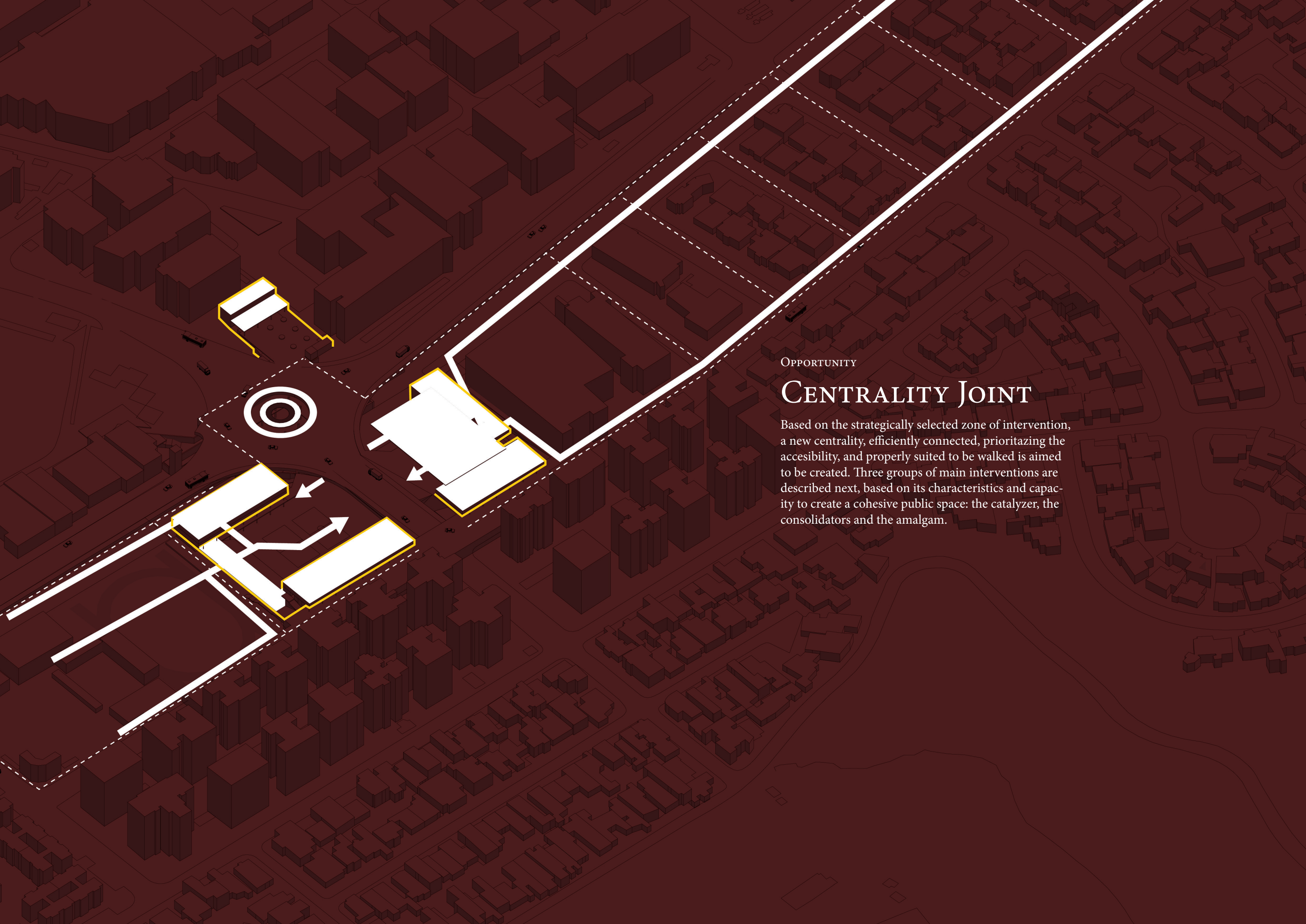




Selected area of intervention



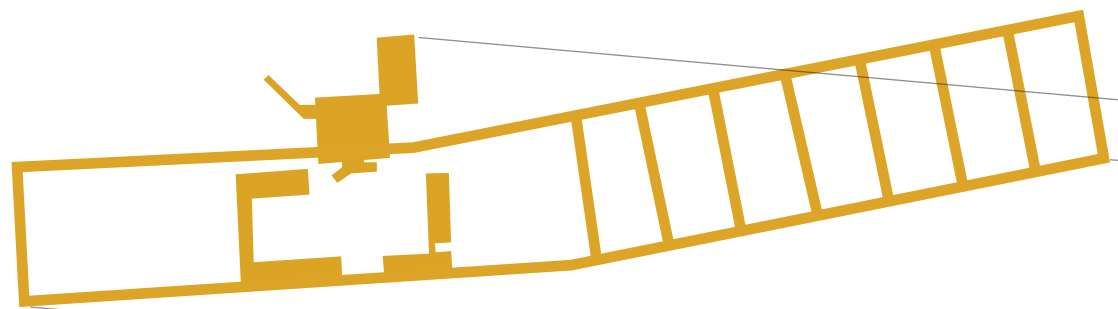




OPPORTUNITY

CENTRALITY JOINT

Based on the strategically selected zone of intervention, a new centrality, efficiently connected, prioritizing the accesibility, and properly suited to be walked is aimed to be created. Three groups of main interventions are described next, based on its characteristics and capacity to create a cohesive public space: the catalyzer, the consolidators and the amalgam.



MASTERPLAN



The Metro Station, a massive transportation that will make more accessible La Trinidad is The Catalizer of the project.

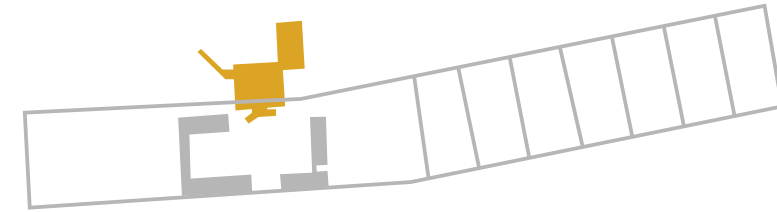


Strategically providing convenient public spaces for the upcoming masses of visitors, commuters and workers, a set of consolidator buildings define the perimeter of the “new centrality”.



A 1 Kilometre green boulevard, accompanied with renovated streets that assure enjoyable paths for pedestrians, clearly define the limits of this urban intervention and “amalgam” the node.

THE CATALIZER

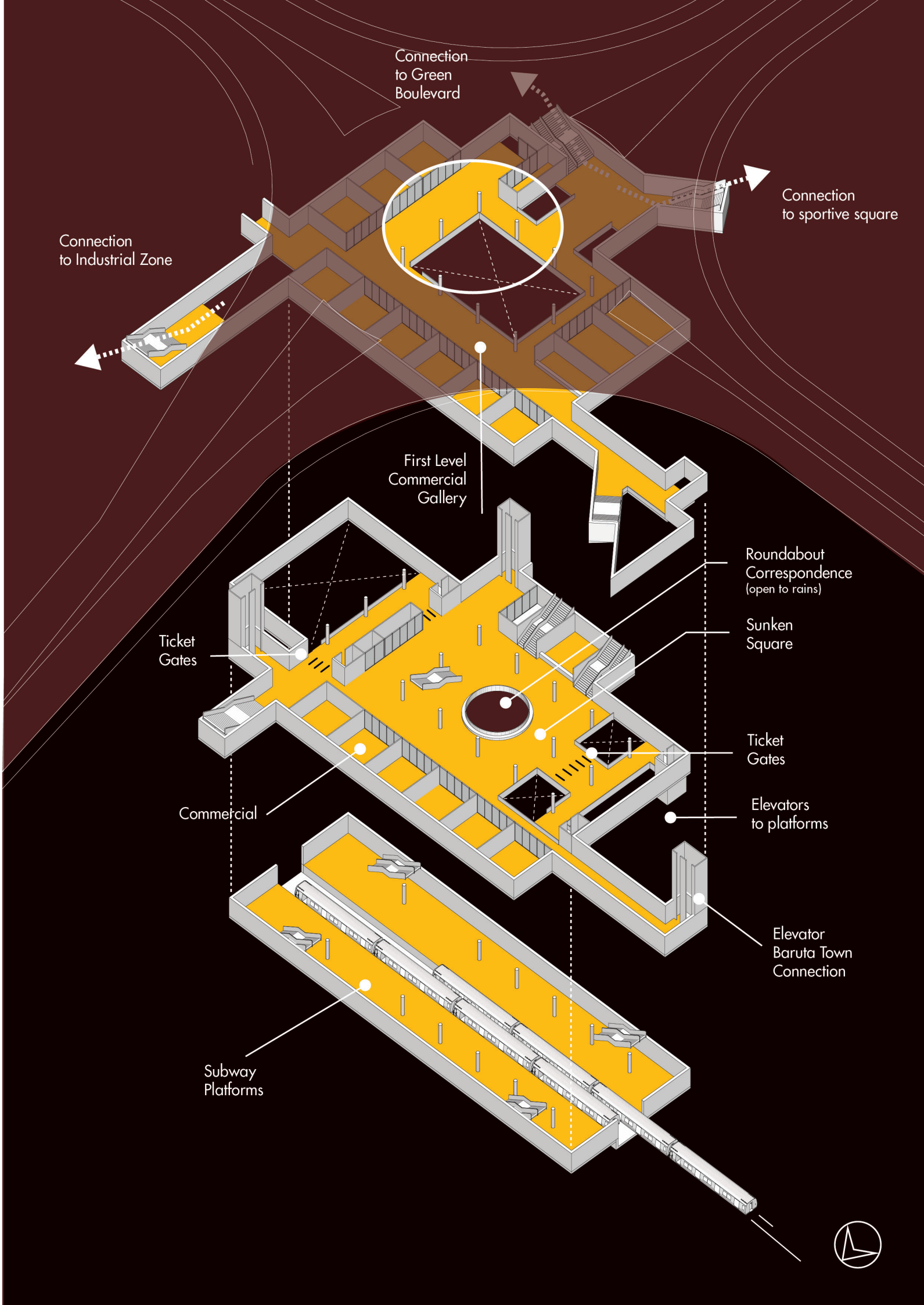


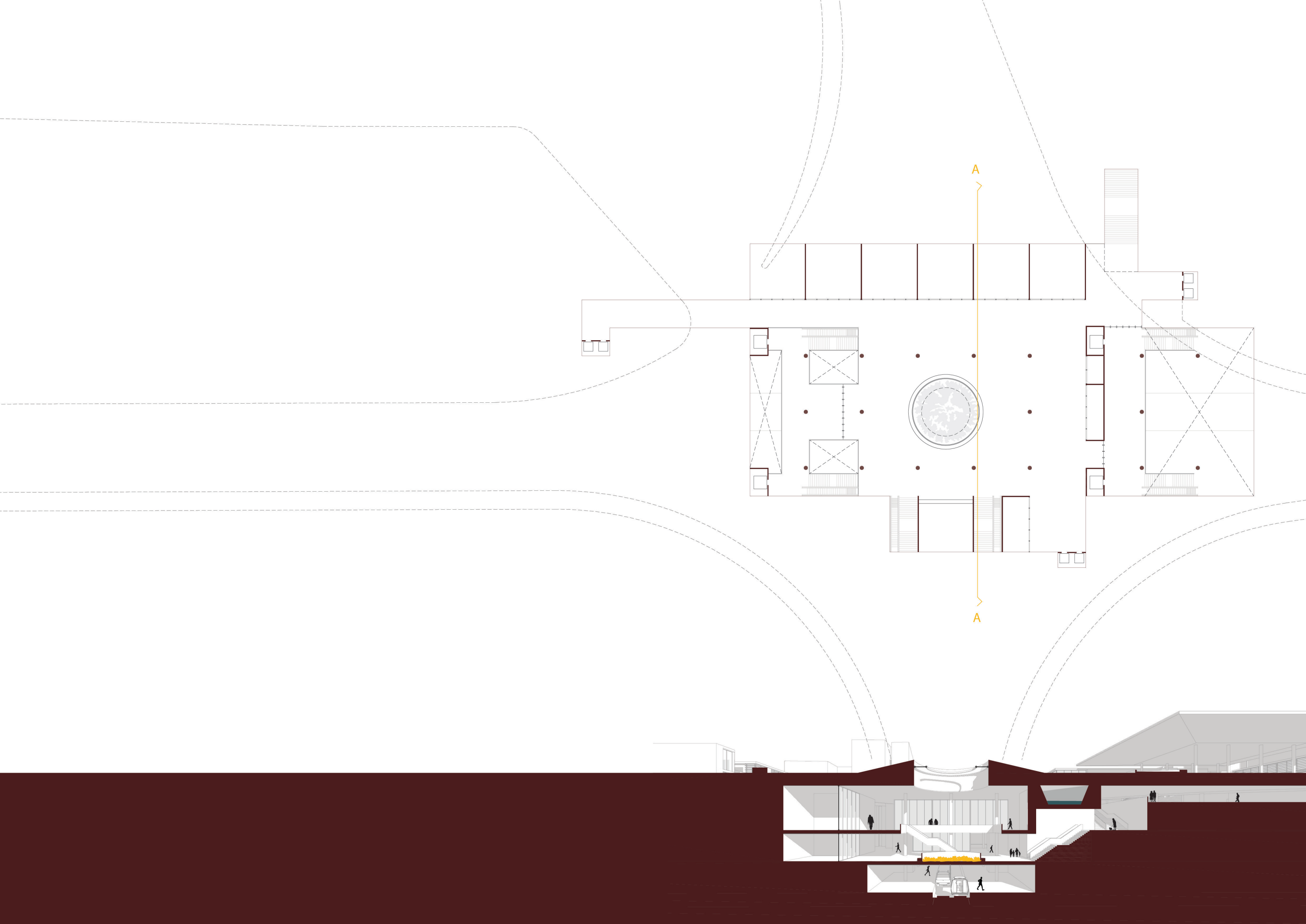
Many geographical, political, and infrastructural circumstances transformed La Trinidad into a relevant centrality. The upcoming Metro Station -announced by the central government at the beginning of the millennia- should serve as a starting point for uncountable interactions that will activate this depressed and disconnected zone. Workers, visitors, family groups, athletes, residents and more will be constantly using this relevant infrastructure. The presence of these several type of daily users should be confronted by assuring the proper connections with the adjacencies -three currently separated zones- providing quality public spaces that accompany the centralized station.

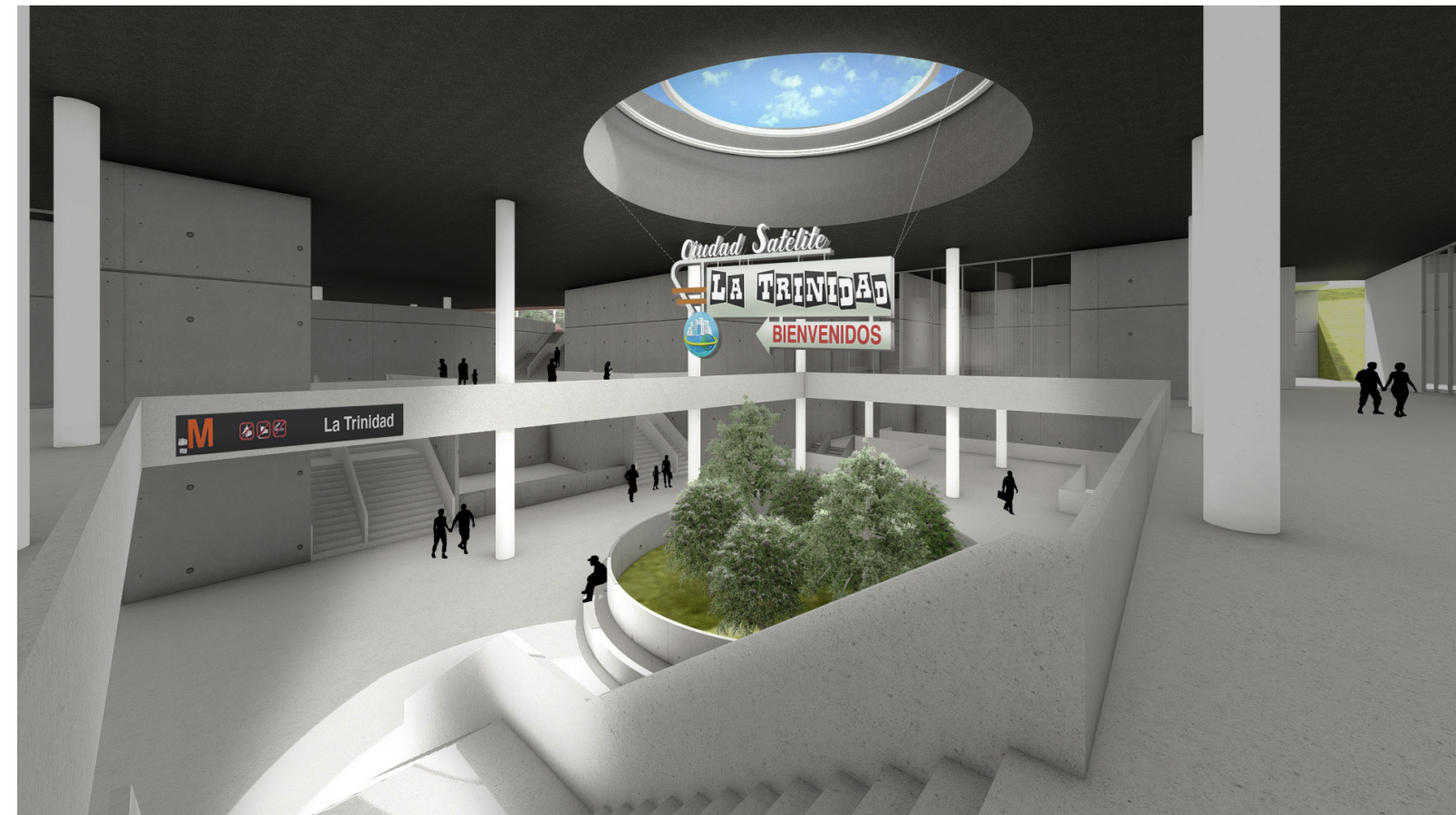
The architectural strategy combines the knowledge of the “tropical” metro stations developed in the 70’s -which take advantage of the climate and provide spaces that doesn’t necessarily feel like traditional underground passages- and the particularities of the roundabout that is specifically located over the open station. Additionally, a commercial perimeter is proposed in order create an enjoyable open crossing path, which avoids the necessity of constructing the typical pedestrian bridges that are usually very hostile, encouraging no one to use them, and creating uncomfortable yet dangerous situations while crossing the streets. In the end, this main architectural intervention will serve as a portal that welcomes pedestrians to both enjoy La Trinidad, and to use it as a connector to Caracas’ downtown.



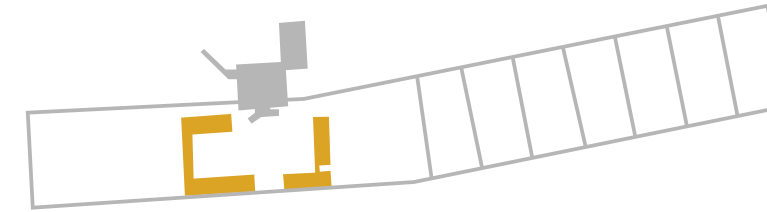
LA TRINIDAD
METRO STATION







THE CONSOLIDATORS

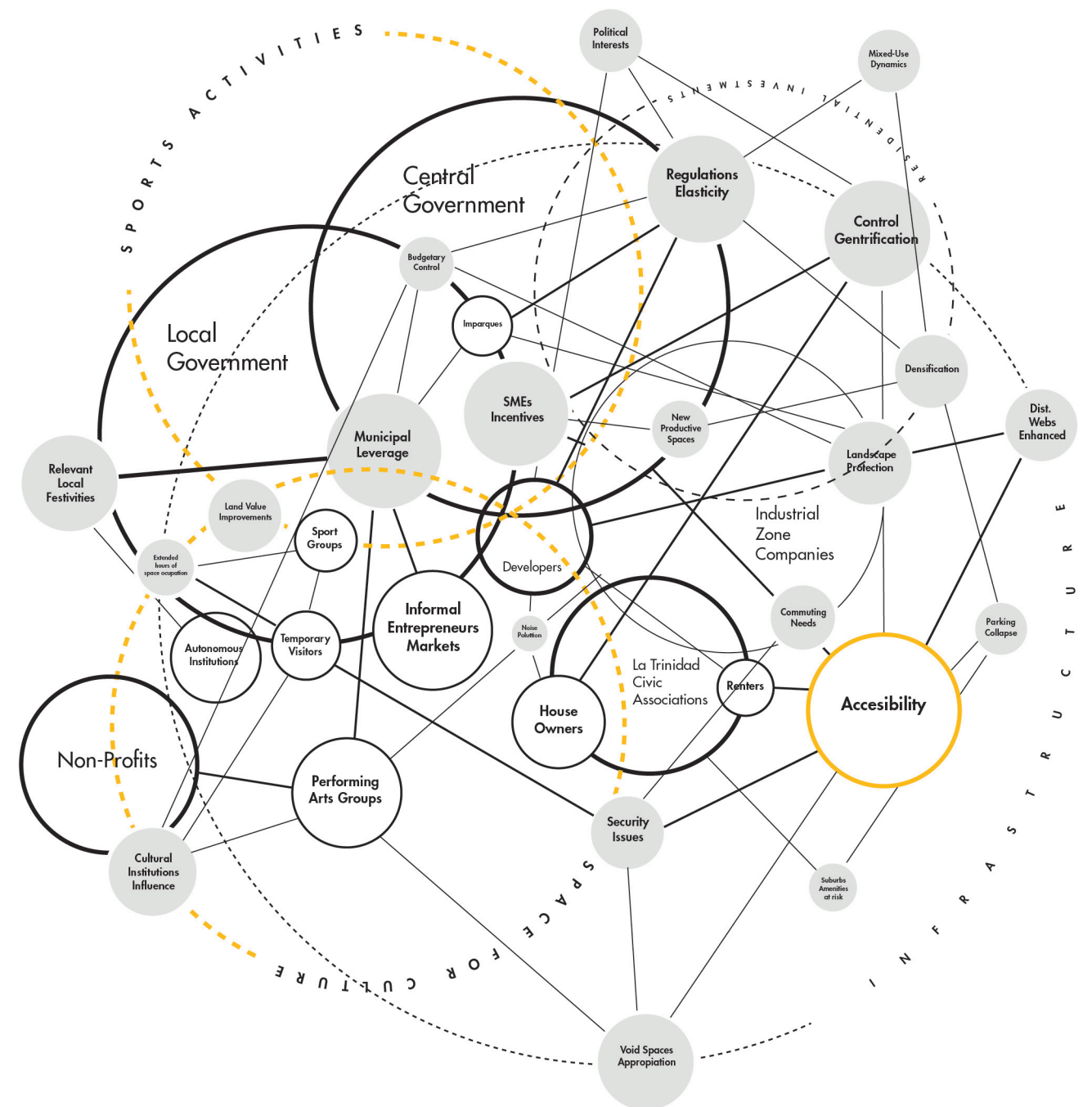


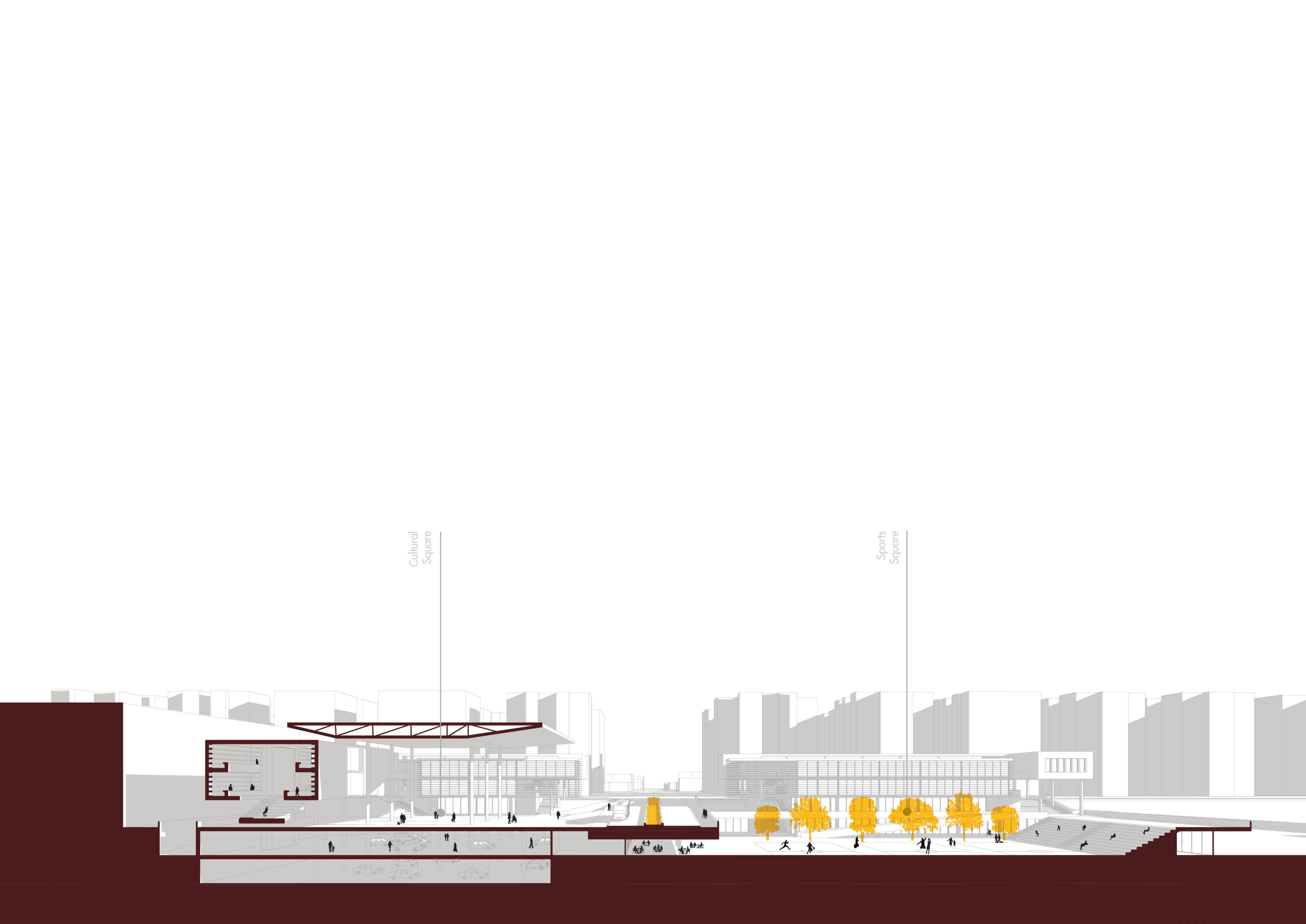
Public spaces cannot be declared, neither their efficiency. But providing the right spatial conditions, the opportunities to be used in very diverse ways and –of course- developing the circumstances to be commercially effective, can be the starting point for new consolidated public spaces. These spaces are projected understanding the priority of a proper walkable circulation within them, and assuring an easy flow of people through the several uses of the open spaces, the perimeter and the green stripe.

As a way of strengthening these open spaces that accompany the new metro station, a set of surrounding buildings are proposed to fulfil the very heterogeneous needs defined by surveying the zone. Commercial, sportive, and cultural activities would conform the ideal scenario in this city node. Following the route of the visitors and commuters, a commercial gallery activates the walkable perimeters of the squares. Furthermore, a prioritization of the relevant interactions that had helped the creation of La Trinidad communities -like the ones developed on the Sports Complex- are taken in count. Finally, the remoteness of proper spaces for the culture -for instance, the closest public library is about 10Km away, with a very reduced capacity-, was a milestone in proposing the new public library of La Trinidad.

- A Matrix containing the stakeholders, intentions, potential conflicts and level of dependence define the spatial opportunities, and directly affect the strategies that pretend to "solve" as many probable disagreements, disputes or tension that detract the original objectives of the resultant urban intervention. The proposed "Consolidator" interventions are the result of analysing the evident and non-evident connections between the actors and their actual purposes, leverage and range of negotiations.

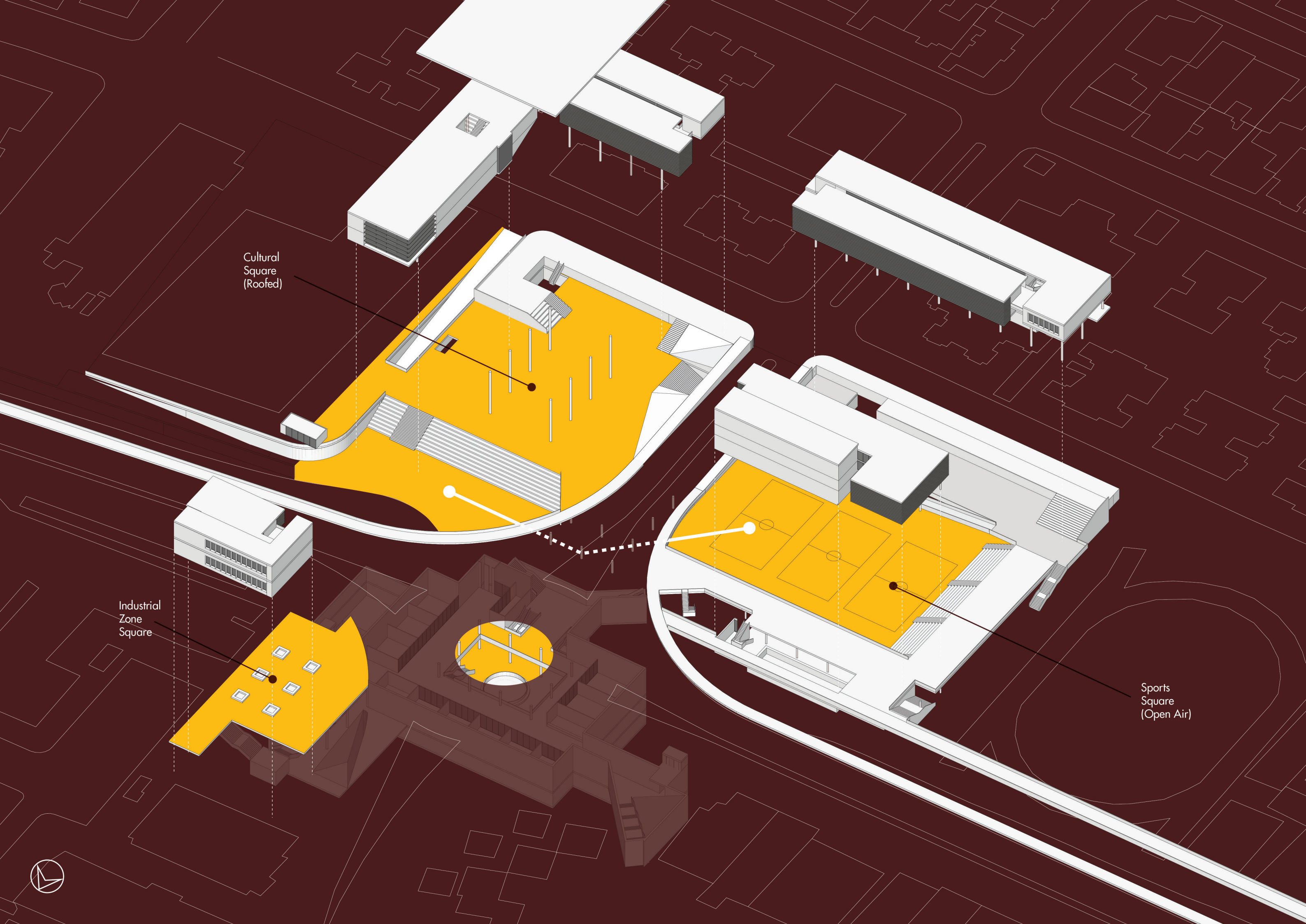
- Stakeholders/actors
- - - Spatial Influence
- Consequences/tension
- Level of Relationship
- - - Bonding Interventions





Cultural
Square

Sports
Square



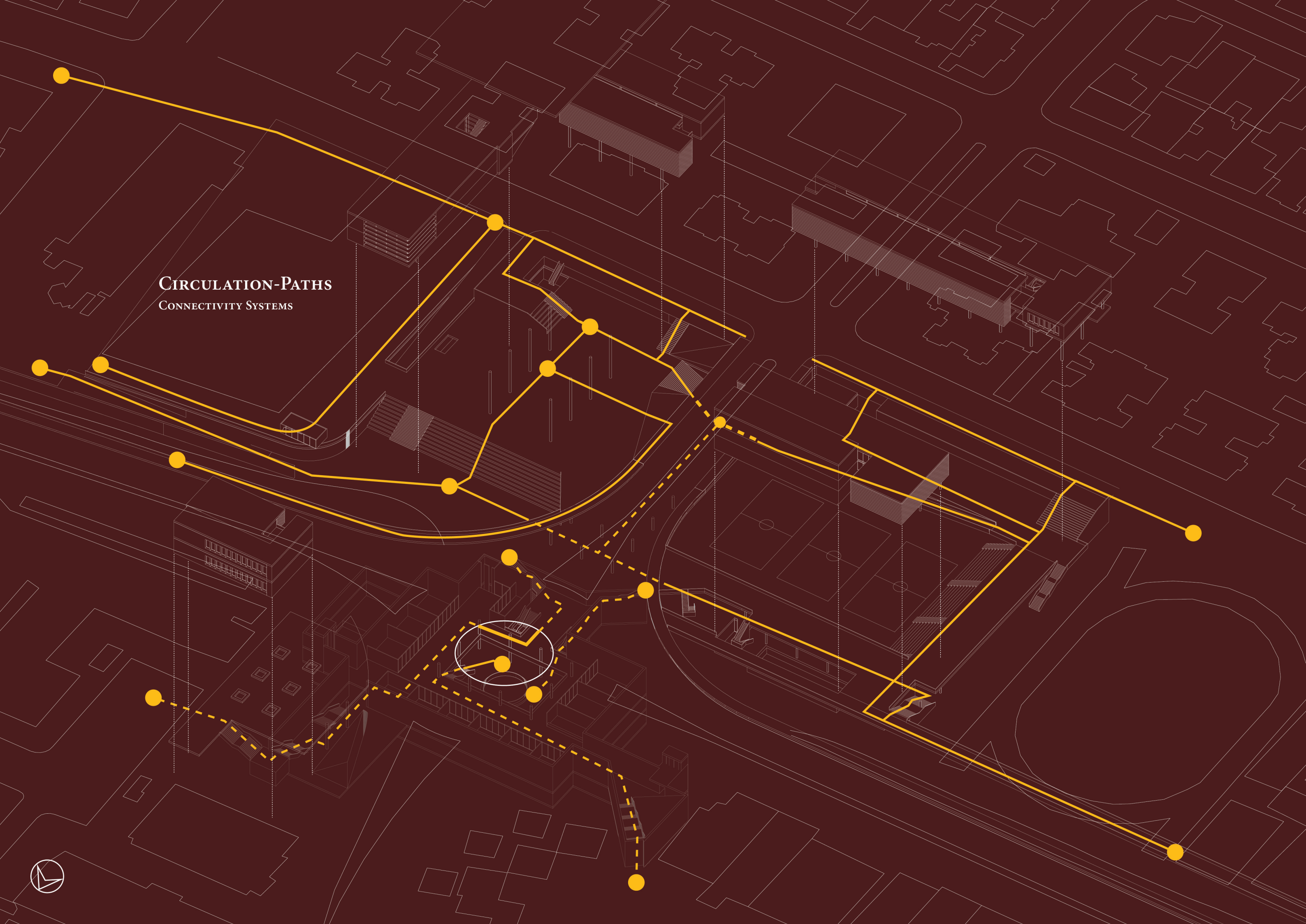
Cultural
Square
(Roofed)

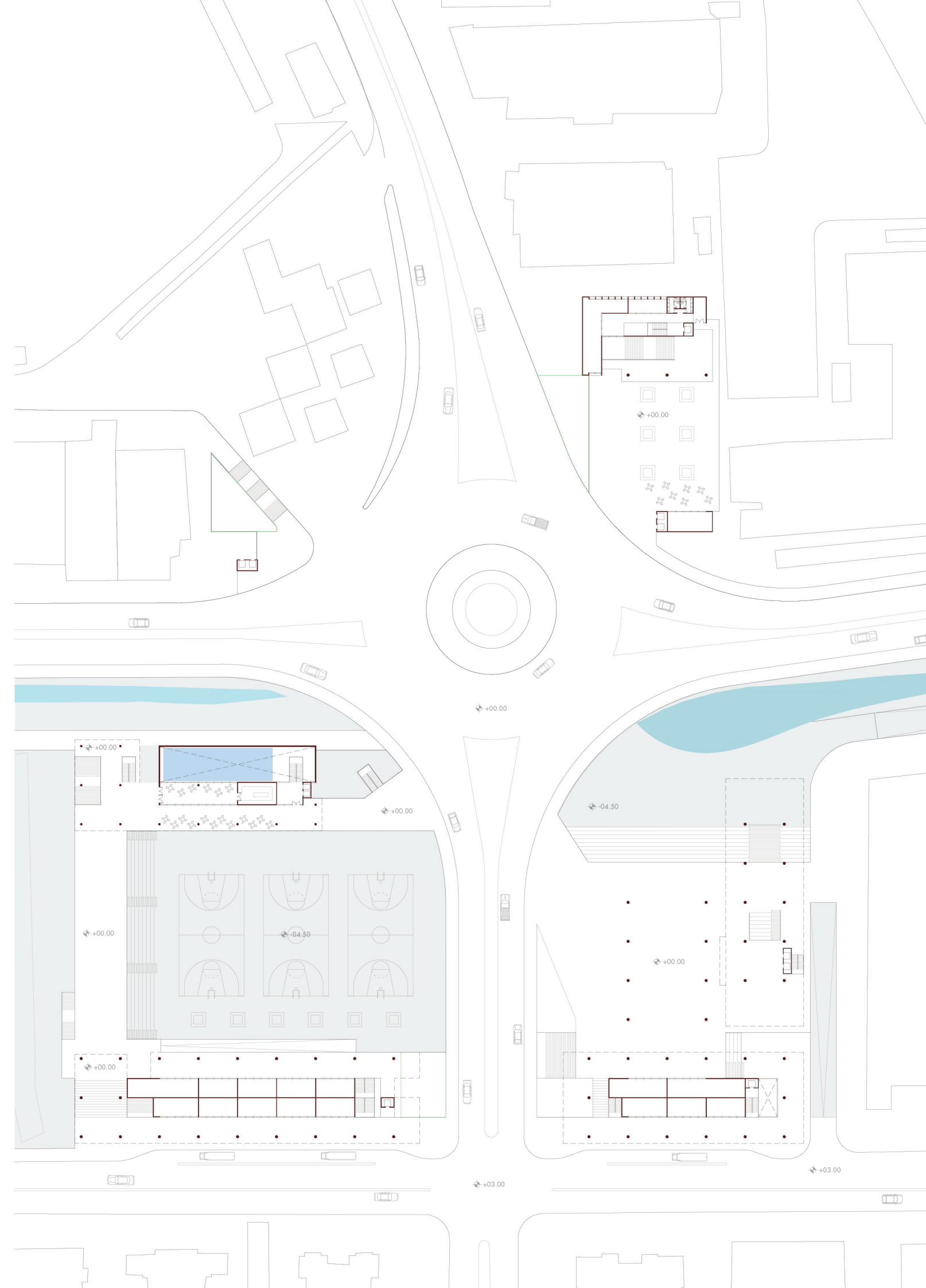
Industrial
Zone
Square

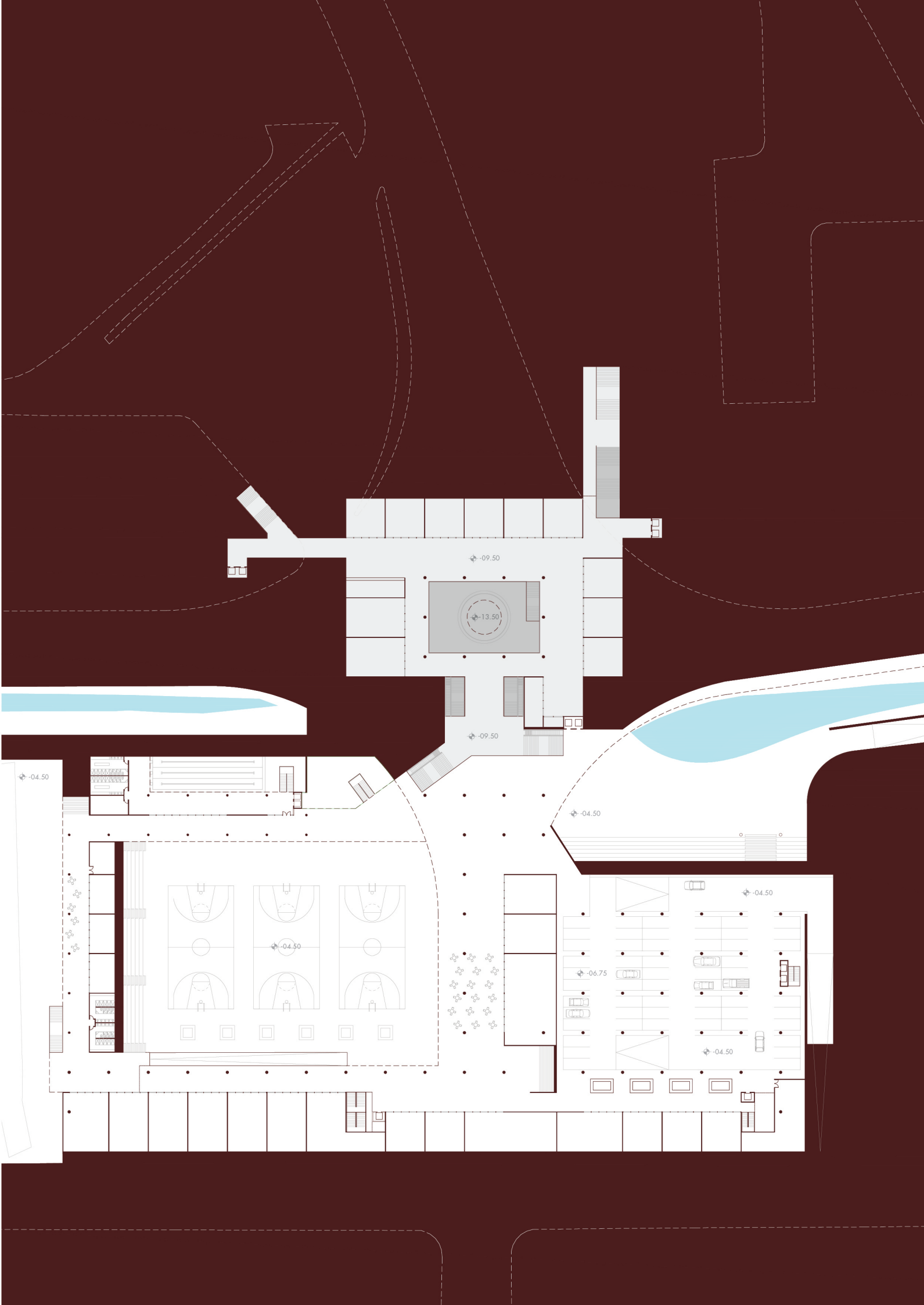
Sports
Square
(Open Air)



CIRCULATION-PATHS
CONNECTIVITY SYSTEMS





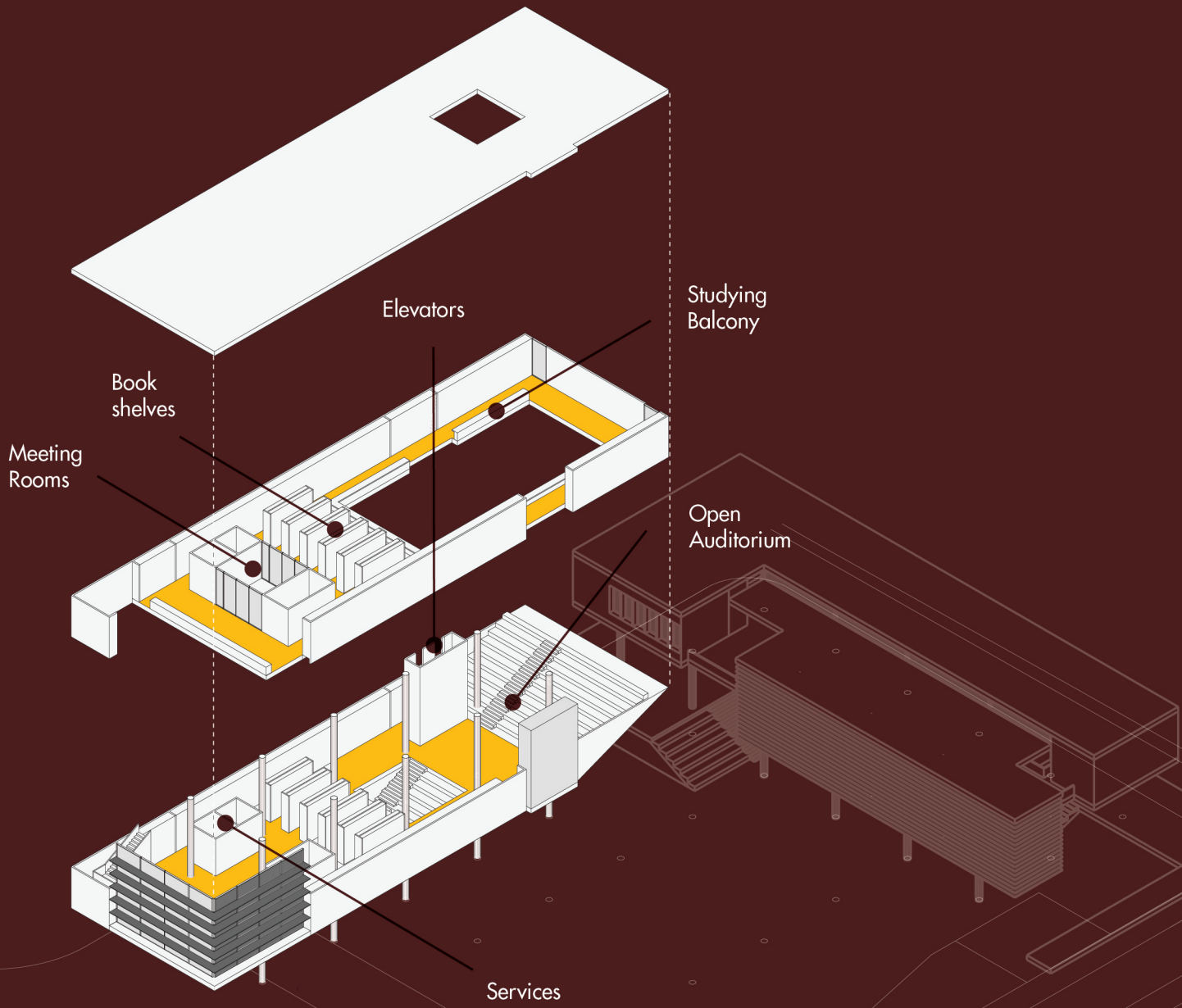


“

In both the past and the present, public spaces have been privileged sites for the enactment and contestation of various instances on Democracy and citizenship in the public sphere (...) Public Space dynamics also provide ways in which to gauge analyse and document the value structures that lie at the core of particular societies and cultures”. Clara Irazabal

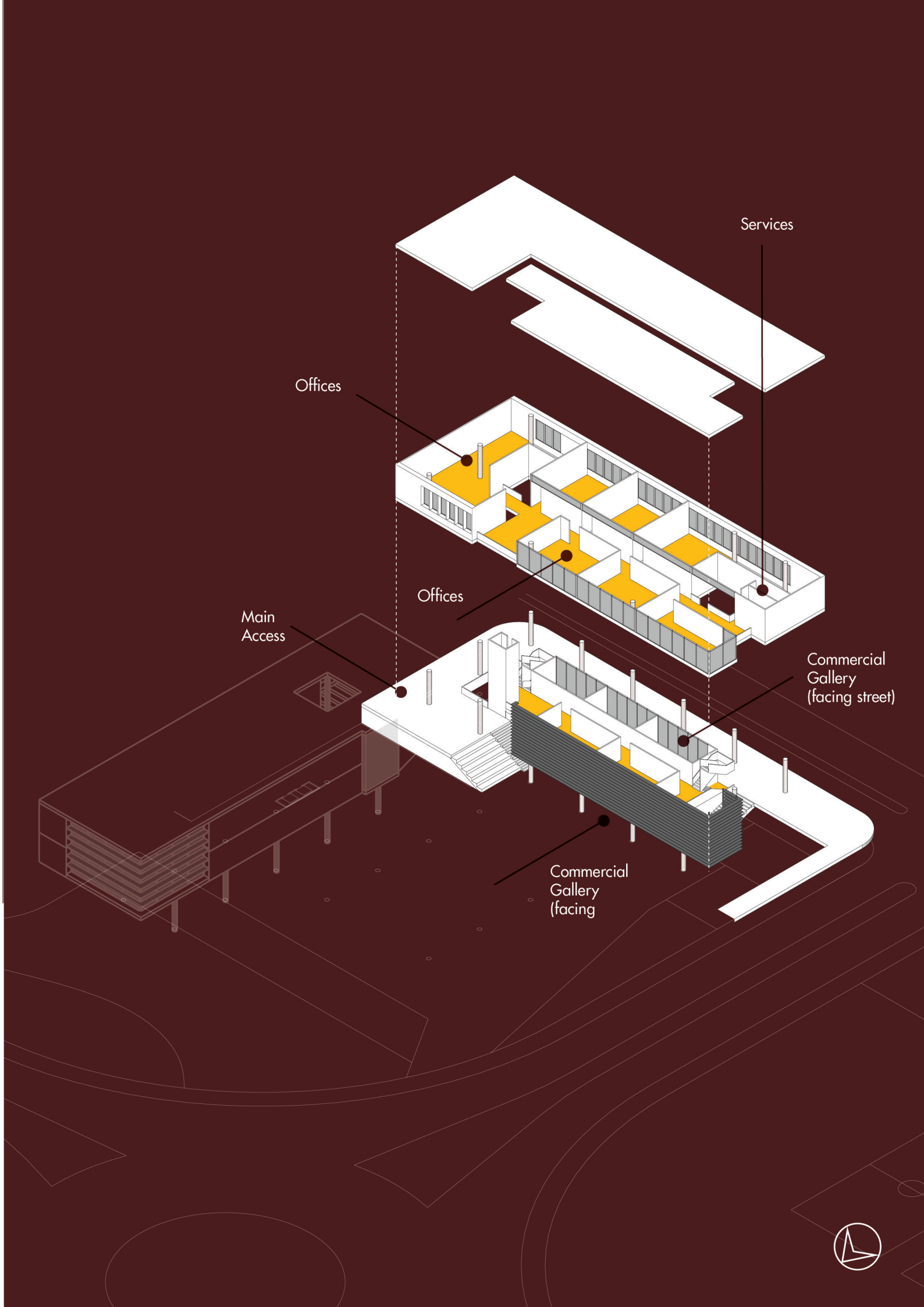


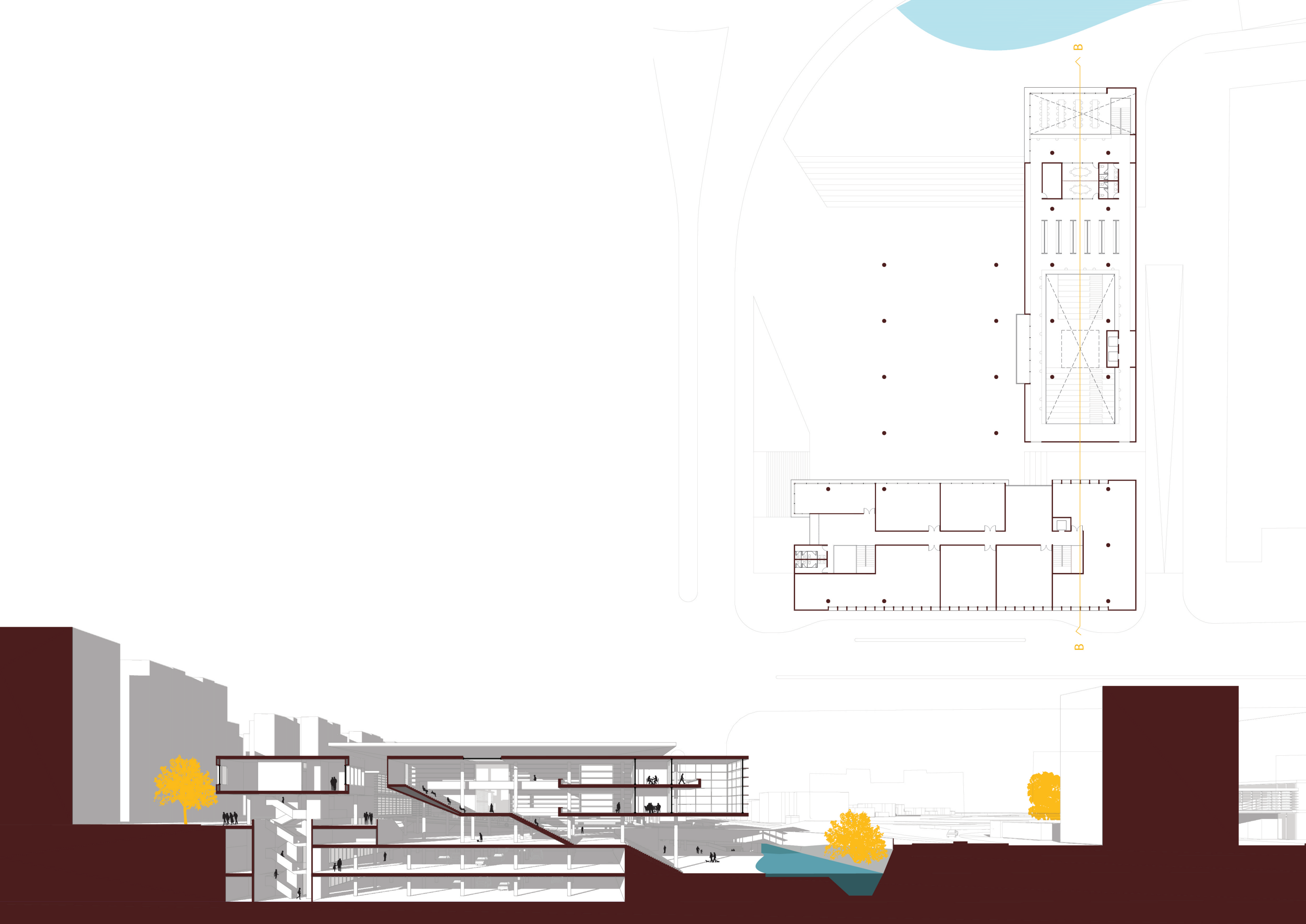
LA TRINIDAD
PUBLIC LIBRARY

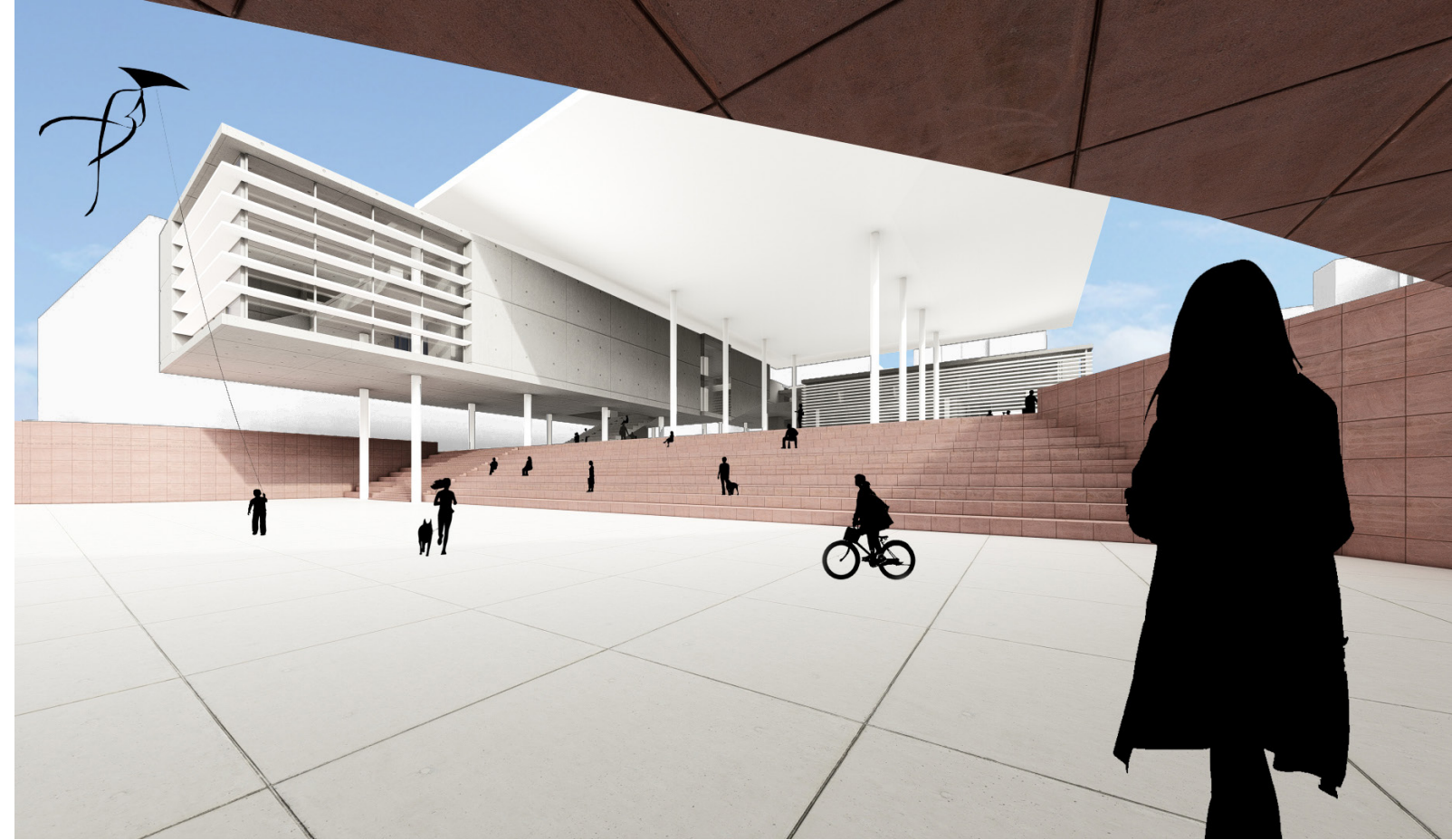




COMMERCIAL/OFFICE
BUILDING A





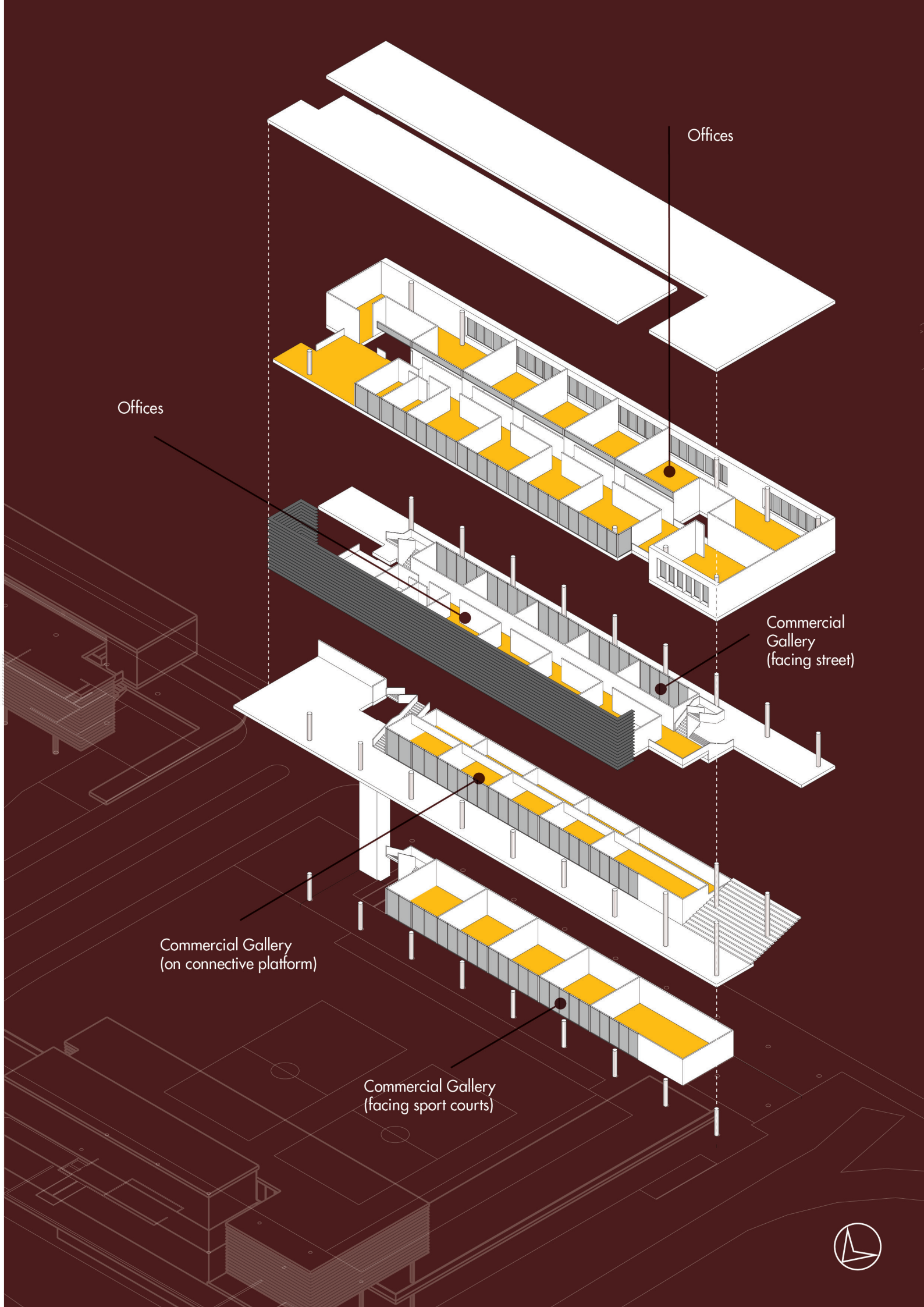


“

“One way of measuring social equity is access to education. It is a well-accepted fact that if children do not get education early on in life, in a safe environment and in close proximity to their home, they lose out on the benefits that a society might be able to offer. Discussing transport as a means to access education is a proxy for talking about social integration. If one takes education levels of the population in different parts of the city, the quality of education utterly correlates to the with the availability of and accessibility to transit facilities, whether a subway, bus rapid transit system, or bicycle network. In other words, the better the infrastructure, the higher the education levels”. Ricky Burdett

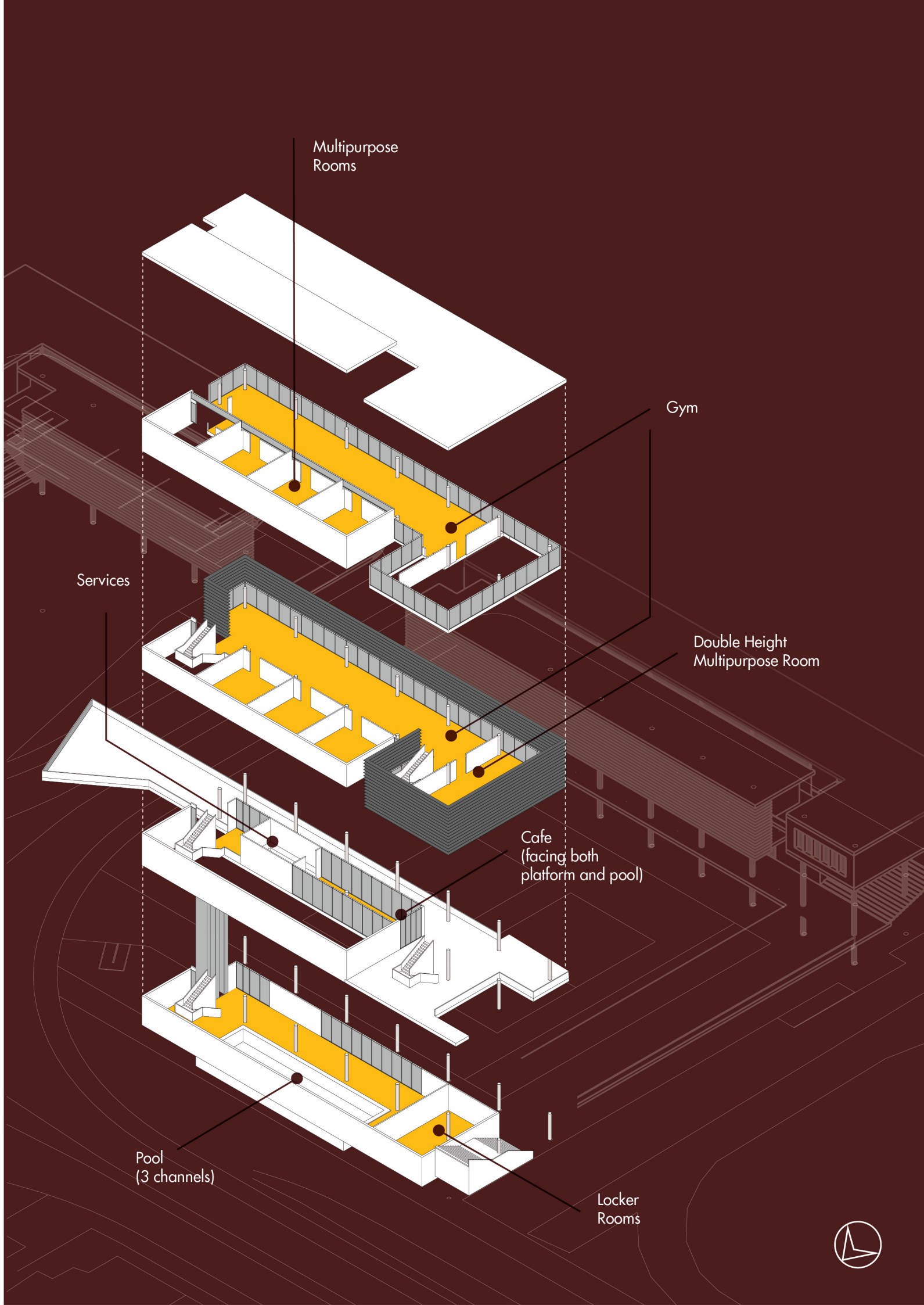


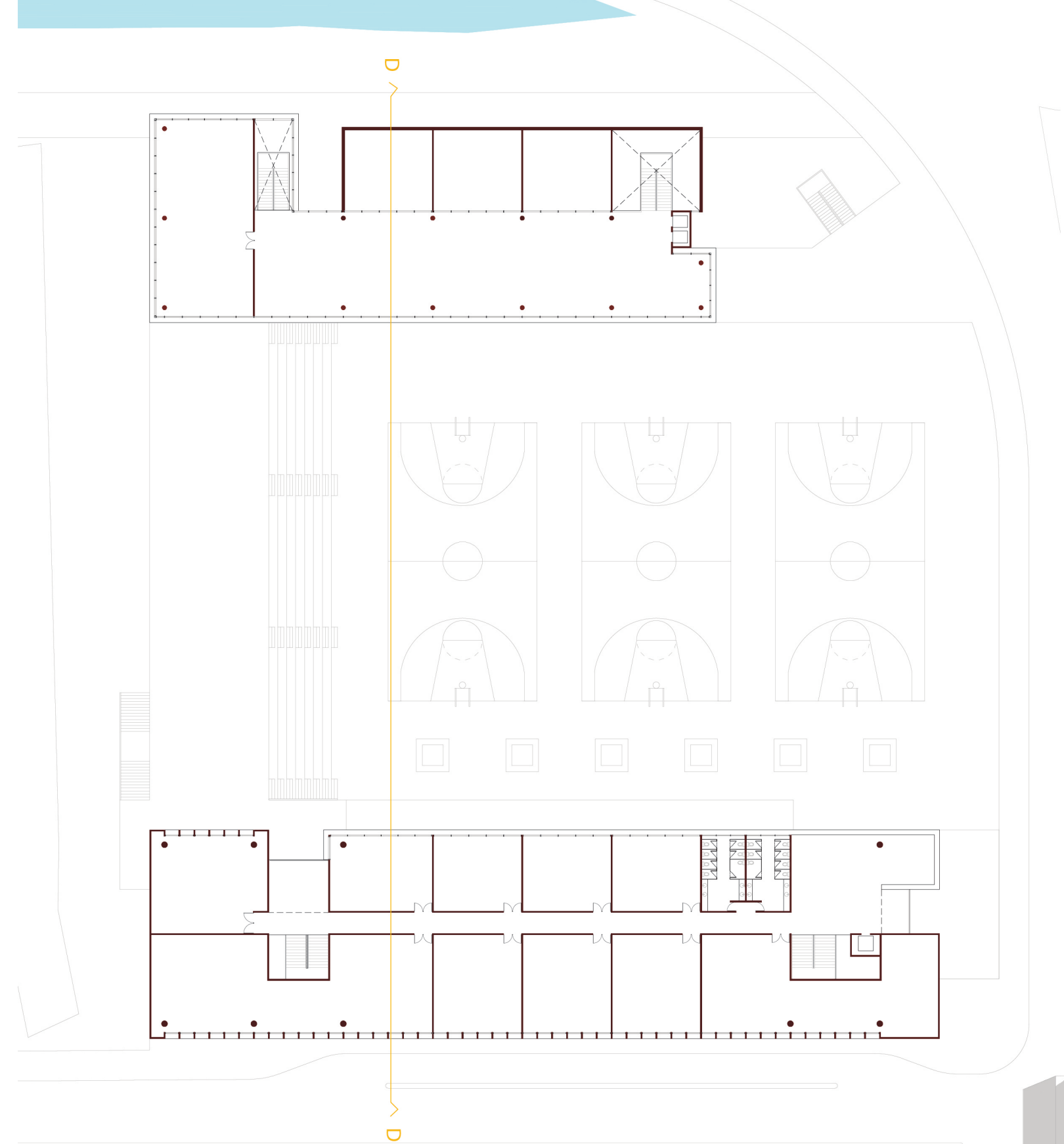
COMMERCIAL/OFFICE
BUILDING A

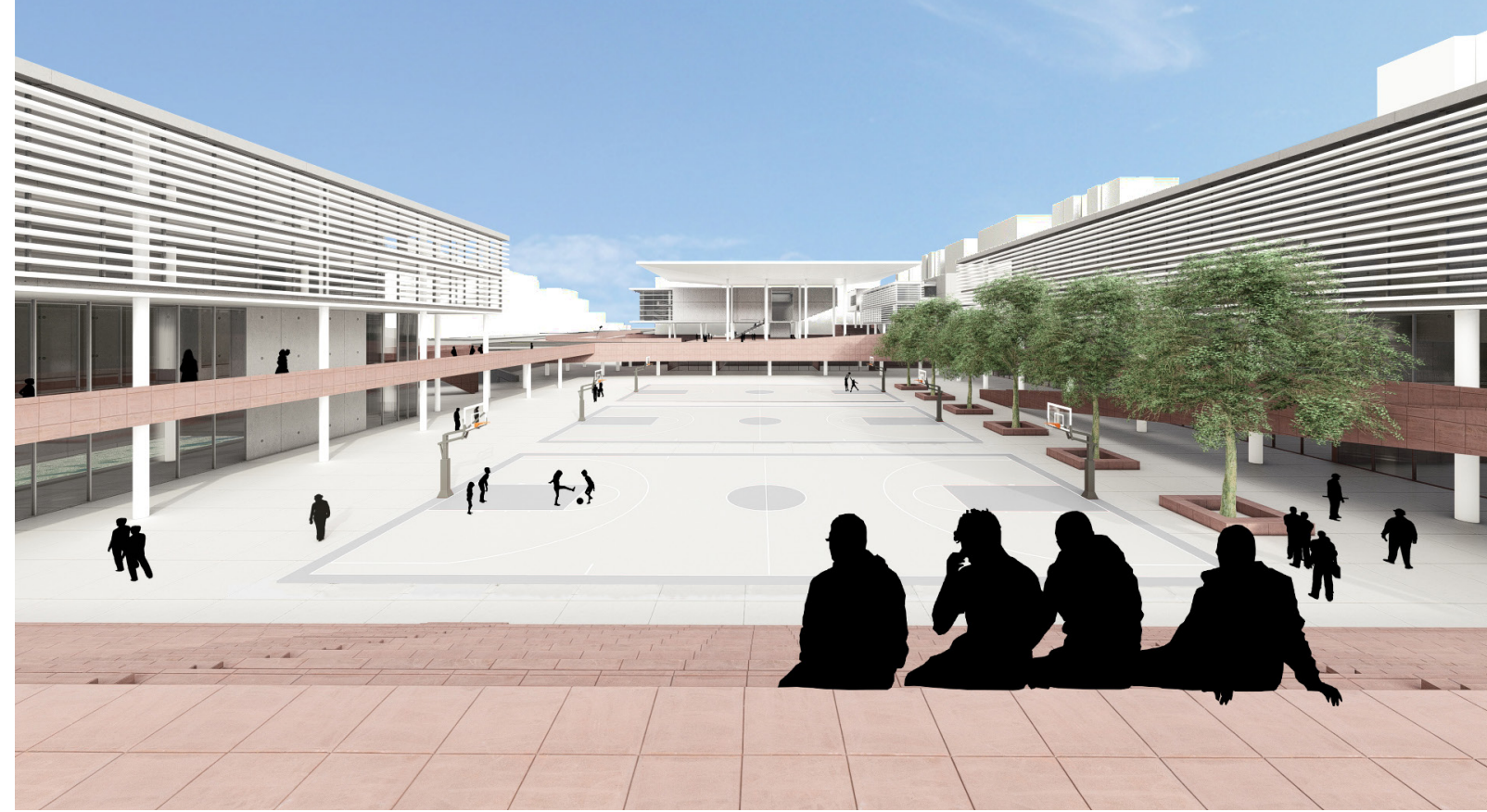




SPORTS COMPLEX
COMPLEMENTARY
BUILDING

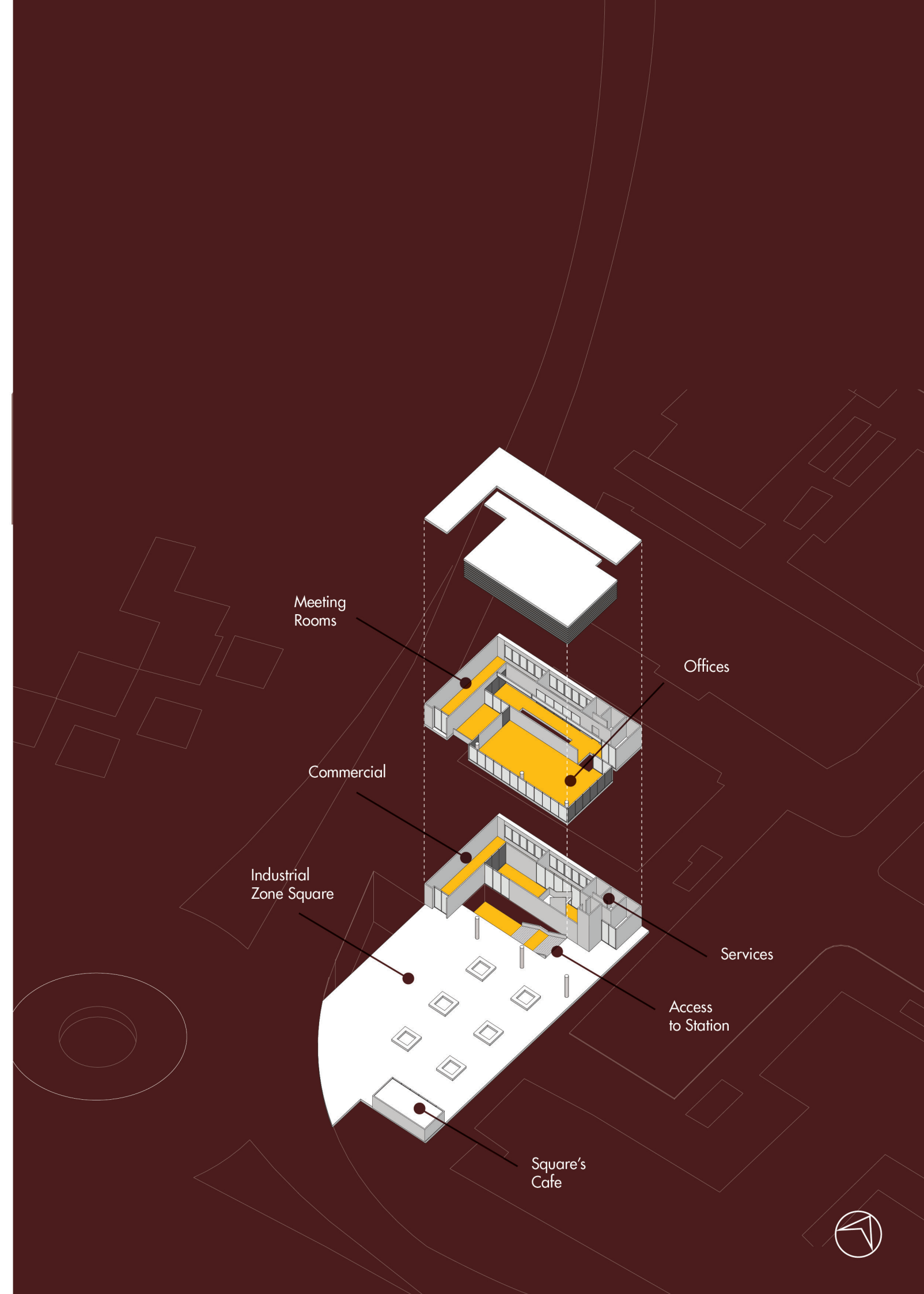


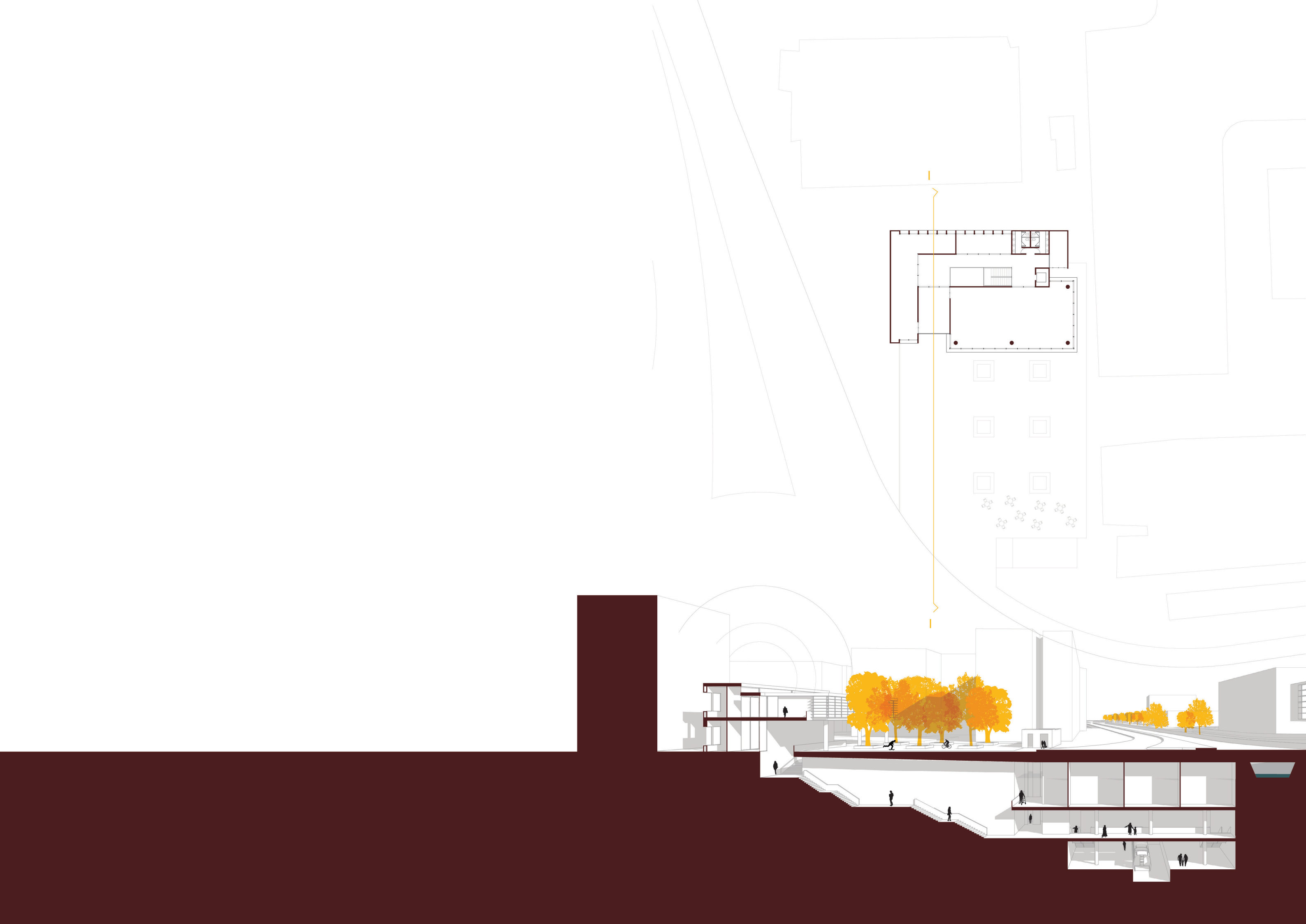






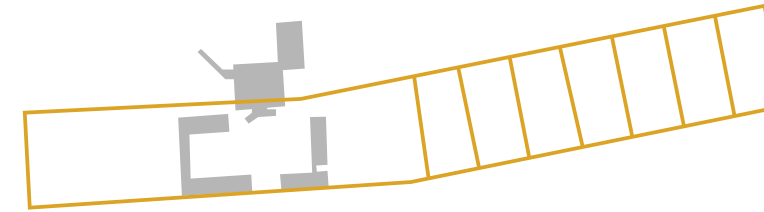
INDUSTRIAL ZONE CONNECTING SQUARE





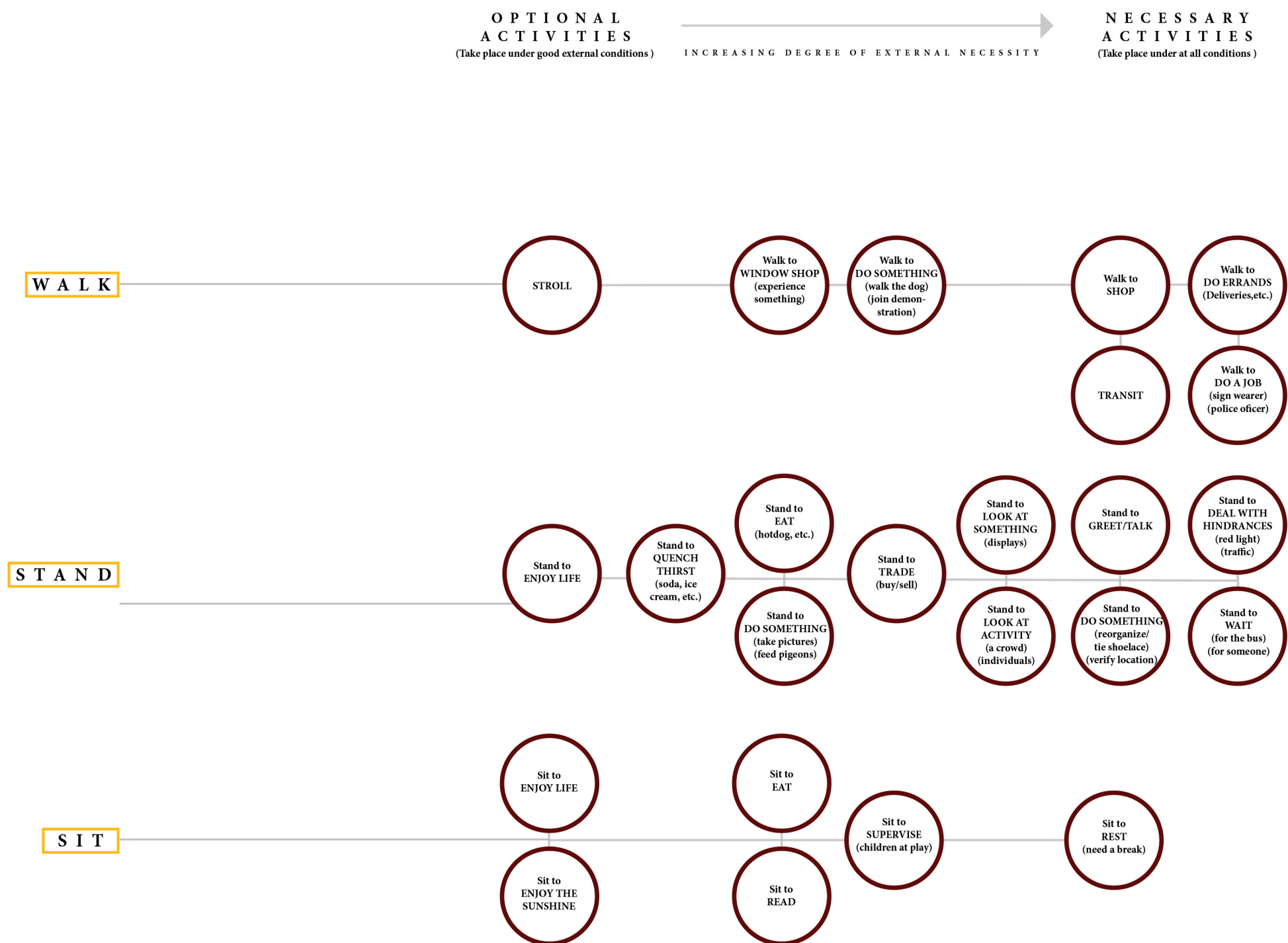


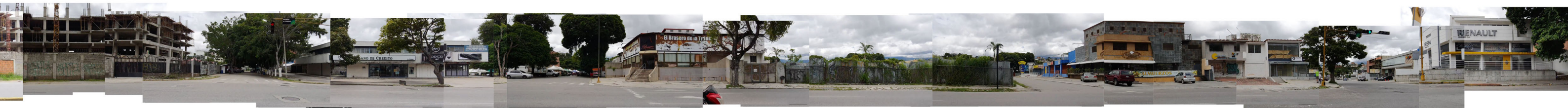
THE ALMAGAM



The presence of big groups of walking people arriving through the metro station encourages drastic changes in the former prioritization of the vehicle in La Trinidad. Restricted circulation areas are delimited, where streets are accommodated to give pedestrians the capacity of fulfilling, as studied by Jan Gehl, “optional and necessary activities” by walking, standing and seating. A relevant opportunity in the potential quality of these walkable spaces is the presence of an ignored natural limit: a river.

This city presents a particular aesthetic and morphological situation which challenges the capacity of unifying and finally amalgamate the whole 1 Kilometre stripe where the project is developed. Understanding the essence behind successful strategies of bonding like the porticoes in Bologna, or the covered path in Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, serve as an example on strategies that allow heterogeneity without compromising the expected continuity.





XX. A visual survey of the limits in the selected plot reveal an heterogeneity that challenges the traditional criteria of unifying morphologically or aesthetically the components of the same "space".





CATALOGUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

The diversity and extension of the project lot demand an scalable implementation of strategies, accepting diversity of styles and program, all searching to create the sense of continuity.

Three areas of intervention are confronted, providing simplistic catalogue of potential relationships that construct quality spaces and define the constrains of the project: the limit with La Guairita Brook, the limit with the southern street -Av. Principal de La Trinidad-, and the potential interstices that help to avoid paths of around a hundred meters with few spatial interruptions -or spaces of interest-.

WITH RIVER
(GREEN BOULEVARD)

WITH INTERSTICES
(CROSSINGS AND PERMANENCES)

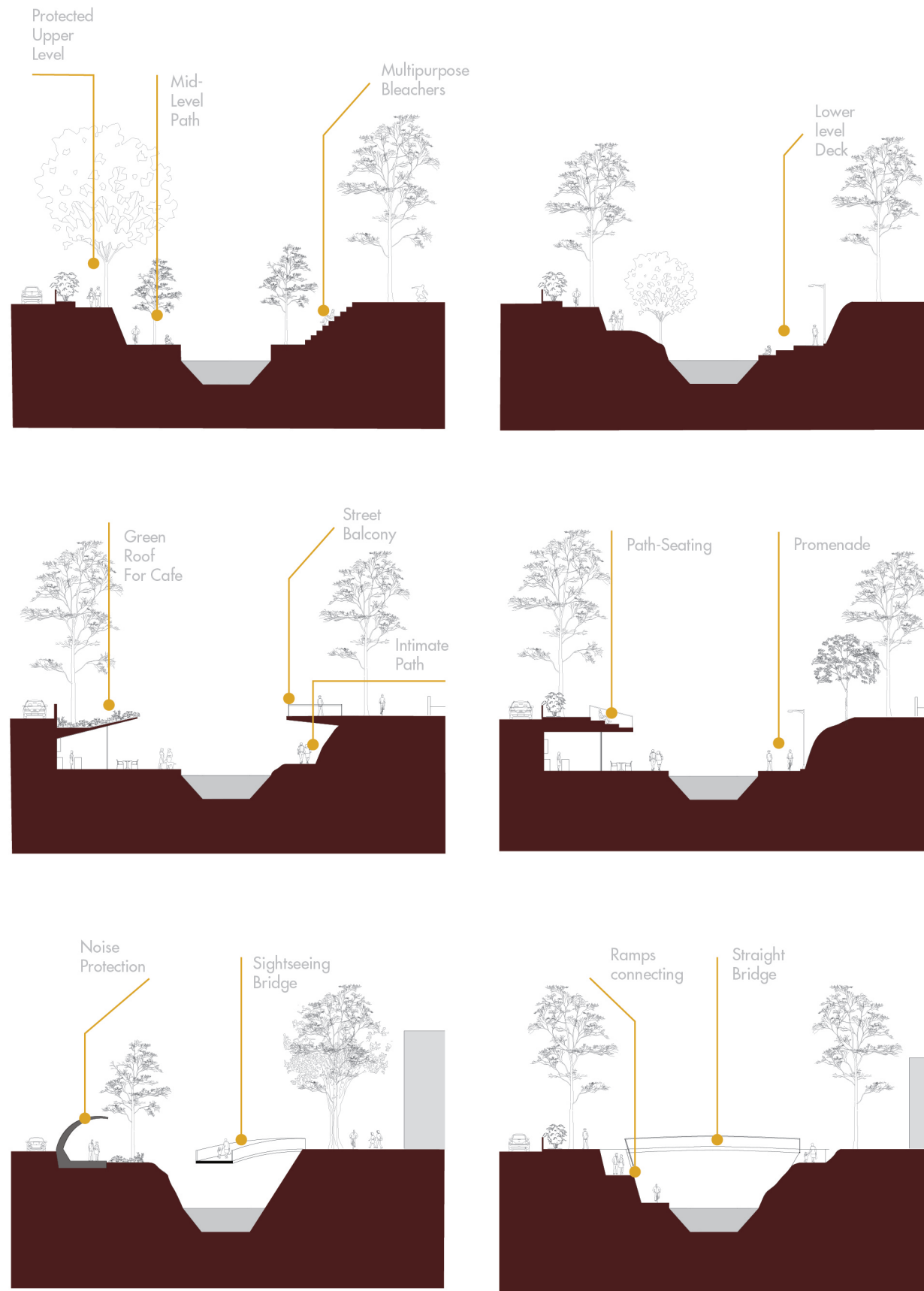
WITH STREET
(AV. PRINCIPAL DE LA TRINIDAD)

“

It is not such a matter of protection (against whom/what) or preservation (of what?), as of identification of what exists (beyond any merely aesthetic or ecological appreciation), which binds to our love and awareness for objects, people, places and gives rise to the need to act in view of ensuring the sustainable preservation of a given resource”. Laura Sasso

LA CONTINUITÀ E LO SPECCHIO:

DESIGNING ARCHITECTURES AND RIVER LANDSCAPES

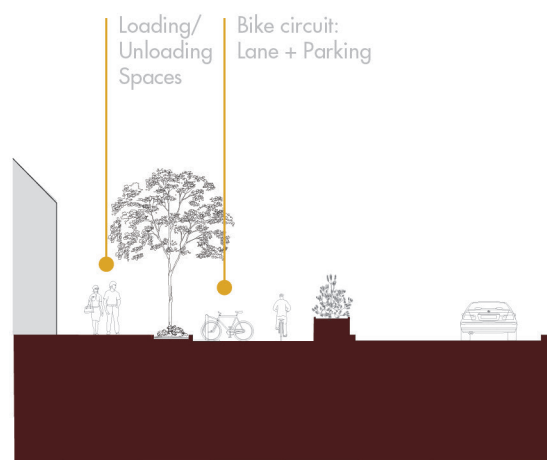
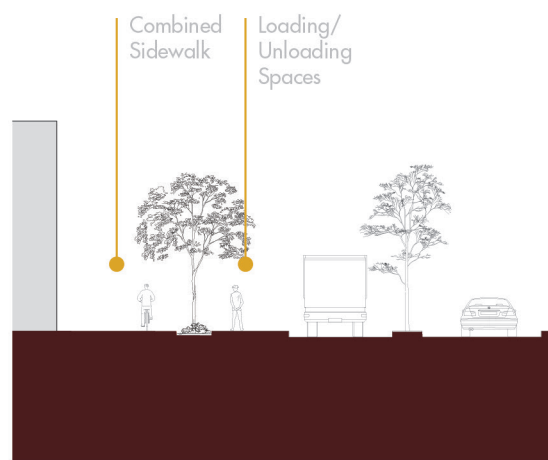
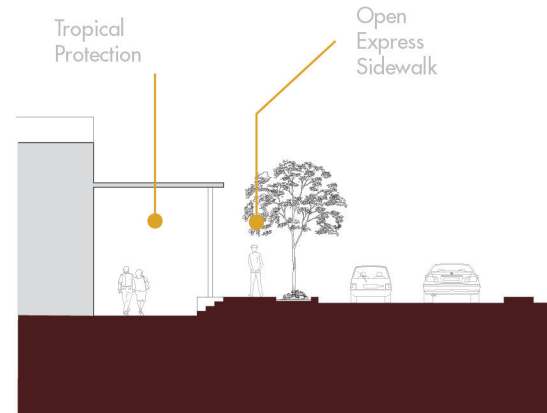
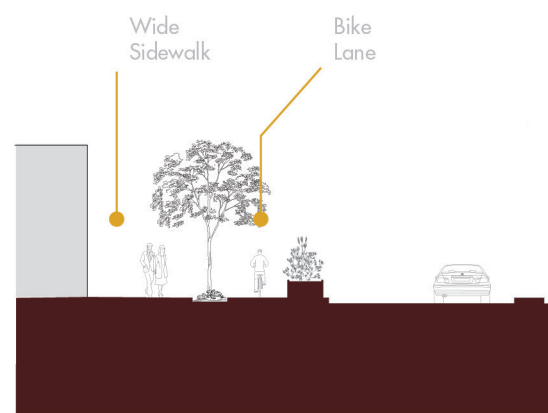
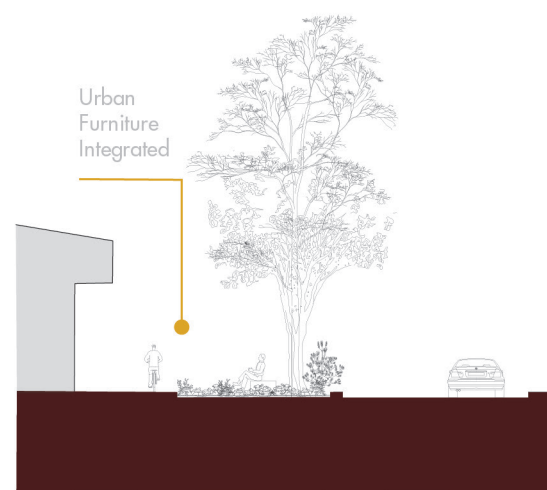


RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE RIVER

Some cities are a bit more favoured than others. Waterstreams usually come with a vivid environment, while in other cases become vital for the transportation of goods. In any case, the relationship with the waterstreams always gives the opportunity to connect with nature in urbanized cities where concrete and steel rule.

It is important to clarify that the physical and chemical characteristics of Caracas' brooks need a sanitizing engineering intervention that will open the right conditions for further spatial interventions.

Walking and running along trees and water is the obvious initial approach. Stitching the parts that the river divides is another simple intervention, forming bridges that allow us to have new visual perspectives. Finally, getting closer to the waterstream can be the more challenging yet impactful transformation to recognize the river.



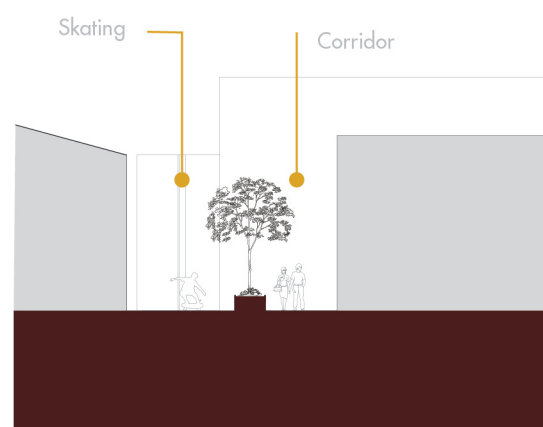
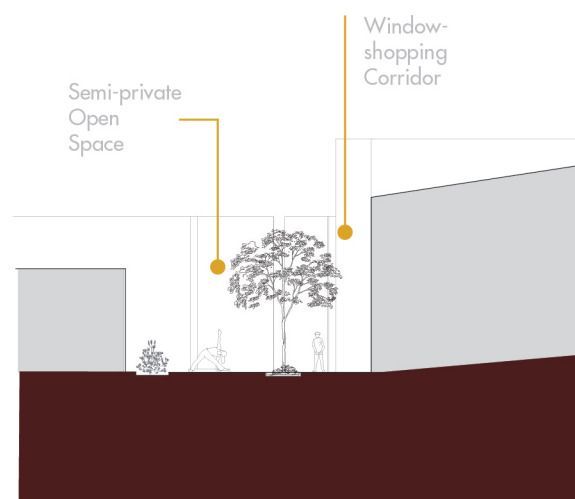
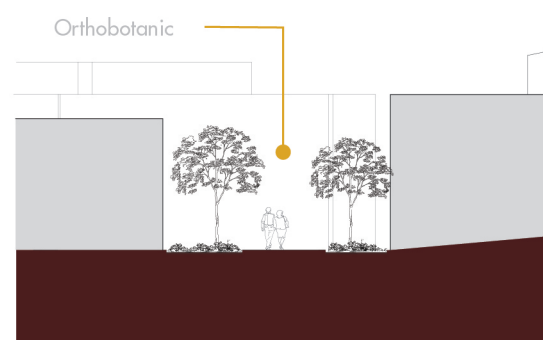
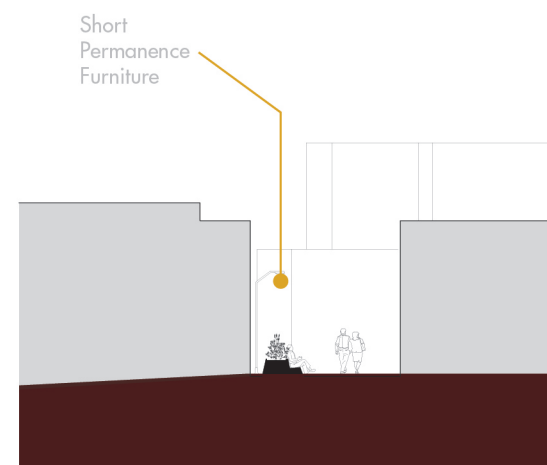
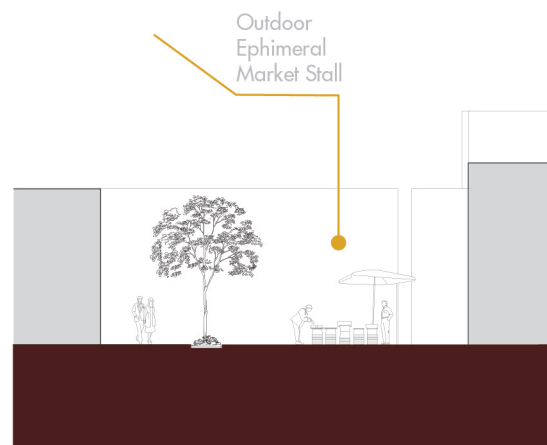
RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE STREET

As explained before, there is a big gap between cars and pedestrians, and streets are usually favoring the vehicle, most of the time putting the pedestrian at risk.

Improving the southern limit of the project zone -Avenida Principal de La Trinidad- doesn't only serve to unify the 1 Kilometre stripe, but aims to develop quality spaces for whoever is visiting the southern perimeter for commercial or leisure reasons.

Demonstrated by Jeff Speck in several North American cities where his urbanism firm conducted spatial transformations, discovered that controlling the speed of the car is usually the first intervention that should be done. This can be done with bumpers, but also by reducing the dimensions of the streets helps the driver to better understand that the proximity is a walkable space. Service channels can also serve for activities that rely on vehicular transportation.

Using strategically landscape, proper and well distributed urban furniture, and assuring the right comfortable space are two primary operations that help to create a better space for walking, without the necessity of compromising the quality of the vehicle street. Further physical relationships with the commercial can be encouraged, arriving into more dared interventions -like complex protecting roofs that define the entrances or the street transitions- creating more interesting spaces in this new commercial and public space.

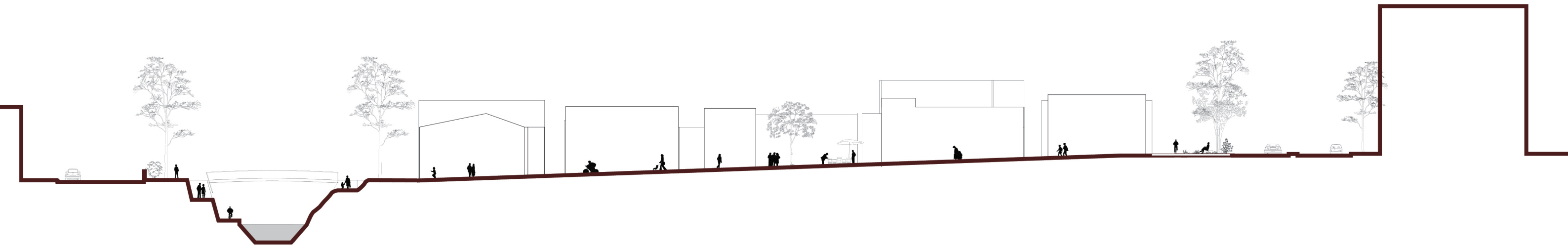


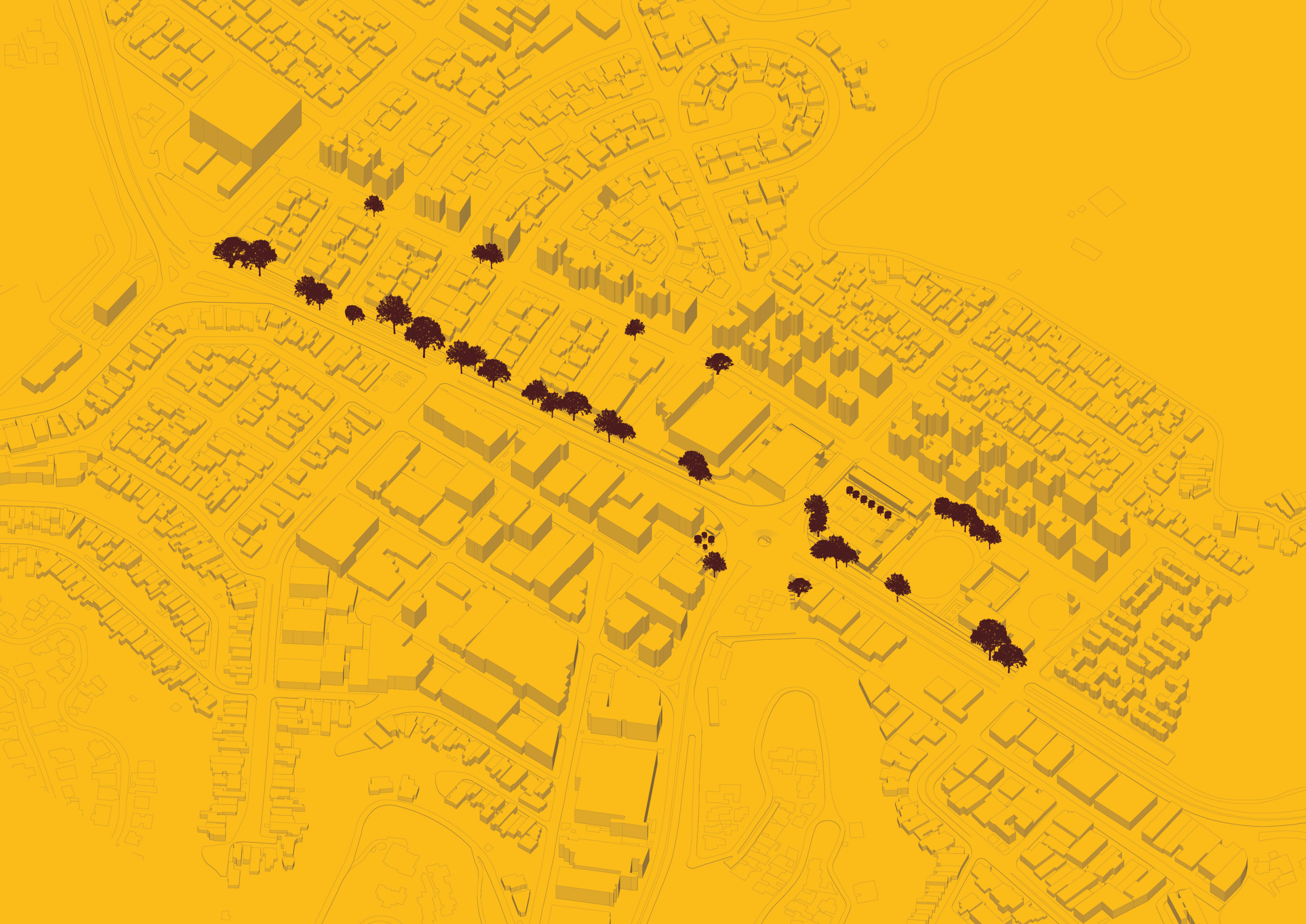
INTERSTICE TRANSITIONS

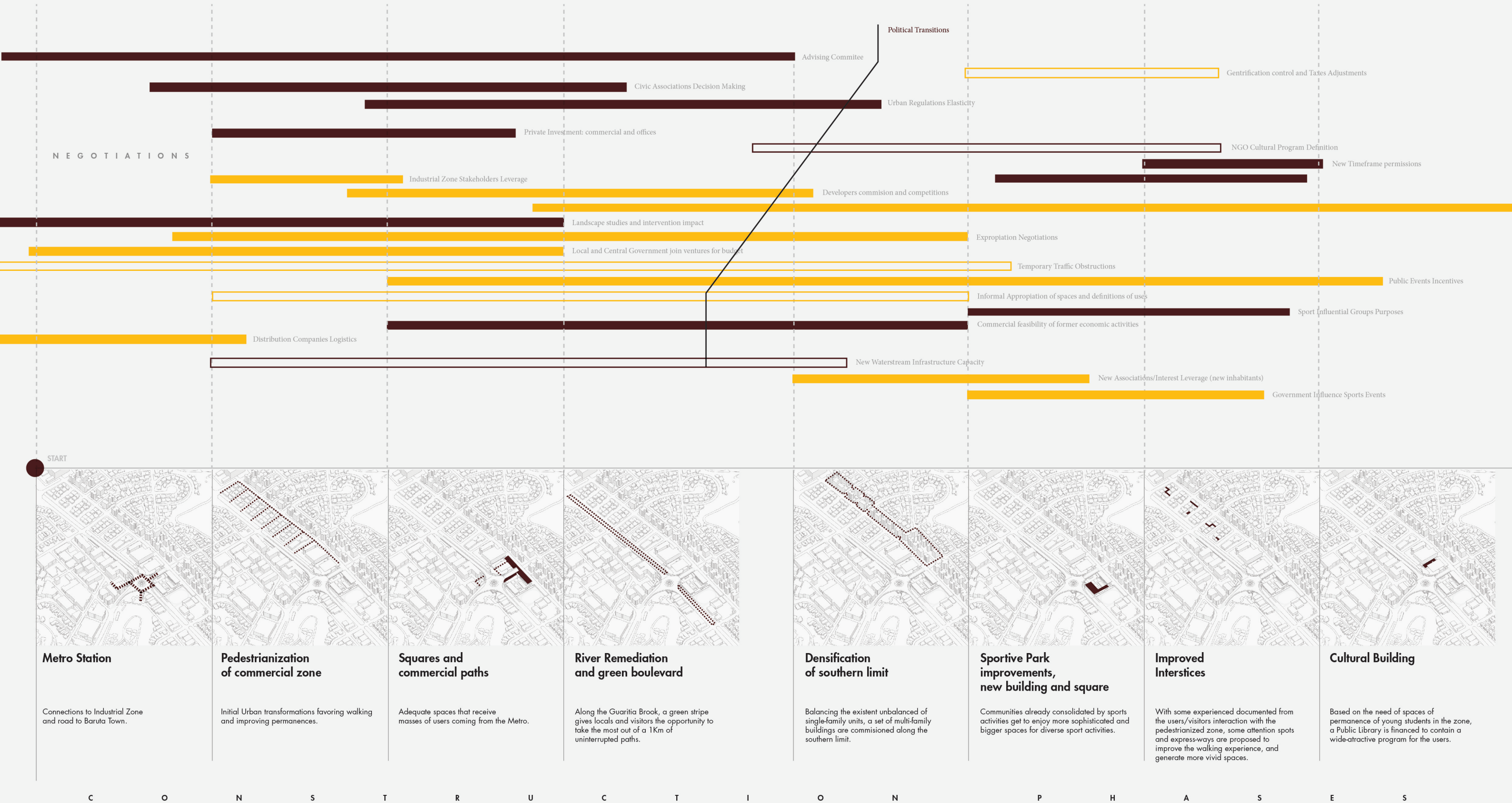
Composed by ten north-south walkable streets, only connected in their limits, connections between them seem to be appropriate to obtain interesting yet discoverable paths through the 1-Kilometre project.

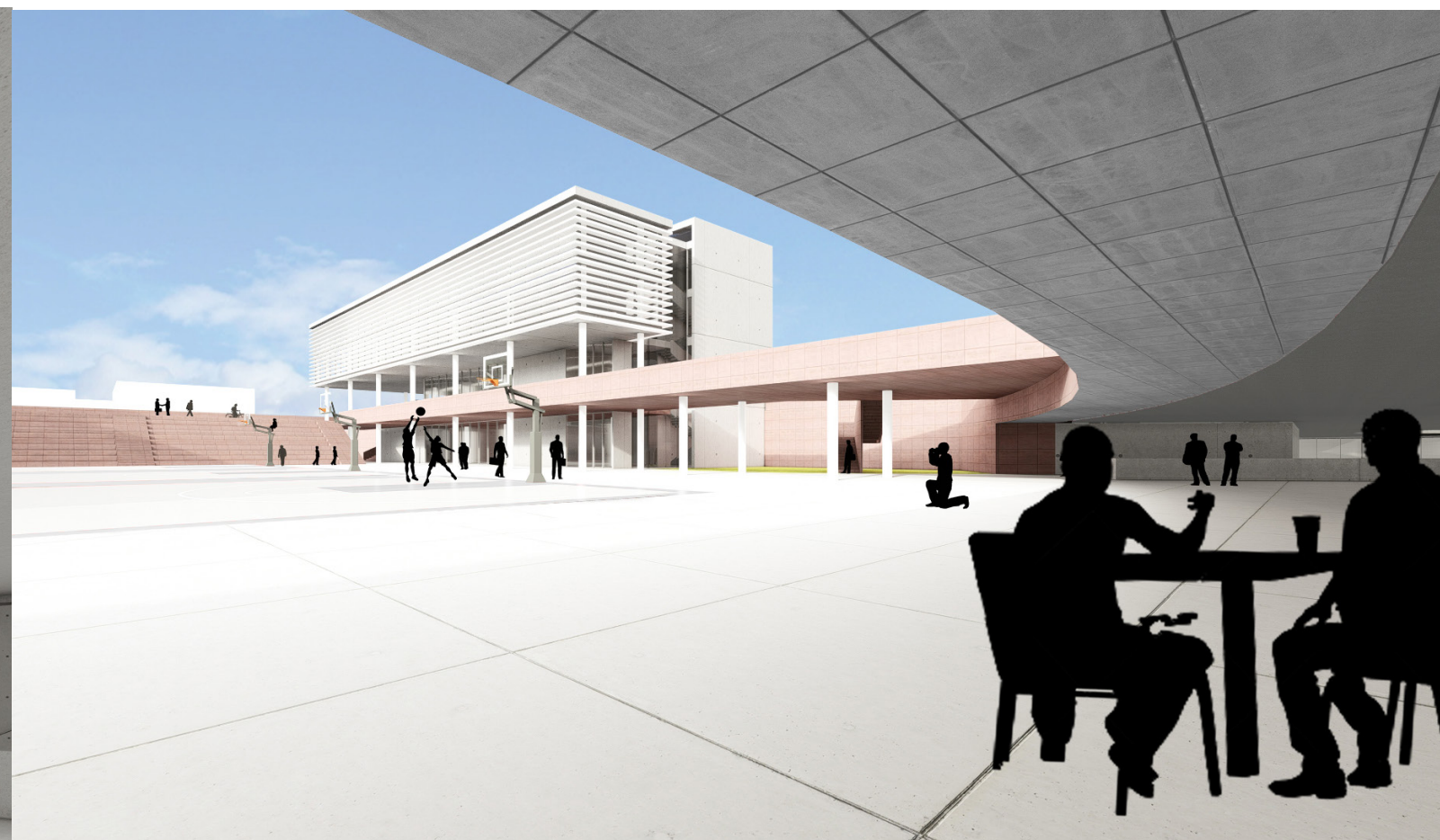
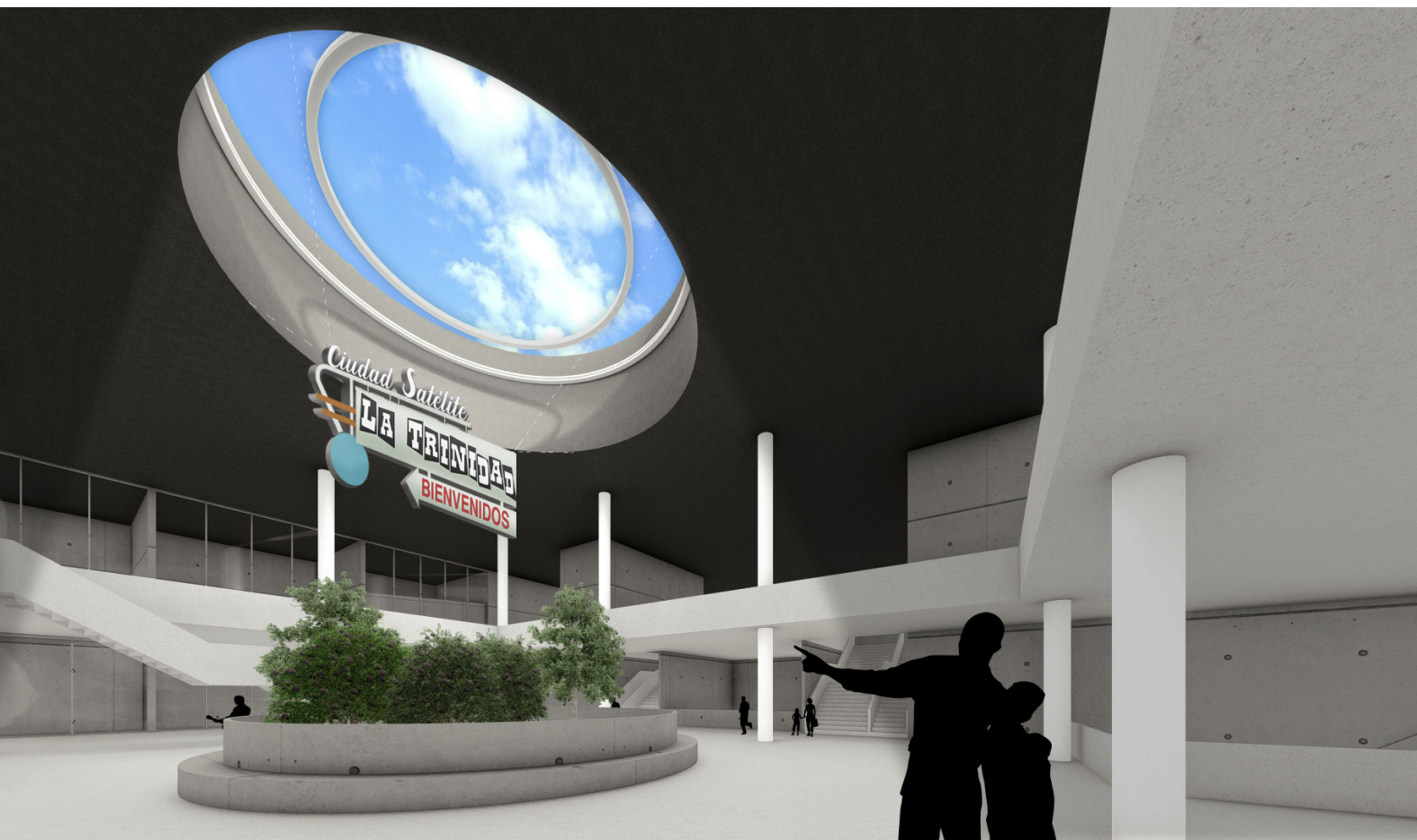
Almost one-hundred meters long, each of these “blocks” should combine diverse services, allowing the appearance of interstices. It is recommendable to avoid the repetitive scheme of thematic streets, and only develop it on specific spots of the lot, for instance, a street of restaurants or bars.

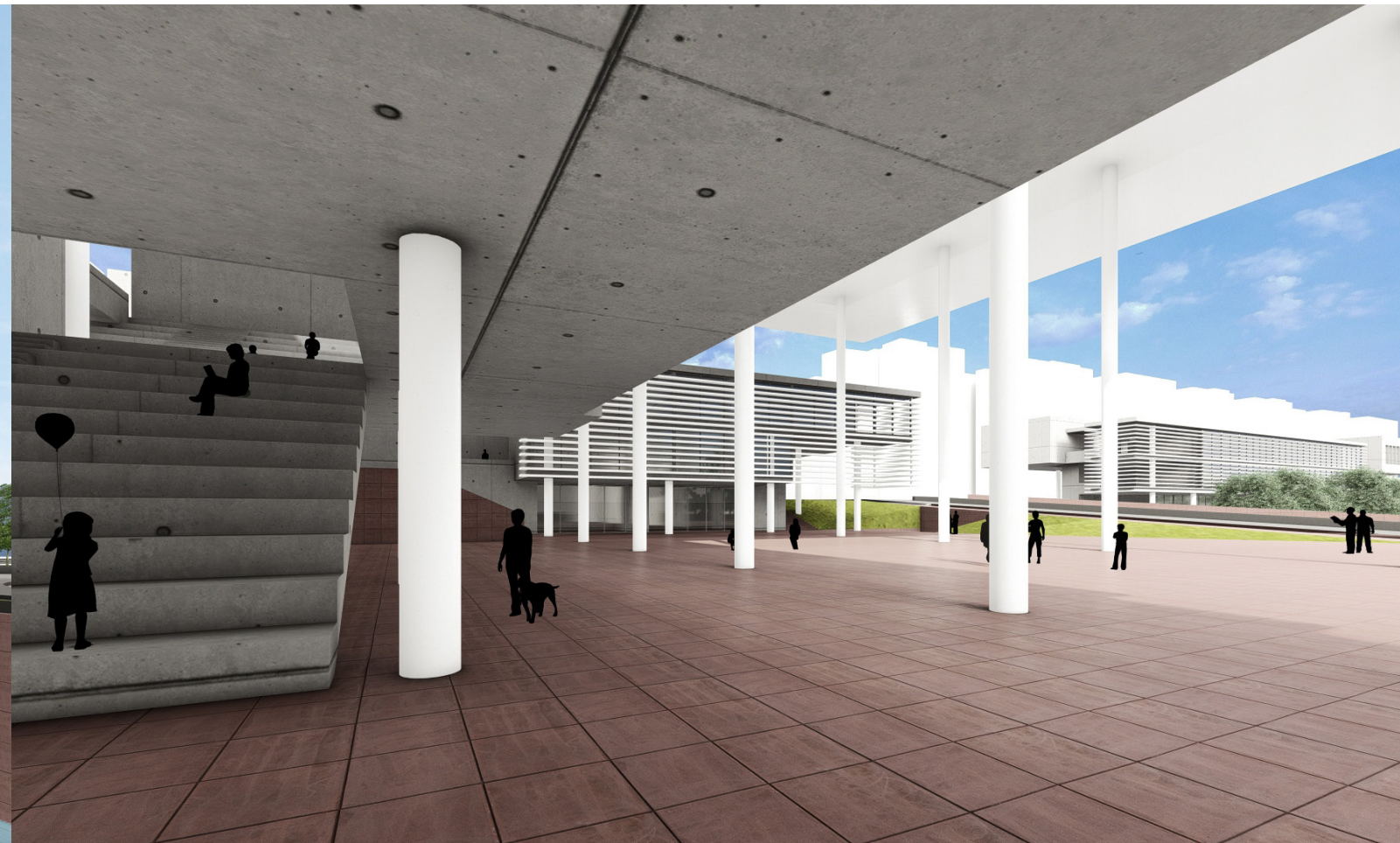
Three type of activities are proposed in these initial Catalogue of Transitions: an interesting crossing path, a void to promote space appropriation or ephemeral events, and more open spaces for intense activities like sports.













C O N C L U S I O N S

To create good citizens -understood as not only who lives in a city, but who truly uses the city to fulfil its needs-, both education and spatial conditions need to be guaranteed. Caracas, unlike other major cities in Europe and America, has an urban history that is compressed in less than a century. This means that many experiments, success, and failures are all contained in a city that is still defining its dynamics, its identity.

The prioritization of cars in a city like Caracas significantly reduced the capacity of its inhabitants to understand their common spaces and appropriate them. As in North America, the moving machine -the car- also served as an excuse to segregate, to augment the distance between groups and to question the necessity of walking. Relationships that depend on a moving capsule are usually reduced to self-centred activities that naively denies the existence of something outside the limits of our properties, instead of engaging in active dialogue with the street space (Lasala, 2018).

Young as it is, Caracas fabric is a mixture of eras of prosperity and chaos, and planning has been really incapable on predicting the behaviour of a constantly growing city. This thesis used La Trinidad as an example of questioning, reformulation, and optimization the way we use our cities and compromise with a more accessible, better connected, meaning more walkable city. It is also relevant to point out that there is not an important amount of bibliography and research related on how to walk in Latin America, where variables like insecurity, violence and precarious infrastructure drastically affect the ideal and always peaceful scenarios proposed by relevant architects like Jan Gehl.

By focusing on the opportunities that recognize first the pedestrian, without denying the advantages of the vehicle and, how Jeff Speck named, the amenities that come with it, major urban transformation can be carried out to provided useful and healthy public spaces that -hopefully- help to consolidate communities that are little motivated to do so. Public spaces that respond to “localities” consolidate vivid dynamics that give autonomy to communities -the most important stakeholder-, which in the end are

the ones entitled to appropriate their spaces. In the hypothetical project proposed for La Trinidad, three objectives were translated into the space -assumed as improvements-: accessibility and better connectivity, encouraging a more mixed use of the city that also recognizes its environmental specificities and takes the best out of it. This includes acknowledging the failed speculations of the past, and compromising on a paradigm shift not only in the way spaces are projected, but in the way citizens become an active part of their primal space, the public space. The same way Jacques Tati expressed in his masterpiece *Mon Oncle*, modernity can be a promise of progress and comfort that can go beyond our control. This happened in a wealthy Caracas, where cash flow permitted the creation of a global image of the city lined with modern highways that brings some together while separating others (Imbesi, 1995).

Specially In Latin America, one topic cannot be avoided: budget. Political crisis is just around the corner, and major urban projects like the one proposed in this thesis are usually not completed, which compromises the initial objectives of the project. To recognize the leverage of communities in creating new spaces -that doesn’t depend on higher forces- is also a debate that is very pertinent in Caracas.

As expressed by William Niño Araque, the challenge of this beginning of the century is to build on what has already been built, to rearrange, weld, recover, sew, clean up, revitalize what already exists. Poets and writers have been fascinated with this particular city that, and Garcia Marquez once described that in the midst of iron and asphalt and traffic jams that have remained one and always the same for 20 years, the city still retains in its heart the nostalgia for the countryside. “One of the beautiful frustrations in my life is not having stayed to live forever in that hellish city”. In the end, Calvino perfectly described that there are two ways to live a hell. The first is easy for many: to accept the hell and to be part of it, to the point of not seeing it anymore. The second is risky and requires attention and continuous learning: to search and to know how to recognize who and what, inside the hell, is not hell and make it durable and give it space.” (Calvino, 1972)

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