

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Passing Through:  
Repatriation Bureaucratically Considered**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

**Master of Arts in Architecture**

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE



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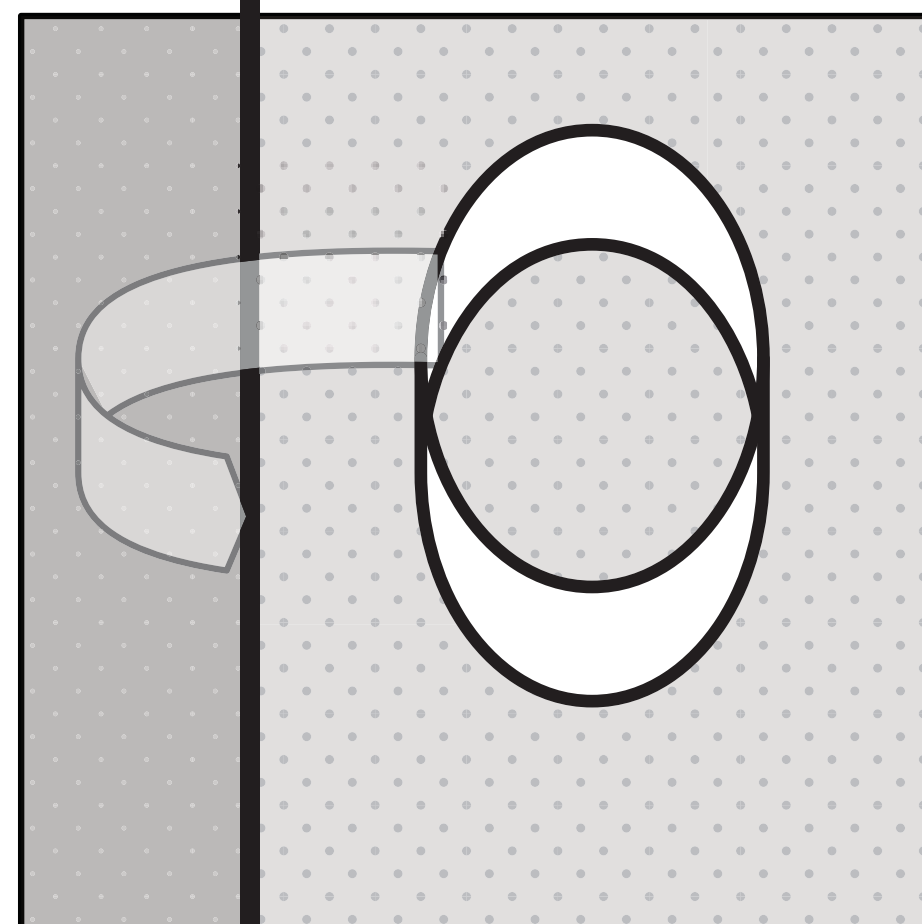
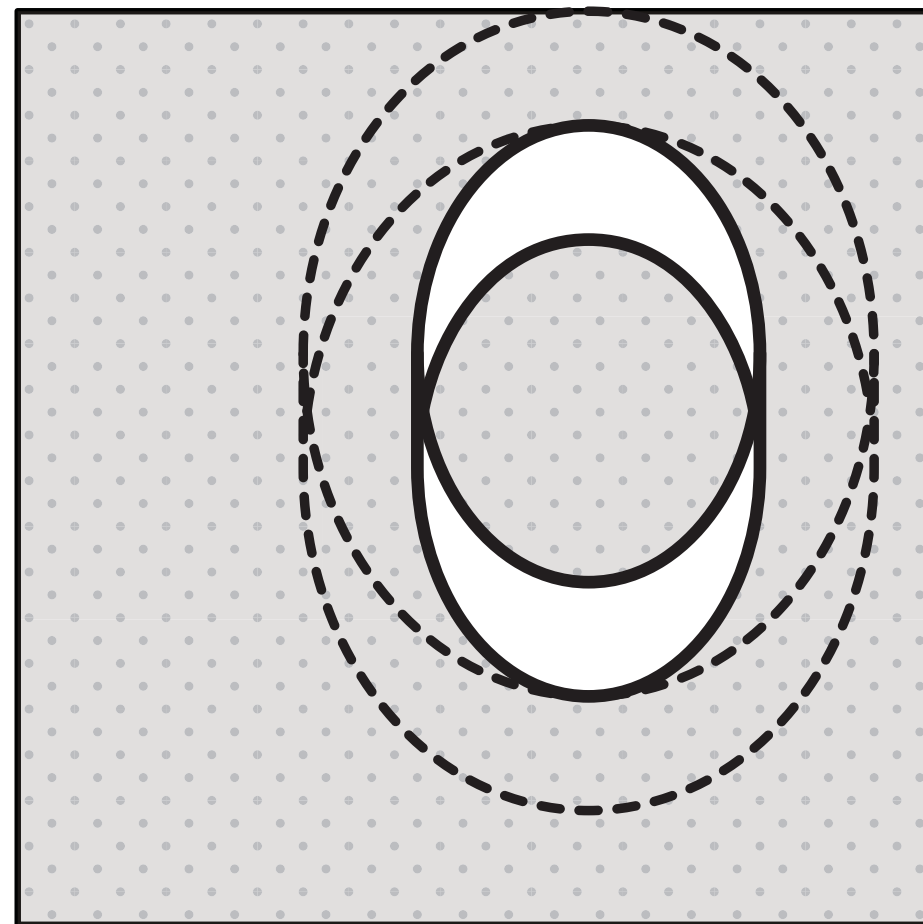
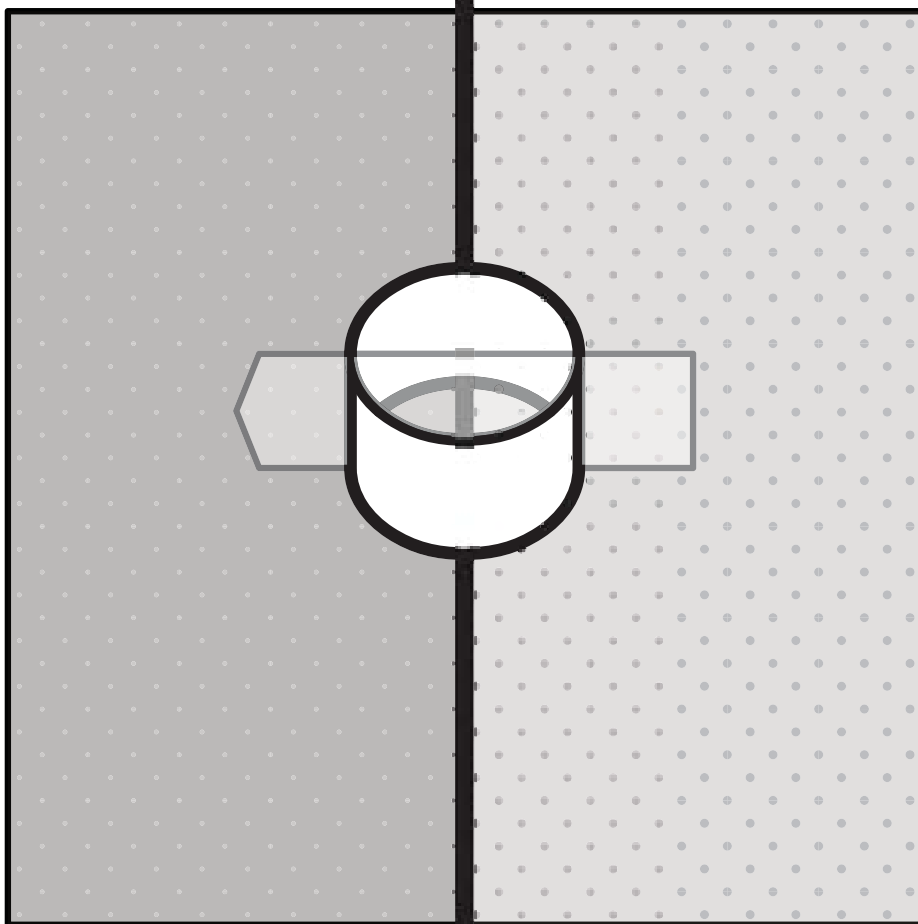
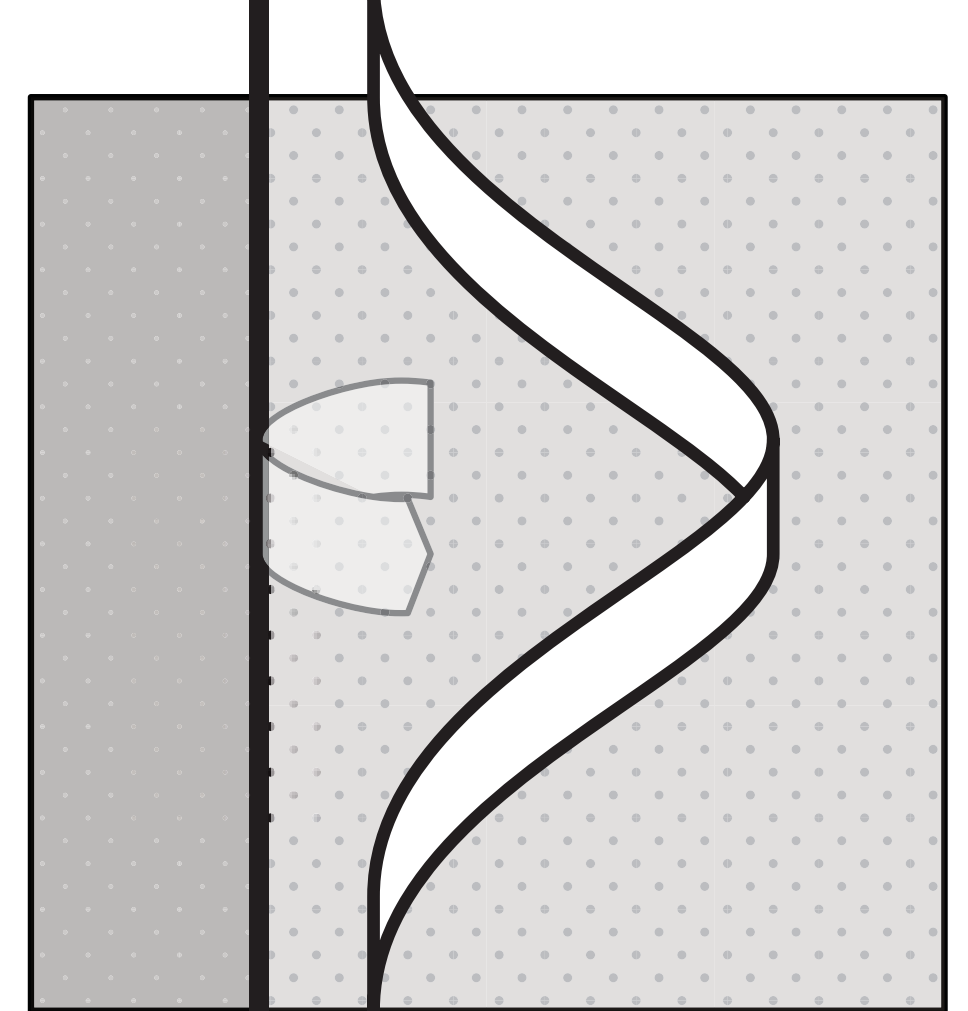
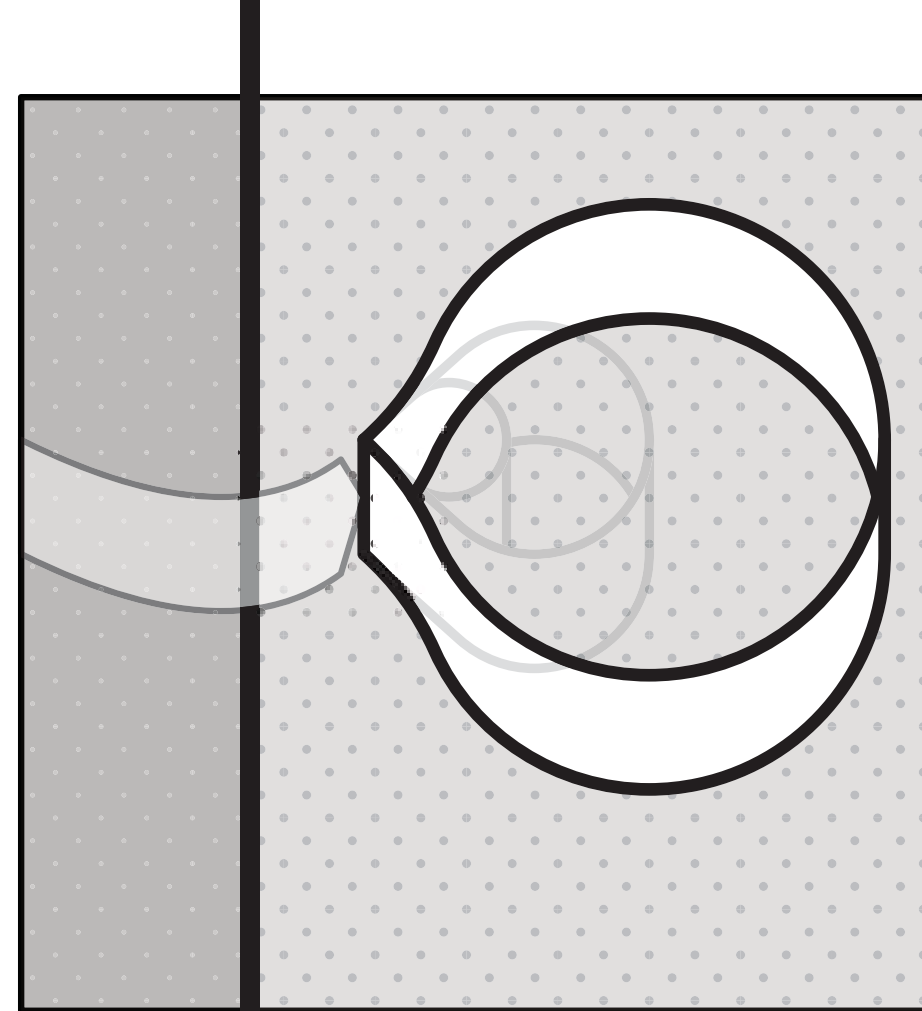
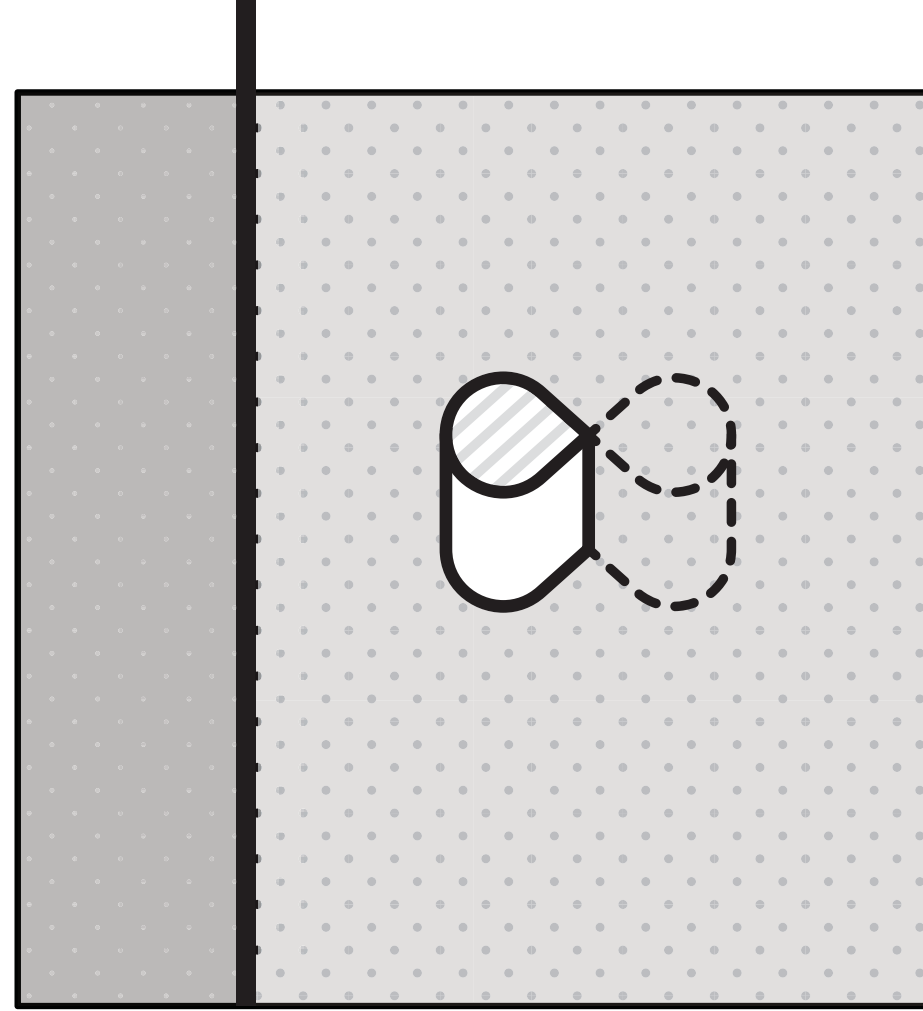
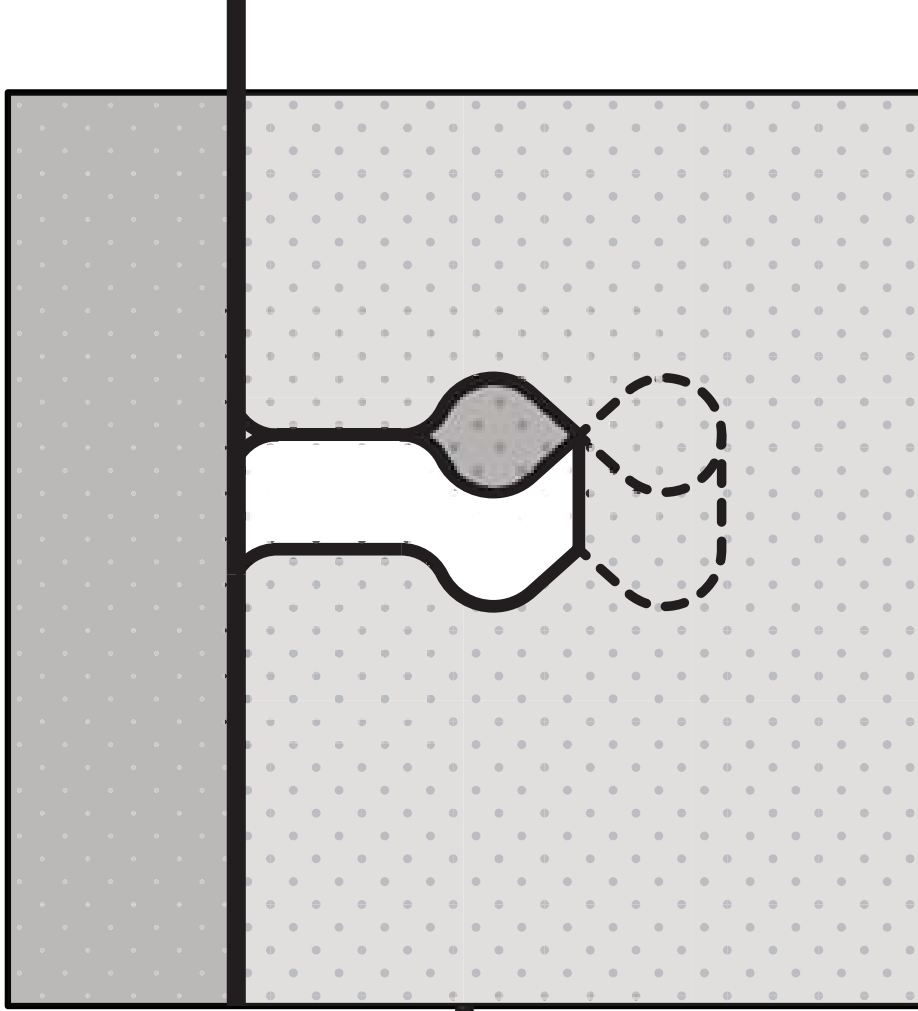


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May 2016





PASSING THROUGH  
**Repatriation**  
**Bureaucratically**  
**Considered**

Bader AlBader



# Passing Through: Repatriation Bureaucratically Considered



## Abstract

Separation is common in our world even though it is often neglected. While much architecture attempts to minimize spatial separation, there are situations where separation is considered a necessity. These spaces are usually those of extraordinary or *unfortunate circumstance*. They are essentially exceptions to the norm, *zones of legal limbo* that ought to have a physical definition that is enriched by separation. The recent outbreak of Ebola and the current refugee crisis remind us of the precarious position we are in, especially with the dearth of institutions that can handle the complex human cases that emerge. Combining the bureaucratic side of humanitarianism with *a presence-in-the-field in the global south*, a UNHCR Global Service Center takes foot in West Africa. As a flagship model of an architecture for transient conditions, this thesis posits a building that is both humanitarian *transit center* and *bureaucratic edifice*.

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I

**1 in every 122 humans**  
is either a refugee,  
internally displaced,  
or seeking asylum

**59 million**  
forcibly displaced

**19 million**  
refugees

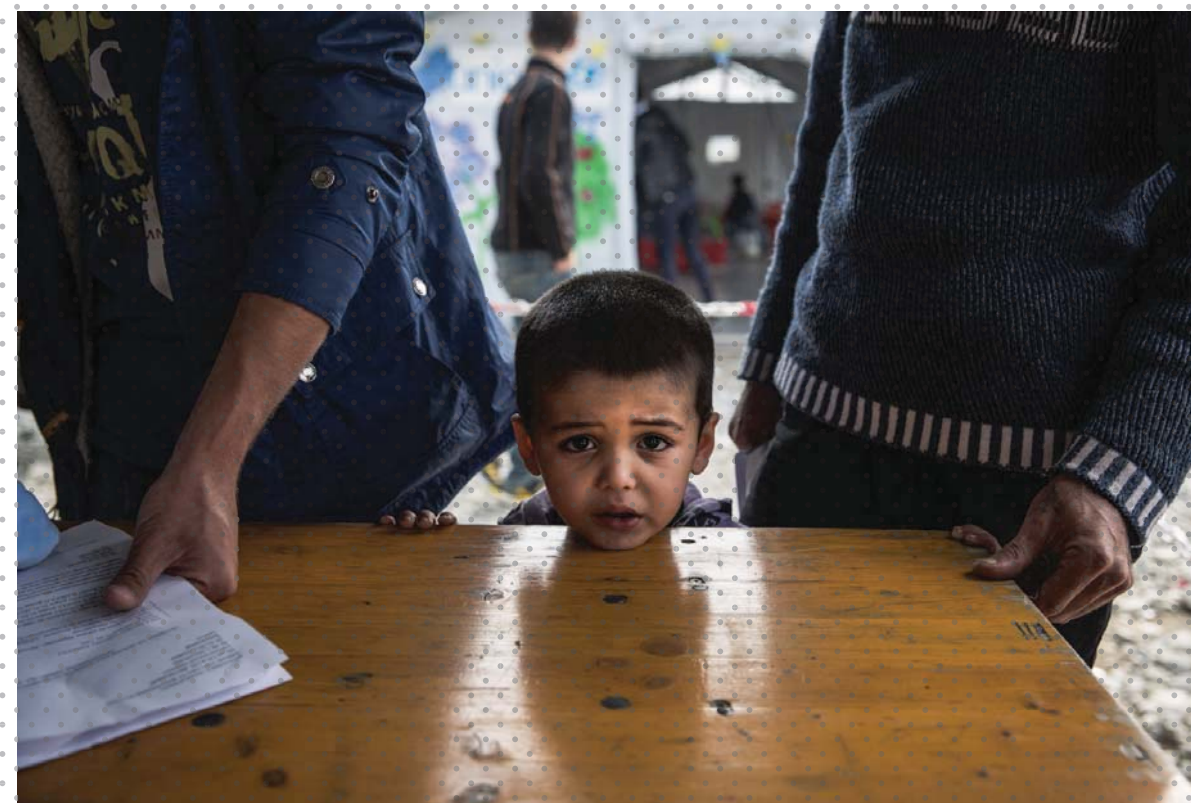
**14 million**  
assisted by UNHCR

most refugees since the end of WWII  
as per the UN High Commissioner for Refugees





In the 21st century, it is no longer the case that only those who find themselves in the proximity of an international border when a crisis erupts have the option of fleeing. In a world where mobility is the norm, humans in crisis know that there is much to be gained from escaping to a far-flung abodes. Movement is no longer confined to a specific geographic locale, but is truly global. The refugee crisis has been globalized, repatriation expanded to any country willing to accept those who are not welcome elsewhere. To this end, an international bureaucracy in place since the end of the Second World War is responsible for documenting, relocating, and advocating on behalf these afflicted populations. This administrative and humanitarian schemata is increasingly stressed and distant as an increasing number of crises erupt the world over. Yet, on foot, by vehicle, or braving the sea, the humans in the midst of these crises will make the perilous trek whether facilitated by these organizations or not.











View of the northern approach to the center as repatriates are boarding a ship

## Repatriation Bureaucratically Considered

The modern world is rife with separatory methods and procedures that have become a norm without which life would not function as we know it. In order to run smoothly, modernity labels people and separates them into groups so that bureaucracy can have its due process. Yet one often finds that the separation of a group from another undermines its architectural experience. This is usually due to the accommodation of separation from without the logic of the design. In the past, separation as a spatial tool has been accommodated in architecture at the expense of the user's experience. Rather than dealing with separation as a design constraint or an afterthought to which a design must adapt, this thesis taps into the power of this tool in engendering the diversity of spatial experiences.





The gap in the building allowing clear passage to the repatriation dock for crowds of evacuees

Separation is common in our world even though it is often neglected. While many architectural attempts try to minimize spatial separation, there are situations where separation is considered a necessity. These spaces are usually those of extraordinary or unfortunate circumstance. They are essentially exceptions to the norm, or are posited that way, to ensure that such separation is tolerated by the populace. Often segregatory spaces are those of transition. Holding facilities such as prisons and camps, and transitory facilities such as airports and border crossings accentuate the division of people, space, and place. These zones of legal limbo have yet to be given a physical definition that is enriched by separation, not diminished.





Grand multipurpose space for the repatriates leading to the second floor utility-recreation space

The recent outbreak of Ebola and current refugee crisis remind us of the precarious humanitarian position we find ourselves in, especially with the lack of institutions that can handle the complex human cases that emerge. Combining divergent programmatic aspects into a pertinent investigation of pressing global concerns, this thesis posits an international humanitarian center in West Africa, a new Global Service Center for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This humanitarian center is part repatriation facility and part administrative hub. These components are integral to the functioning of critical emergency services across international borders, yet have discrete requirements and autonomies that need to be kept separate, and which in turn serve to enrich the spaces people use. As a new architectural type, the center hybridizes the paperwork and fieldwork facets that are integral to the international institutional reaction to humanitarian crises.





Grand multipurpose space for the repatriates with a terraced incline leading to a landing overlooking the public waterfront

By the end of the decade, Abidjan, the Ivory Coast's economic capital, will be the largest port in West Africa. As air travel becomes more tenuous especially in the extreme circumstances brought on by crises, sea travel comes to renewed importance. Lying between the North and South Atlantic and straddling the Gulf of Guinea, Abidjan is an ideal mediation point between the Global North and South. Located on the city's waterfront, a multifunctional facility can flexibly accommodate various scenarios addressing international humanitarian transit and administration. It regulates the exit of evacuees and manages the response to crises in coordination with international bodies, serving as a point of reference located in a major West African city accessible by air and sea.



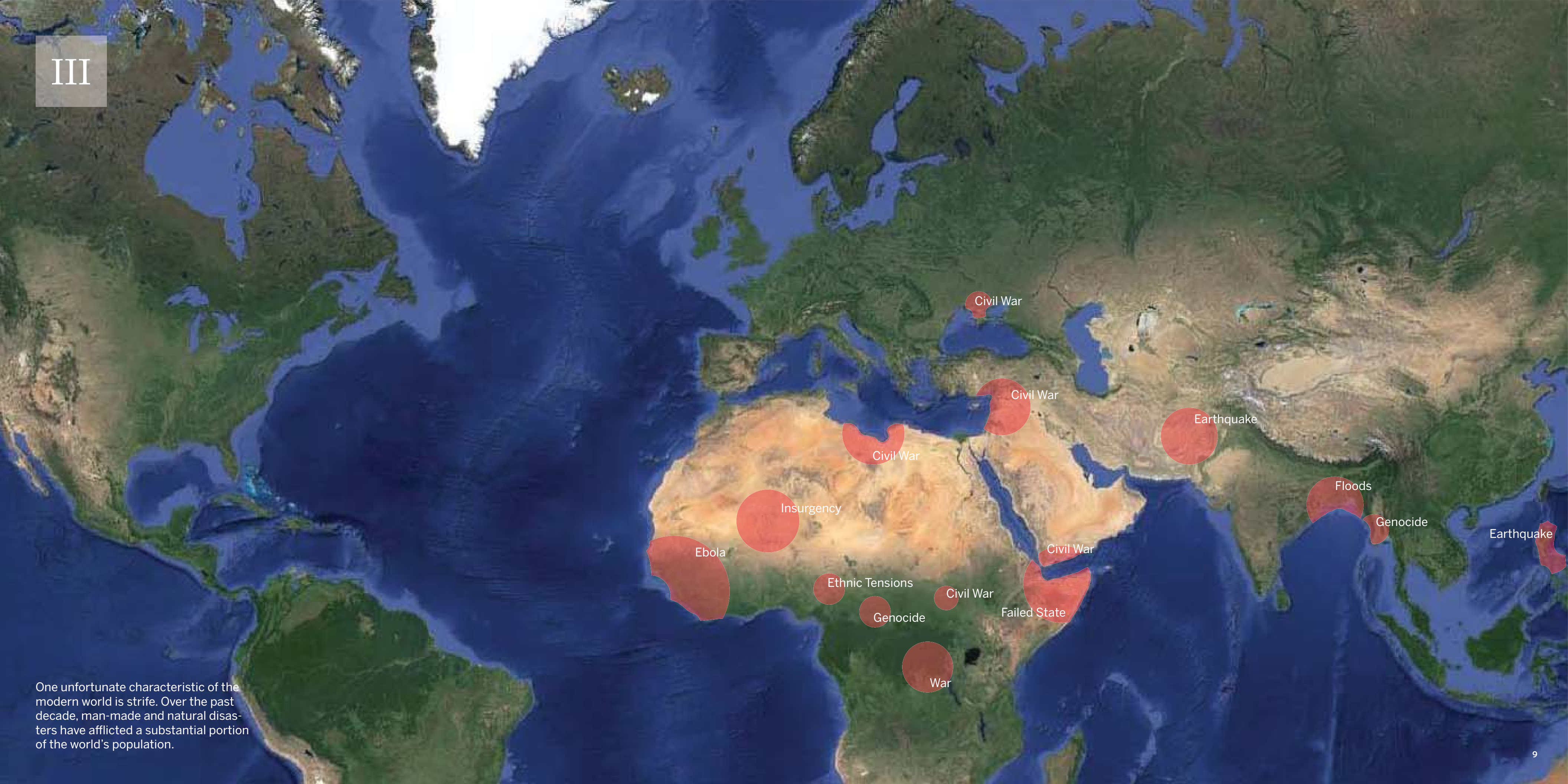


Public gathering and presentation space in public-bureaucratic sector

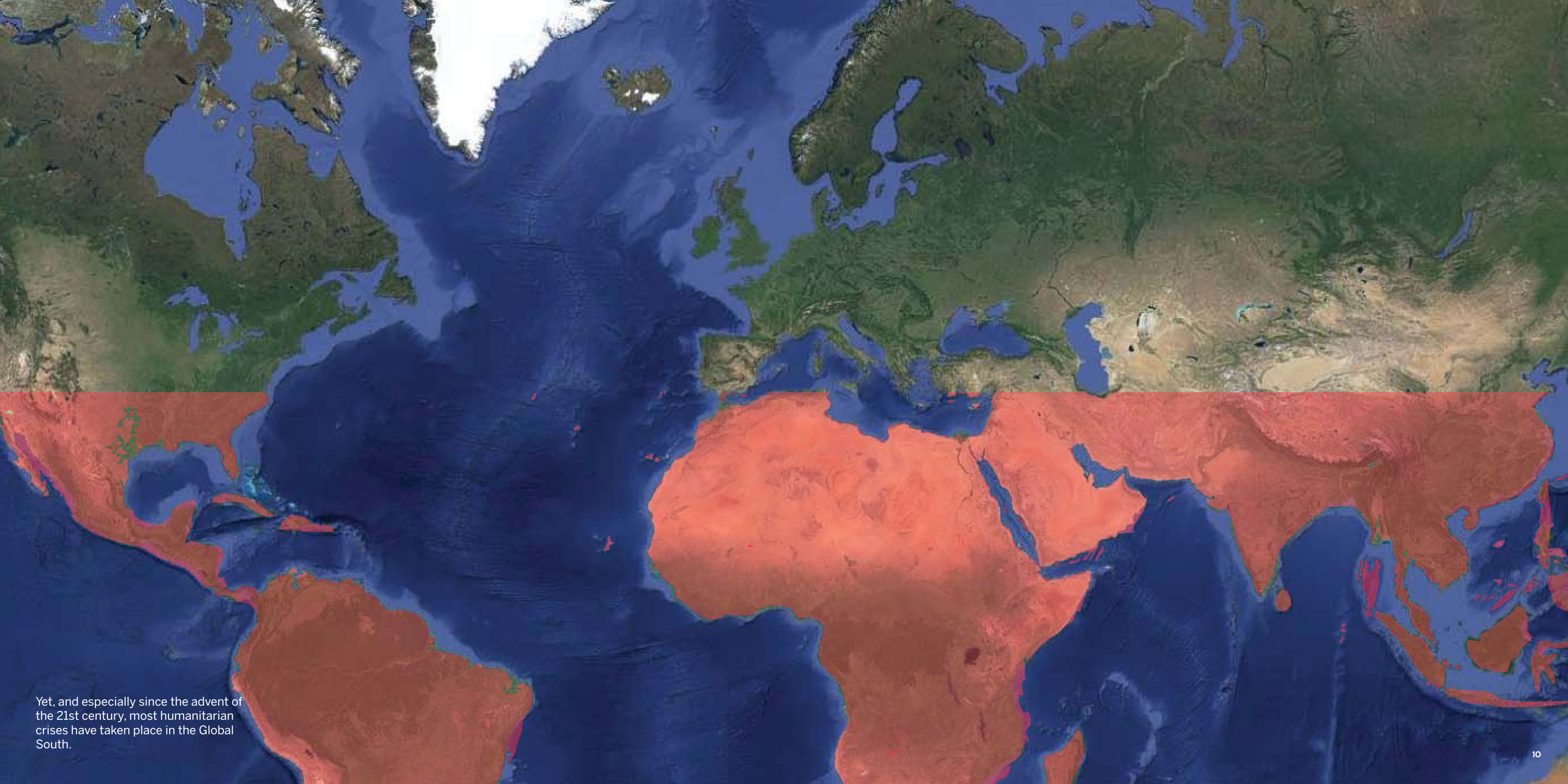
This architecture renders transparent what is often opaque—bureaucracy. And it offers locally what is often considered to be foreign—international aid. It concretizes the presence of the worldwide apparatus of repatriation in a specific African locale, thereby lending ownership to what hitherto was distant and often regarded by local populaces as imposed. Combining the bureaucratic side of humanitarianism with a presence-in-the-field in the Global South, a UNHCR Global Service Center takes foot in West Africa and becomes a flagship model of a steadfast architecture for transient conditions.



# III



One unfortunate characteristic of the modern world is strife. Over the past decade, man-made and natural disasters have afflicted a substantial portion of the world's population.



Yet, and especially since the advent of the 21st century, most humanitarian crises have taken place in the Global South.



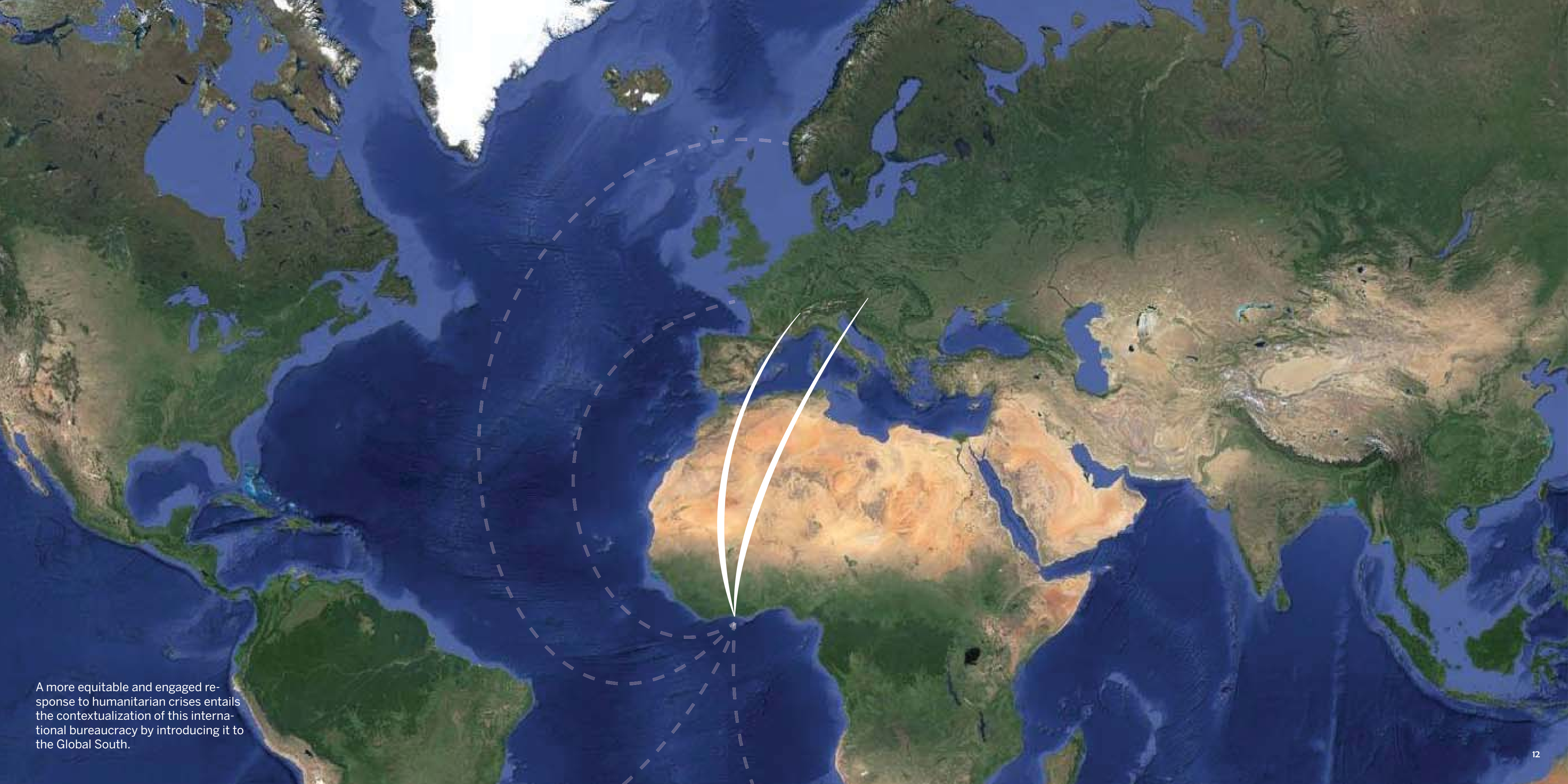


UNHCR HQ  
Geneva

UNHCR GLOBAL SERVICE CENTER  
Budapest

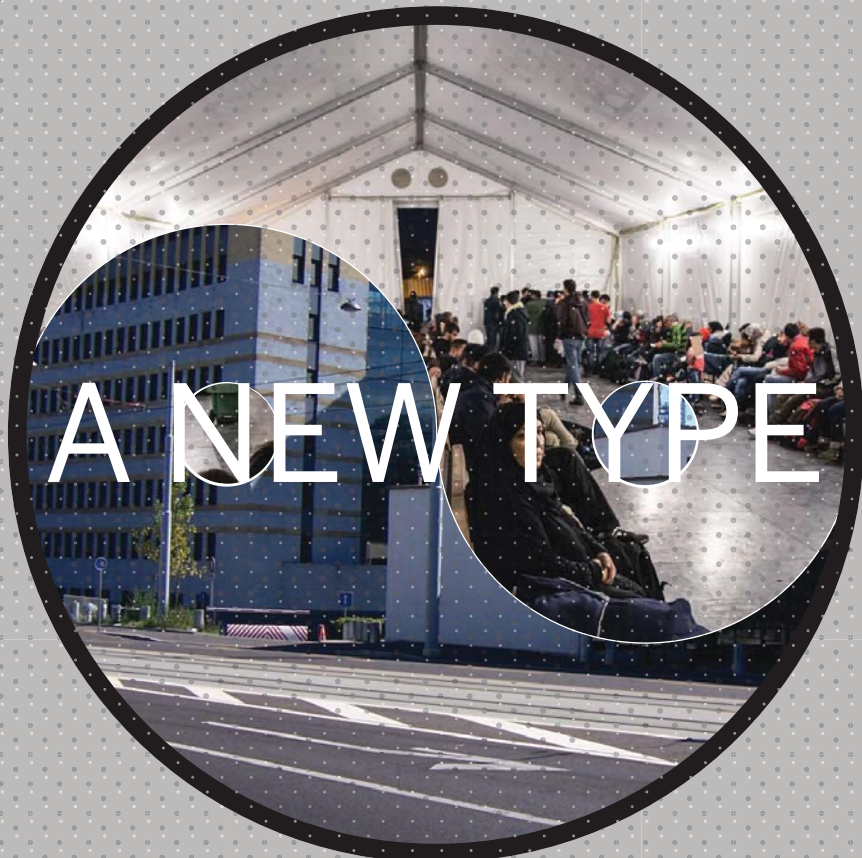
However, the bureaucratic apparatuses that are charged with responding to and managing these crises are situated exclusively in Europe.





A more equitable and engaged response to humanitarian crises entails the contextualization of this international bureaucracy by introducing it to the Global South.





*A multifunctional facility that can flexibly accommodate various scenarios addressing humanitarian transit and administration*

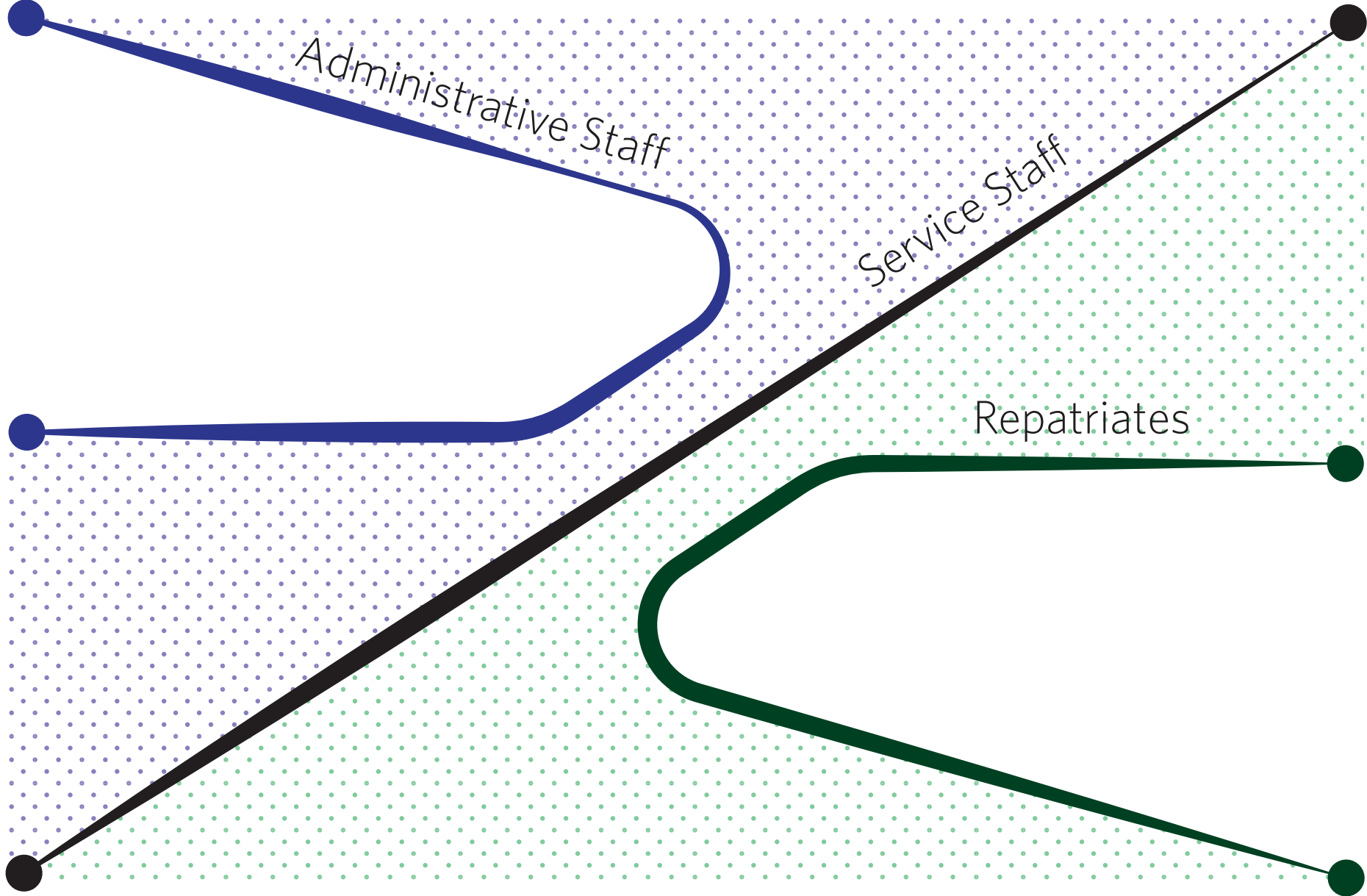




Current UNHCR Centre in Budapest

# HYBRID REPATRIATION CENTER

A New Type in West Africa



Proposed UNHCR Centre in Abidjan





**Site:** Abidjan, Ivory Coast



**Location:** Plateau, Abidjan's administrative quarter  
**Geography:** Tip of a peninsula within a series of lagoons  
**Current use:** Fruit terminal  
**Context:** Opposite of presidential palace in the CBD  
**Access:** Waterfront accessible by boat and expressway  
**Size:** 800,000 sq ft



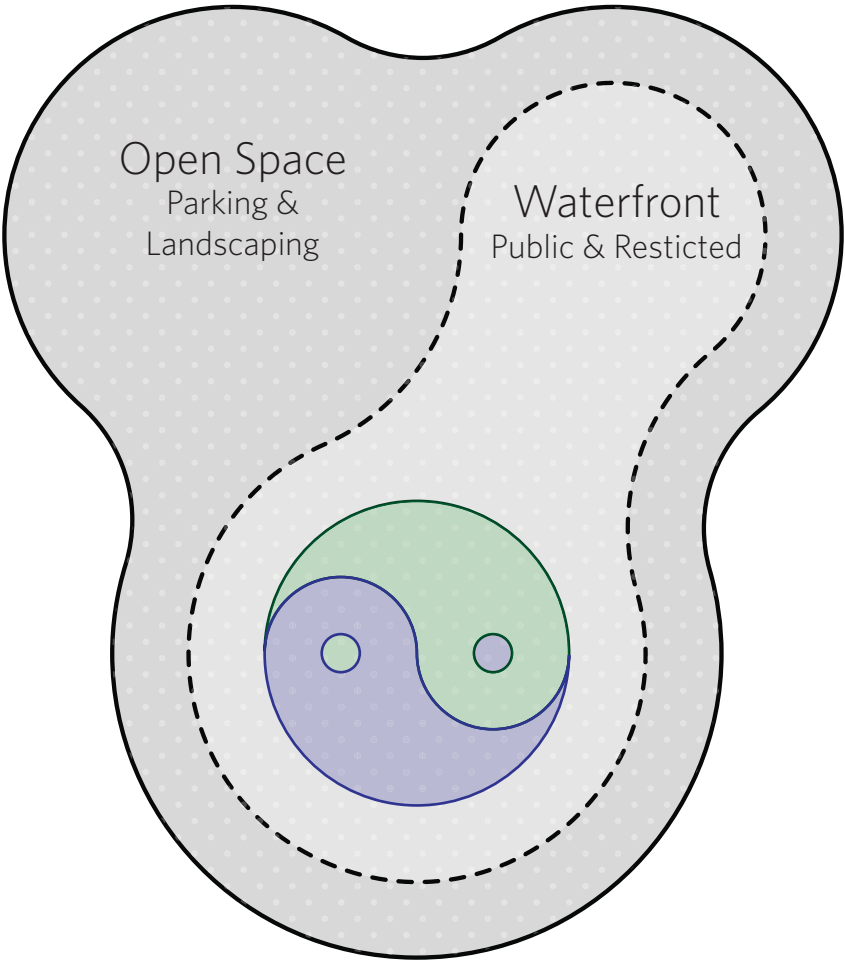
# HYBRID REPATRIATION CENTER

## A New Type in Abidjan

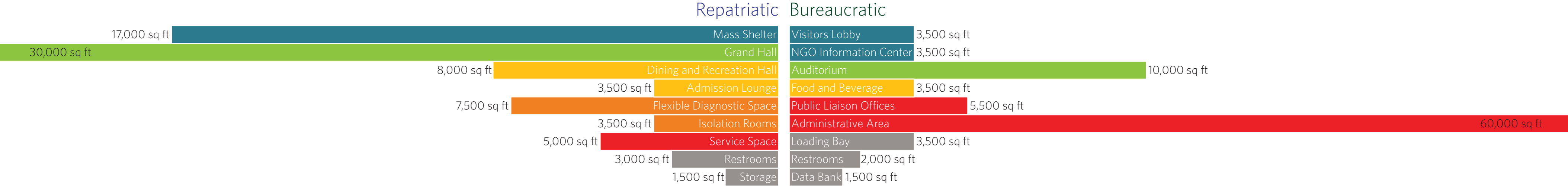
### Site Connections

As a building mediating city and sea, the repatriation center makes use of its location to create varied waterfront areas in interplay with landscaped open spaces. Rather than lying parallel to the coast, the building extends into the sea, creating an expansive green space between itself and the expressway that rings the city center. This open space is landscaped, serving as an area of congregation and defining an approach towards the building. The open space provides an ample amount of surface parking, and is relatively flat in grade to accommodate large gatherings of people. It may also be used as a spillage space during high-volume situations. The building is situated close to the embankment, defining an esplanade on its west that is distinct from the landscaped open space on its east.

The cuts through the mass of the building, articulating its constituent programmatic volumes, is mirrored by the crenelations at the water edge. The interface between the dock and the buildings creates two zones on the waterfront, restricted and public. At the northern end of the building, a restricted quay connects to a large intercolumnar passage through the repatriatic section. It is here that large crowds of repatriates may access an exclusive zone dedicated to their repatriation via seafaring vessels. The rest of the waterfront areas south of the building are public, providing access to the public and administrative sections of the center. Thus, the site is divided in to three zones, leading from the city into and through the building and finally reaching the waterfront.

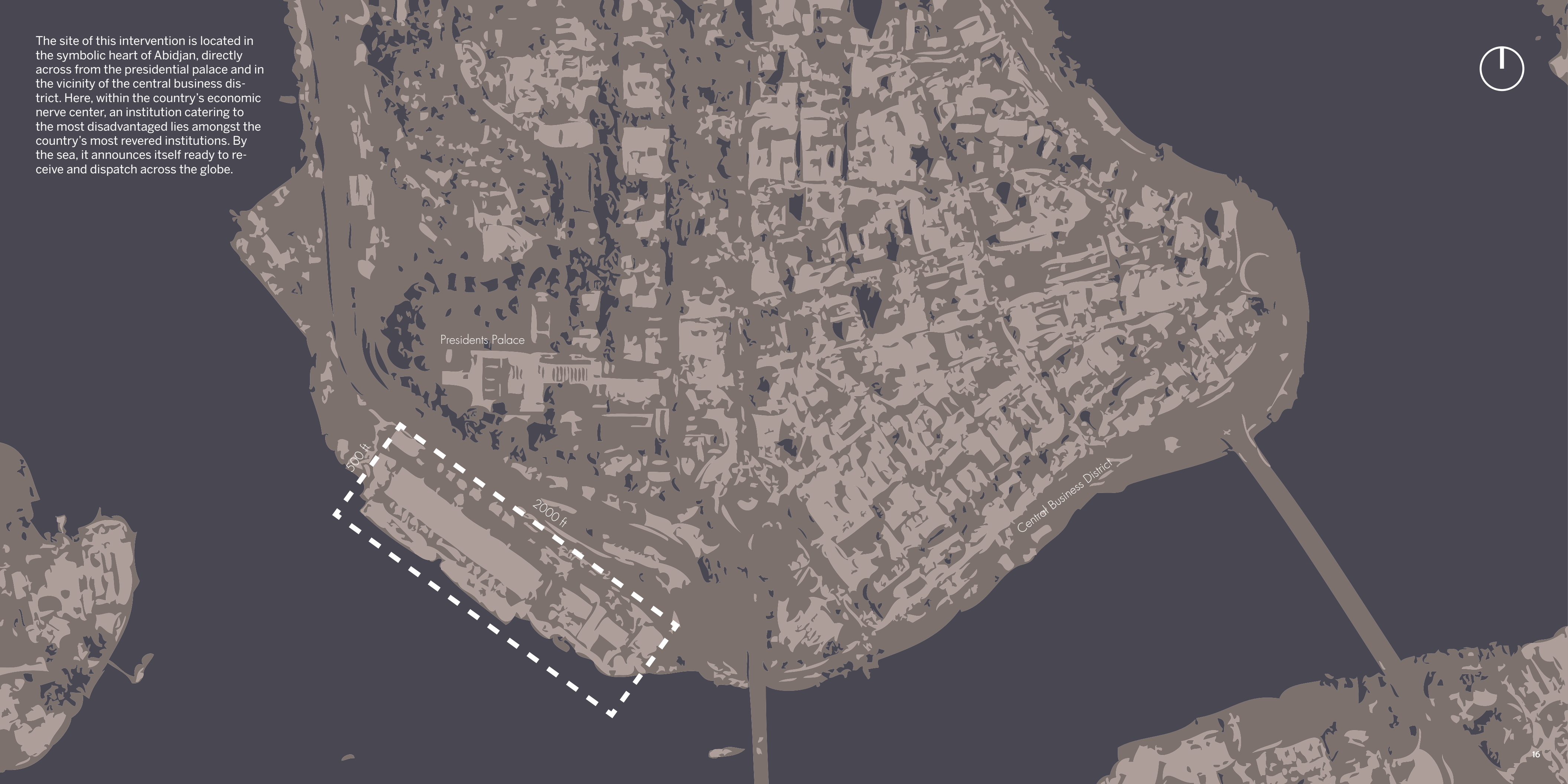


### Program Distribution





The site of this intervention is located in the symbolic heart of Abidjan, directly across from the presidential palace and in the vicinity of the central business district. Here, within the country's economic nerve center, an institution catering to the most disadvantaged lies amongst the country's most revered institutions. By the sea, it announces itself ready to receive and dispatch across the globe.



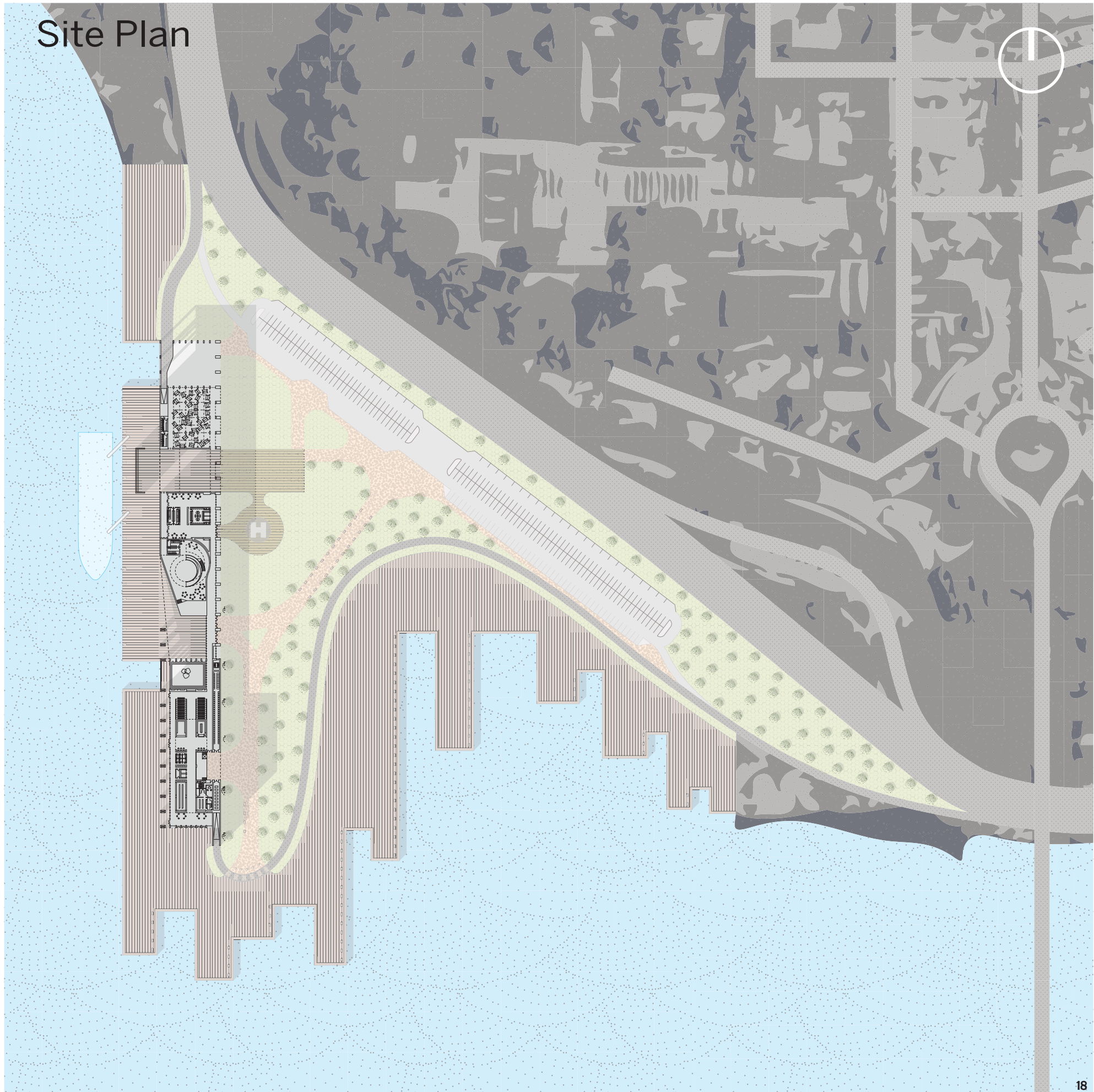
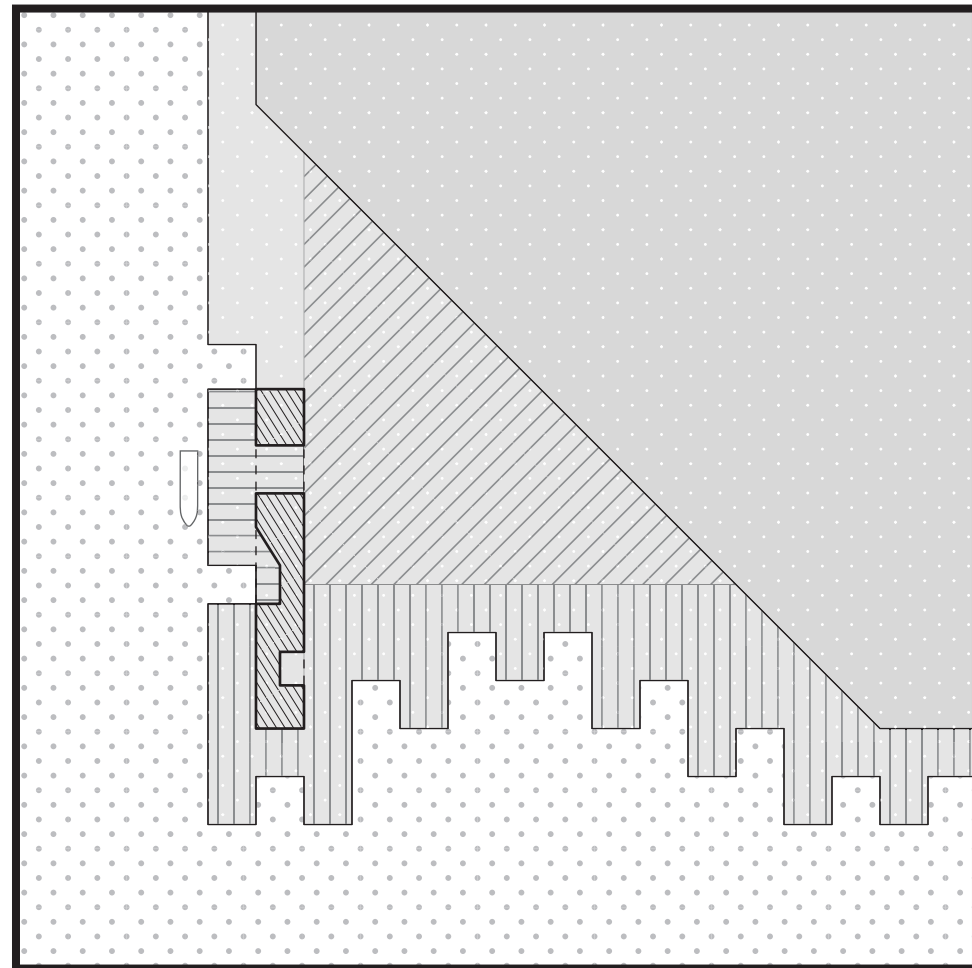
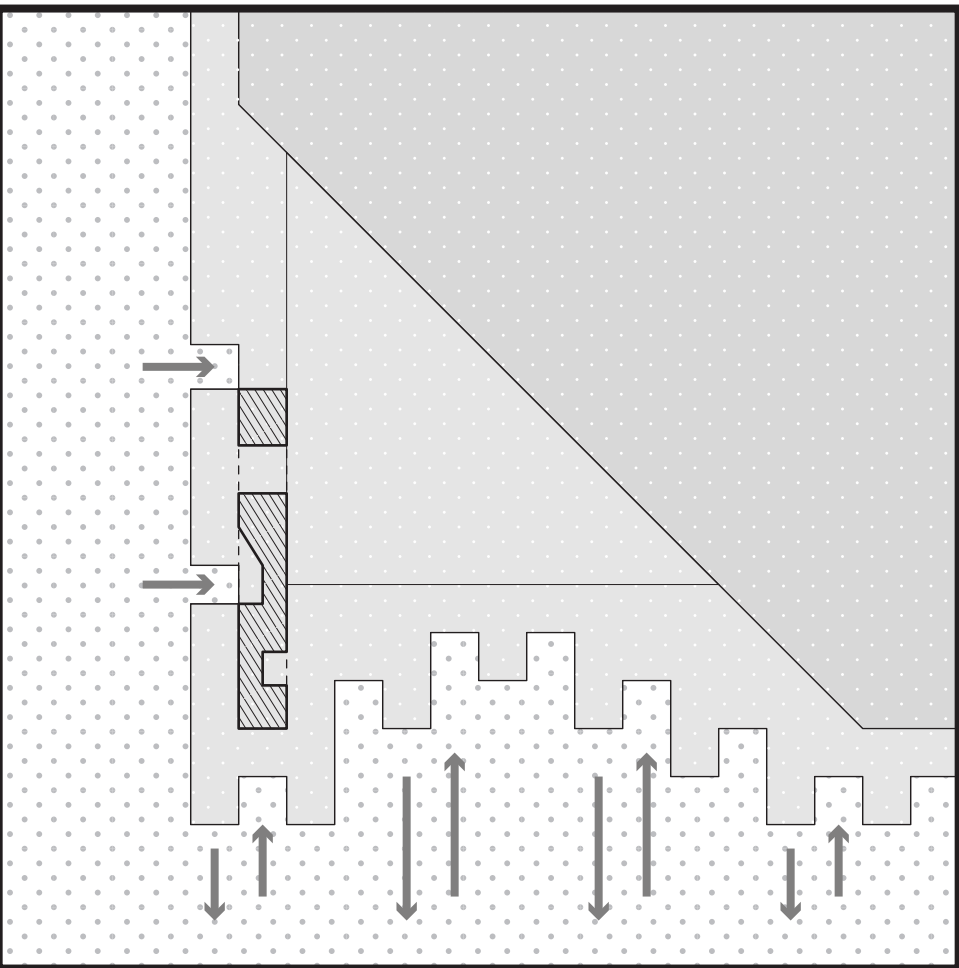
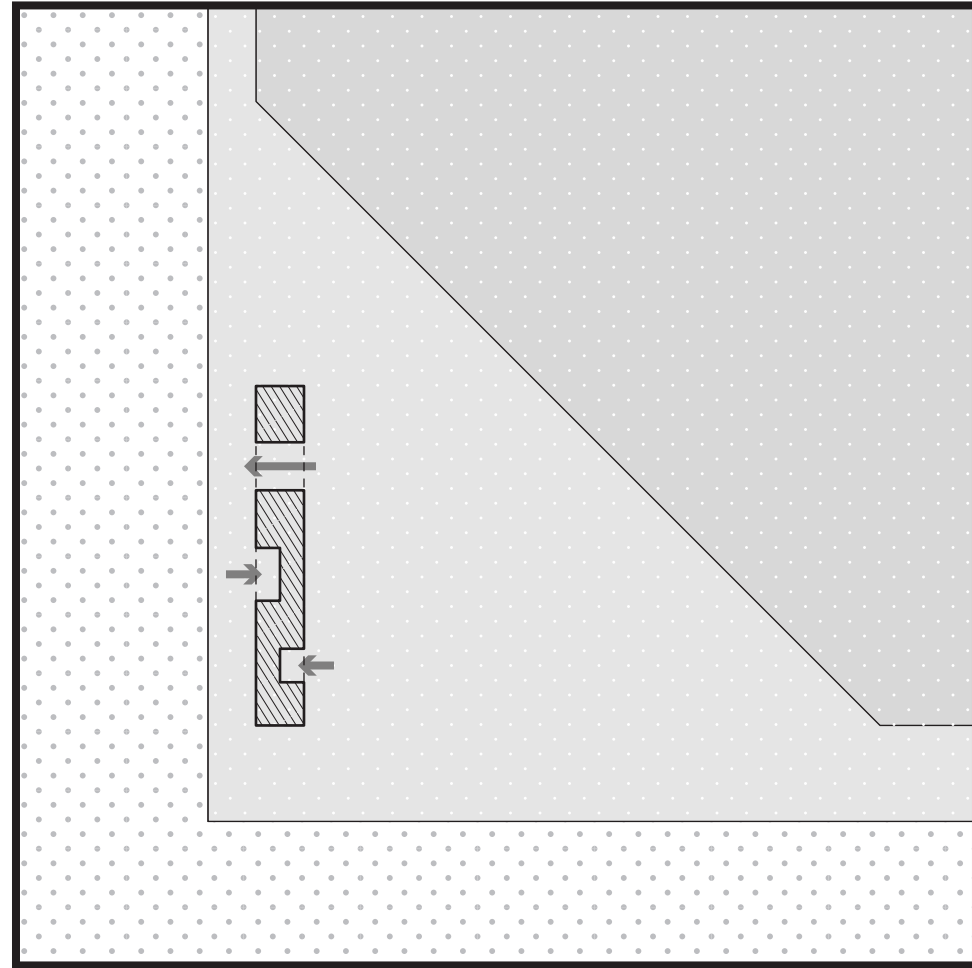
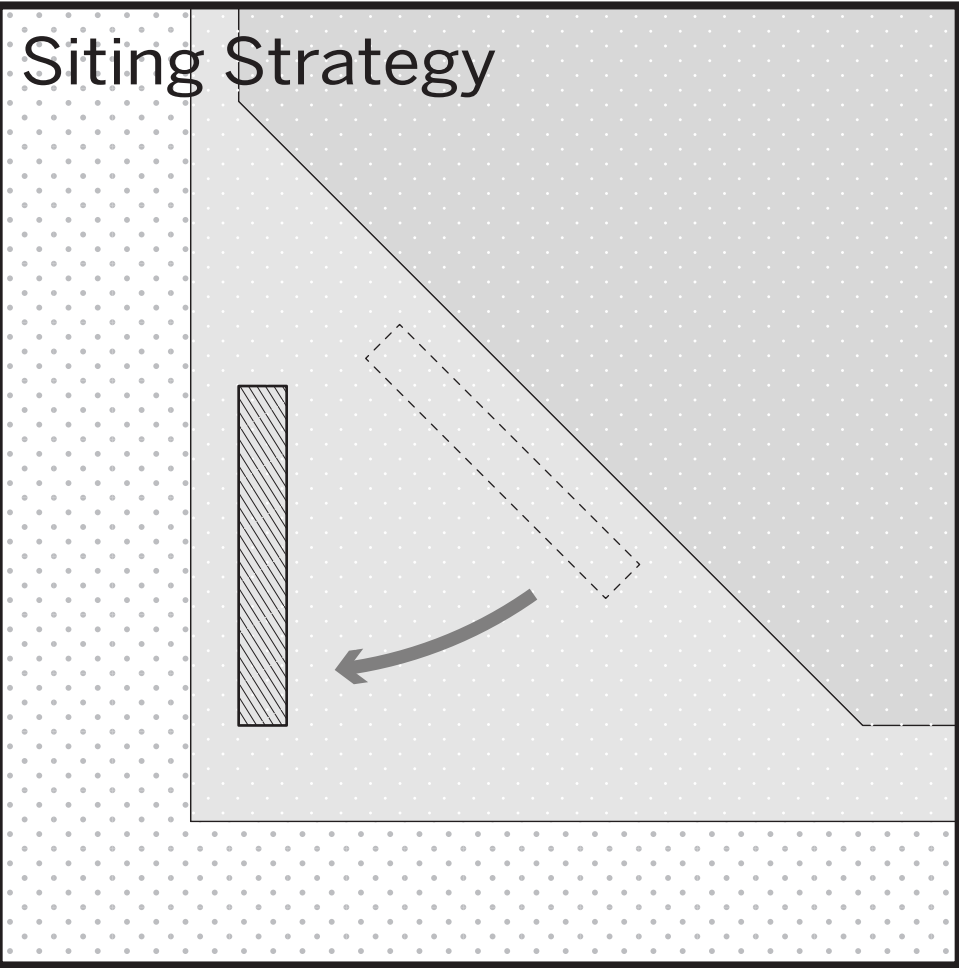
Presidents Palace

500 ft

2000 ft

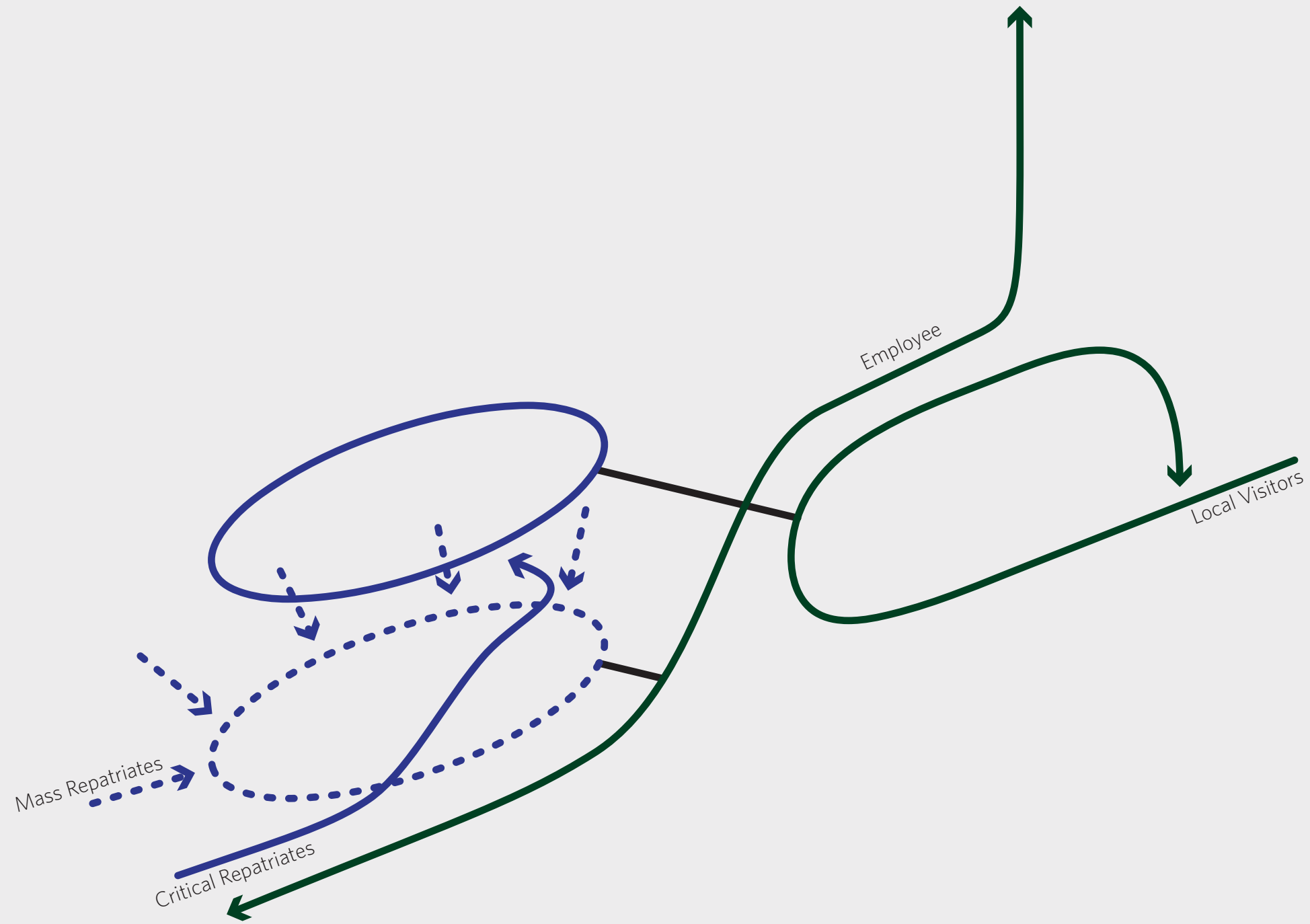
Central Business District



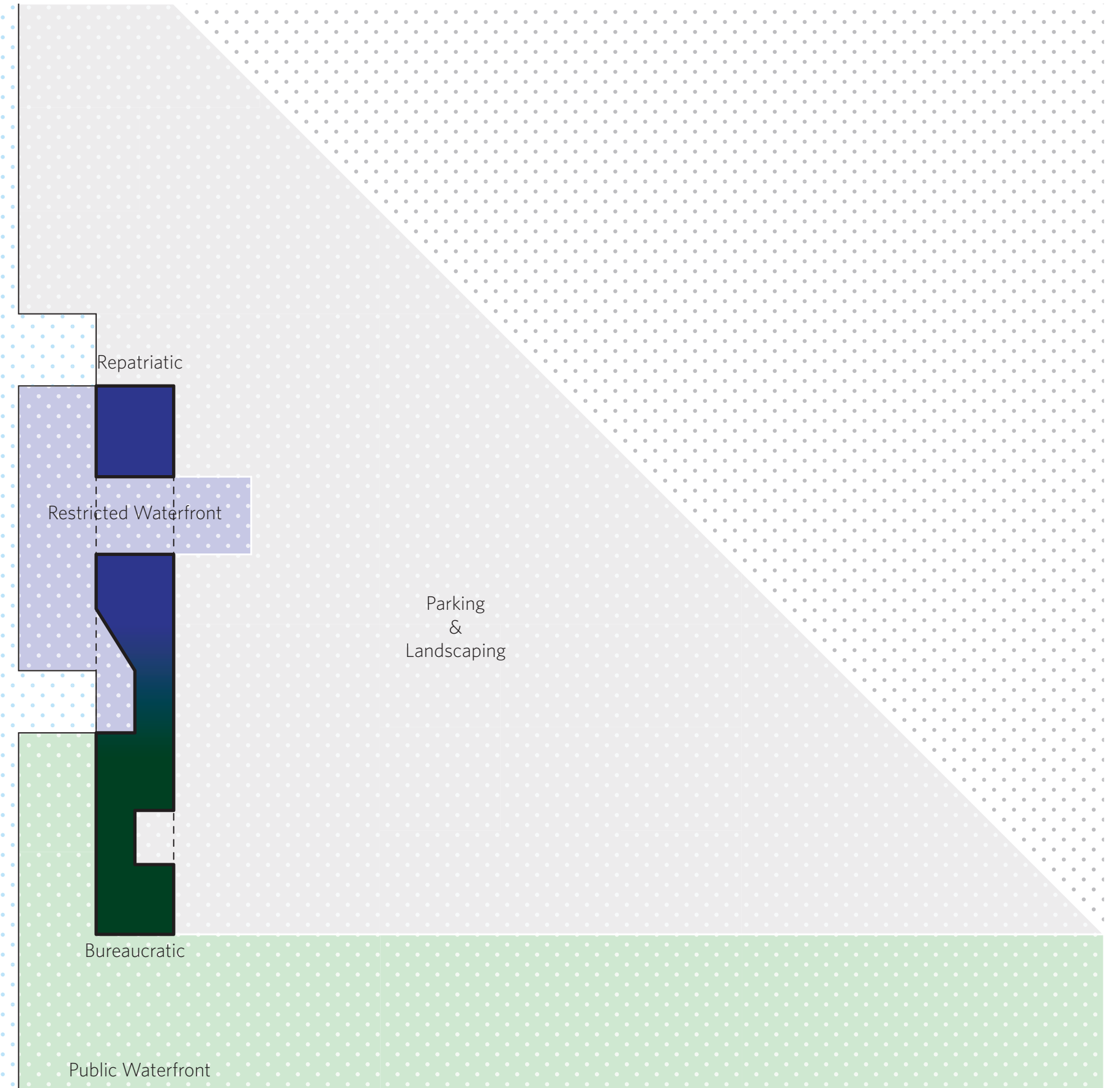




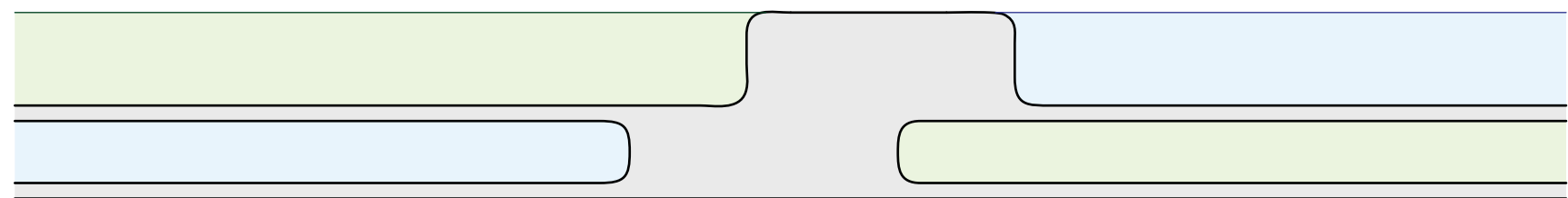
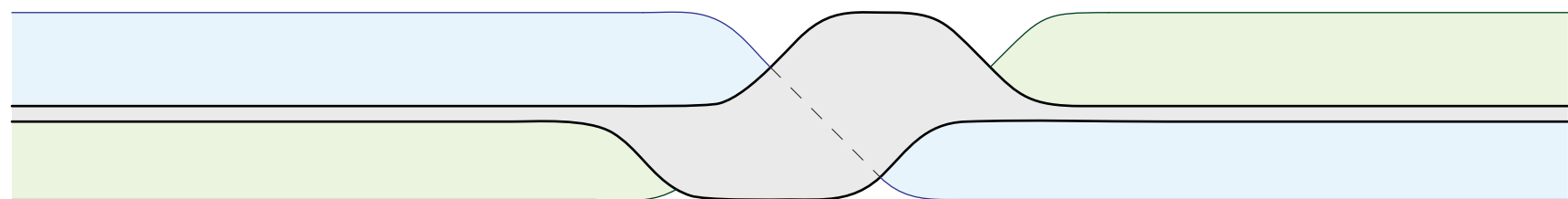
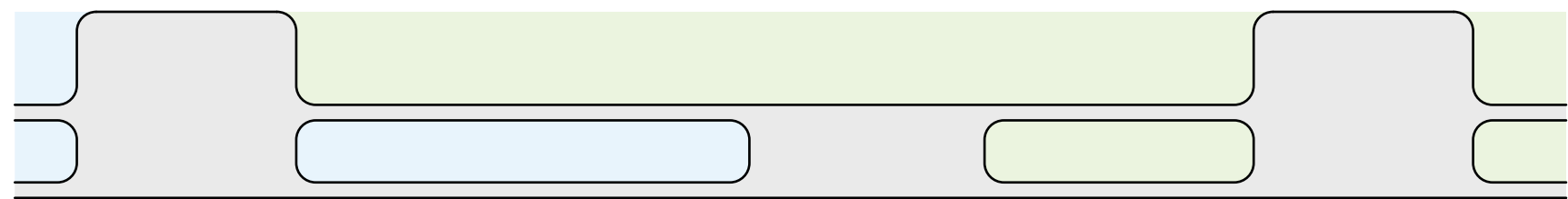
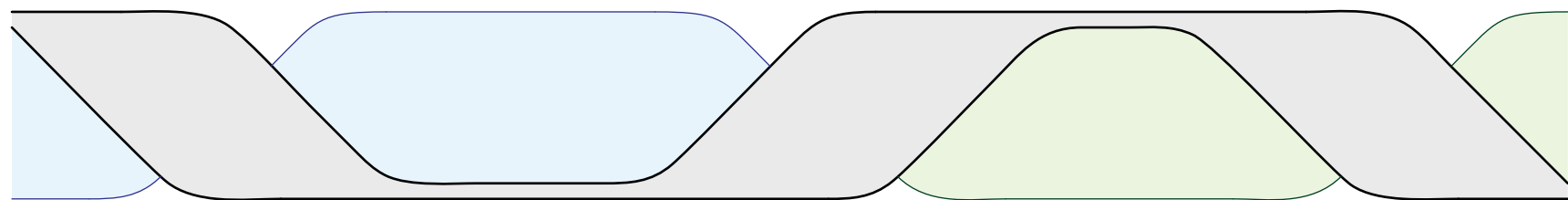
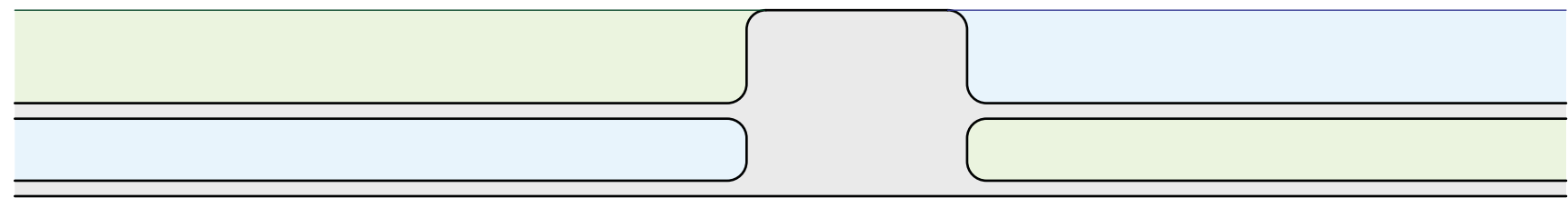
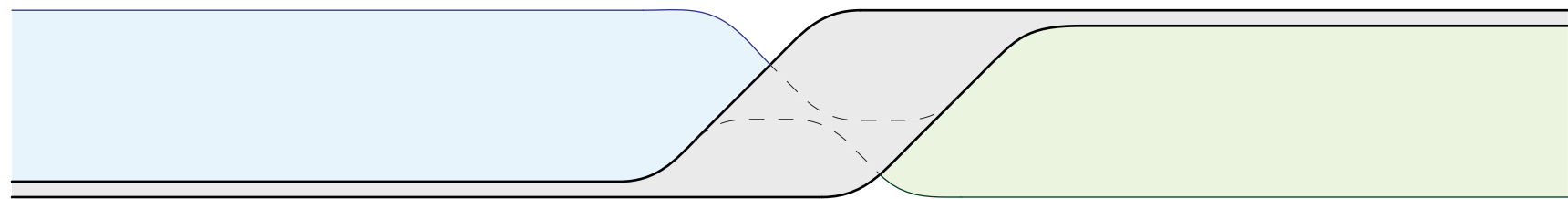
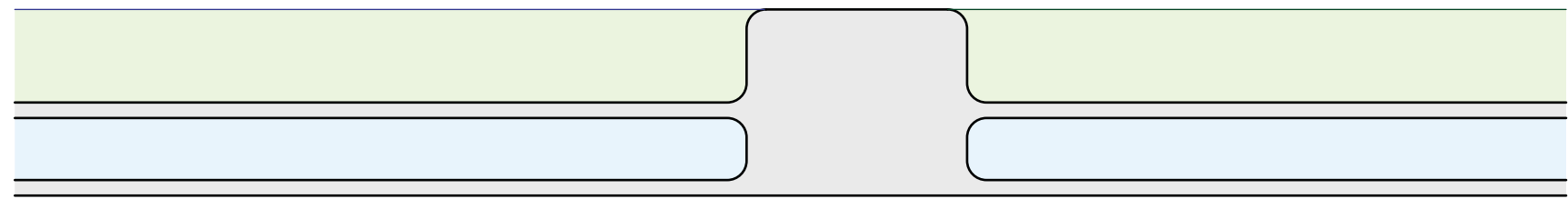
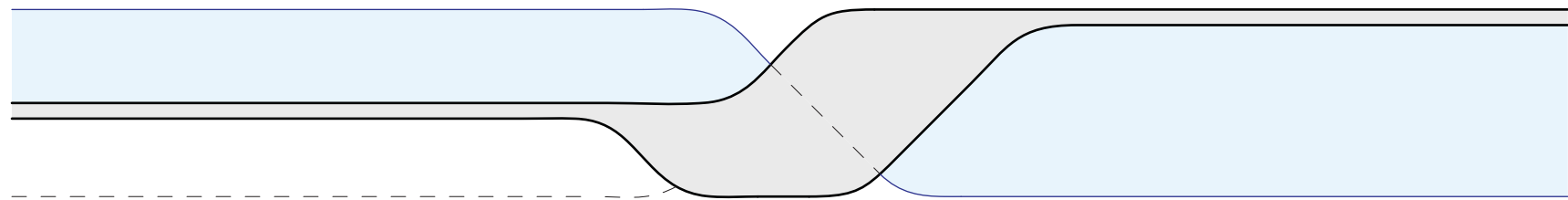
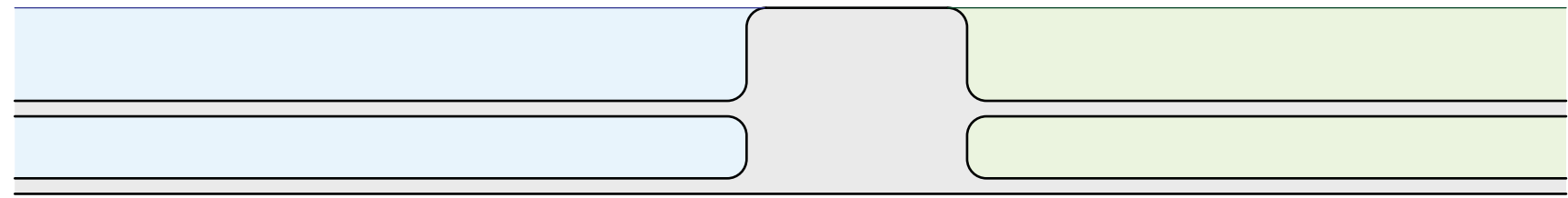
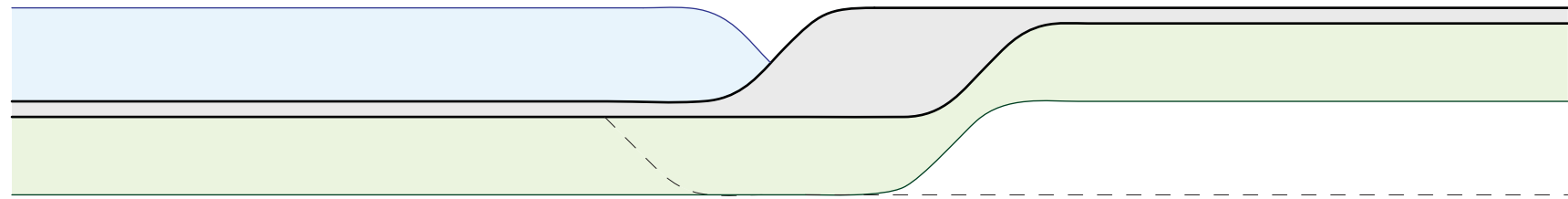
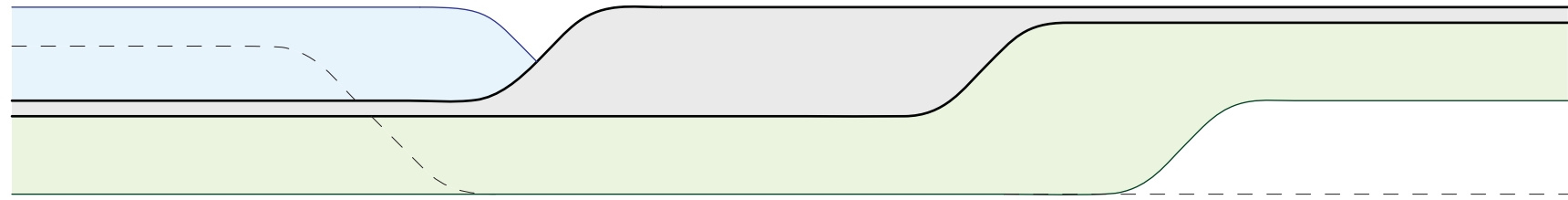
# User Type Distribution in the Center



# Site Relationships





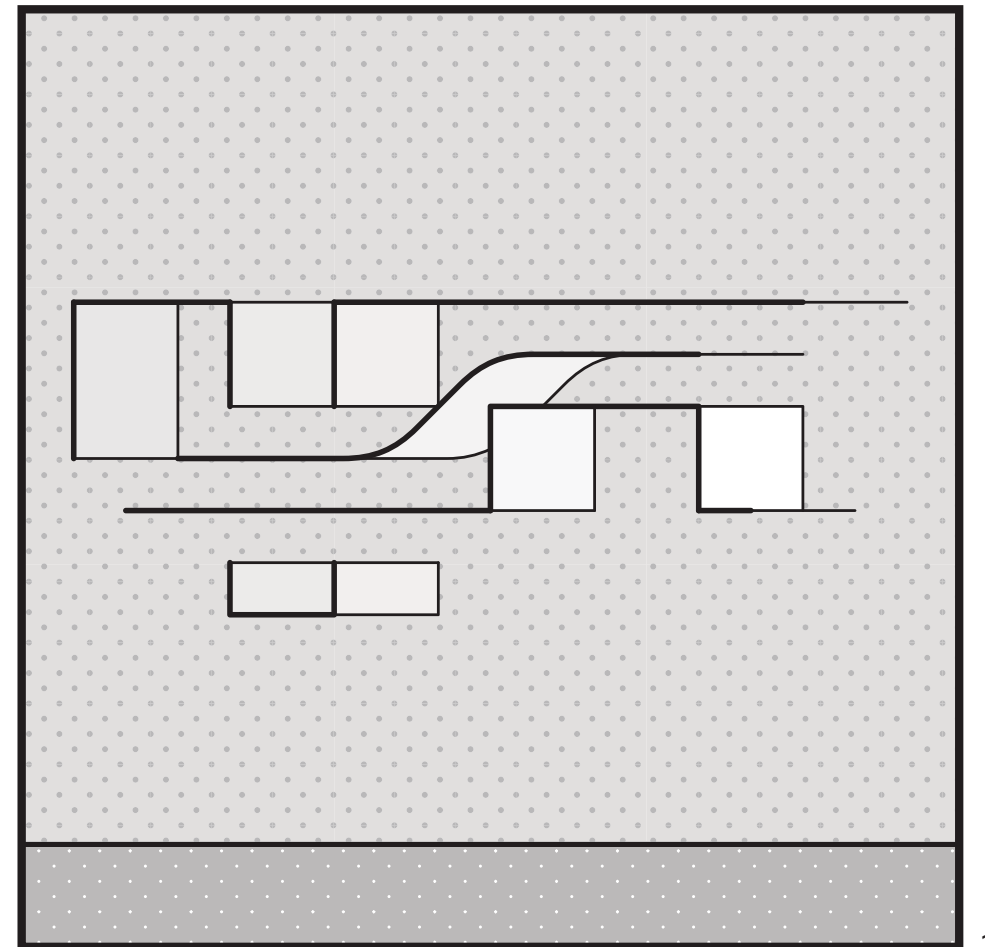
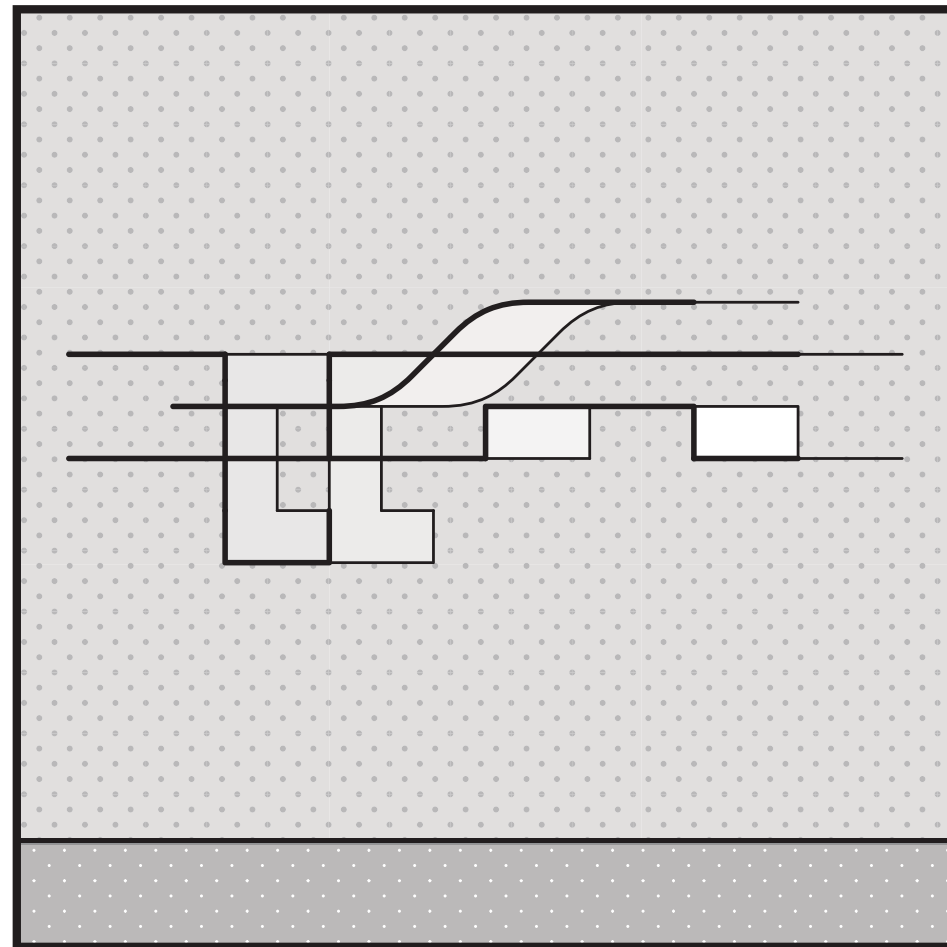
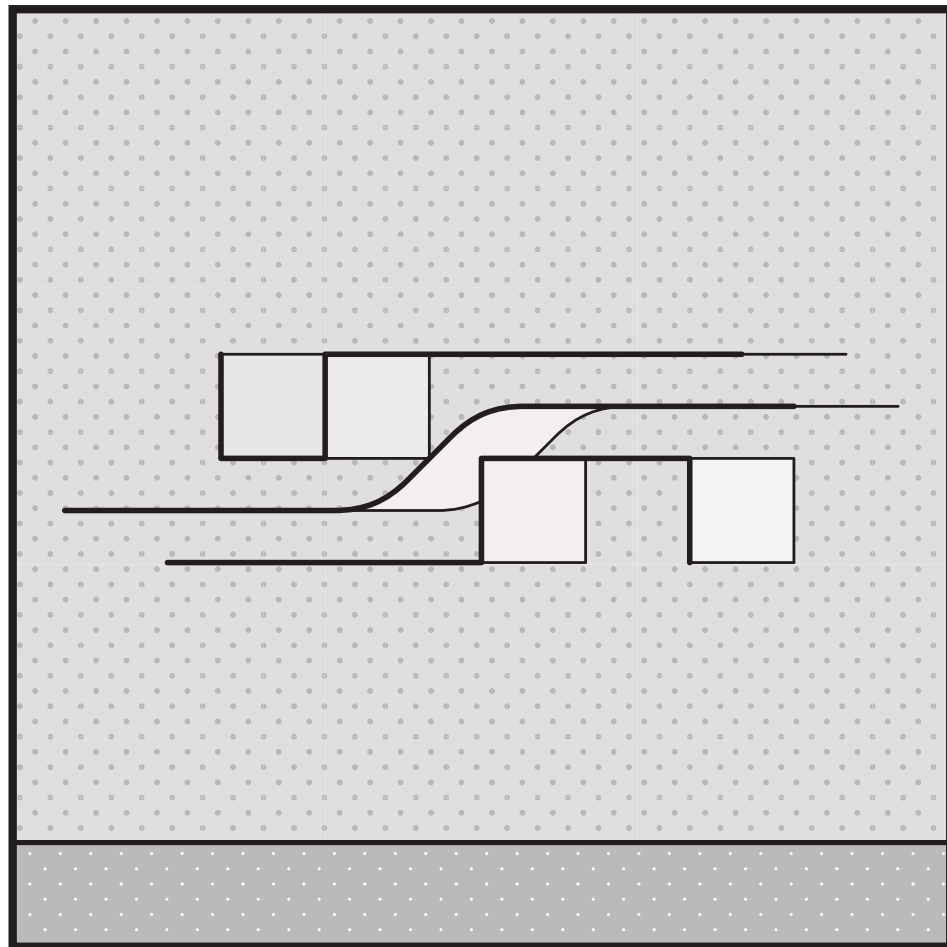
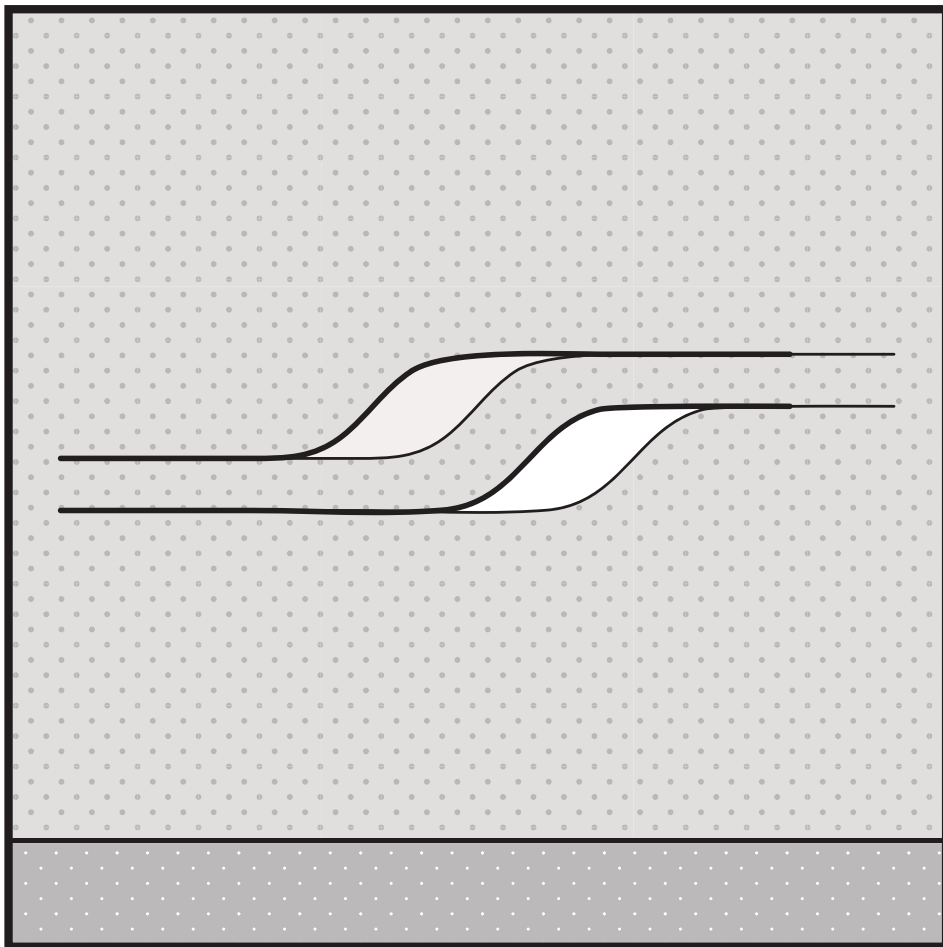
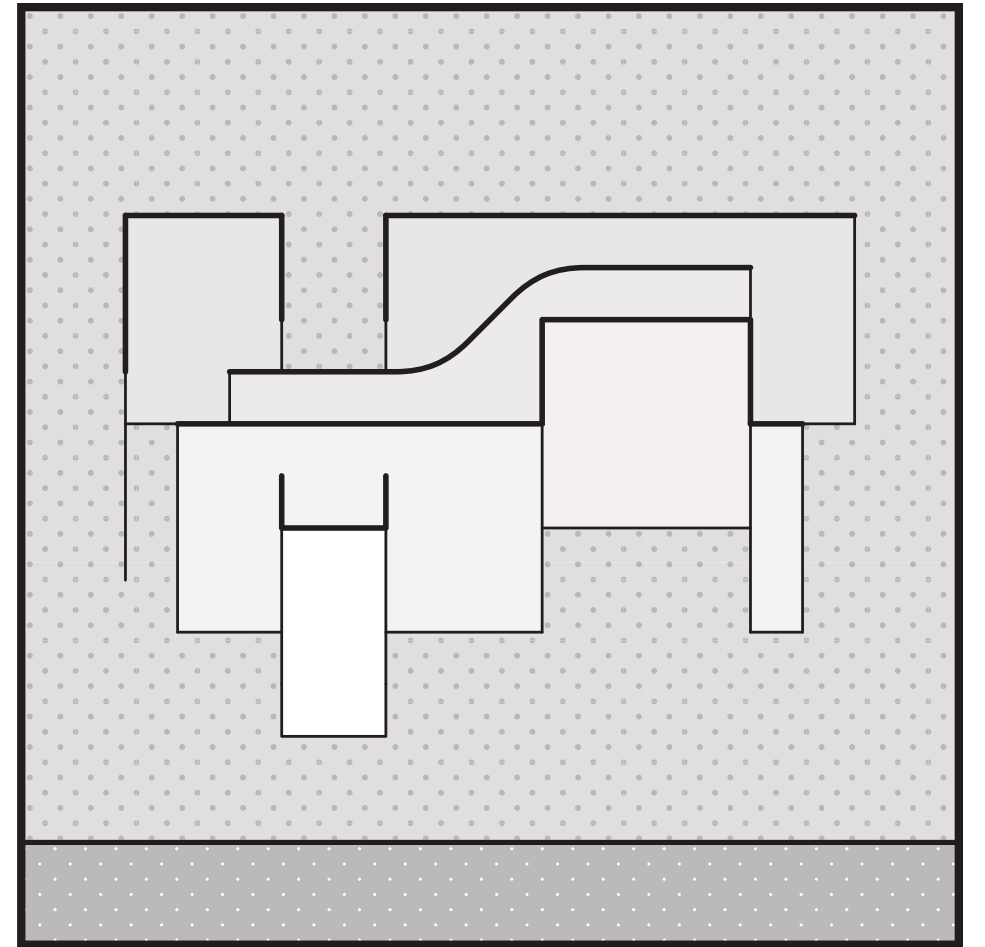
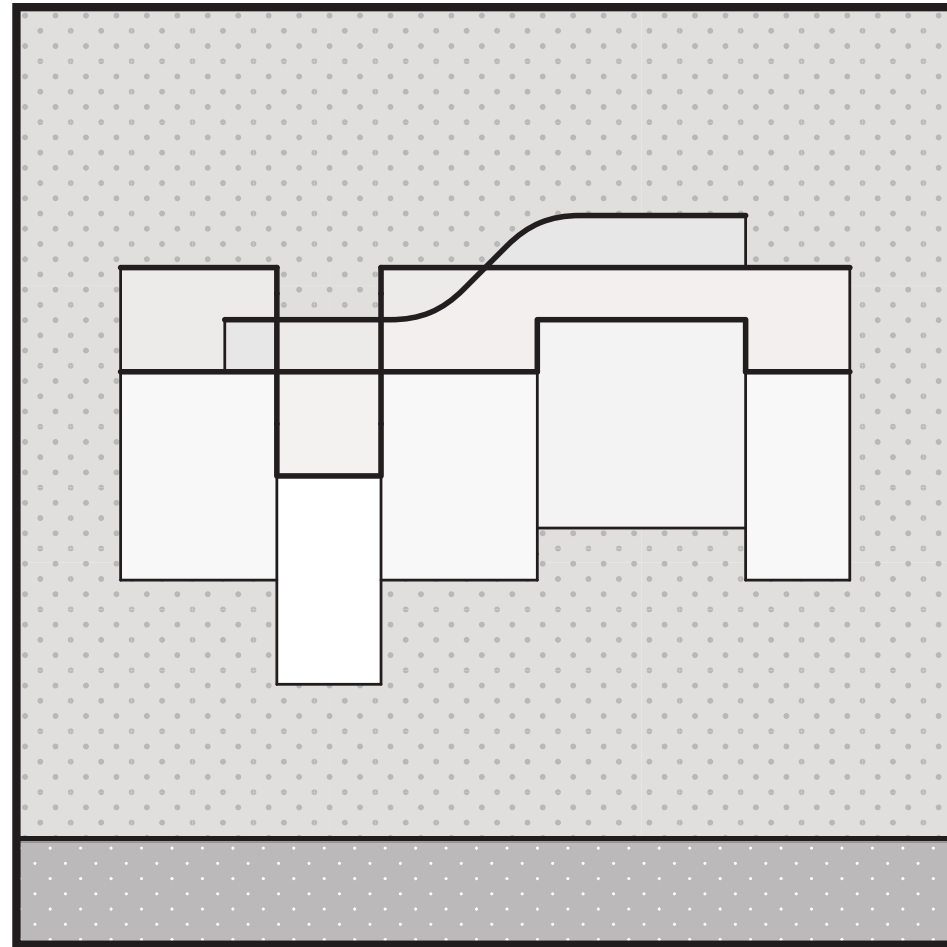
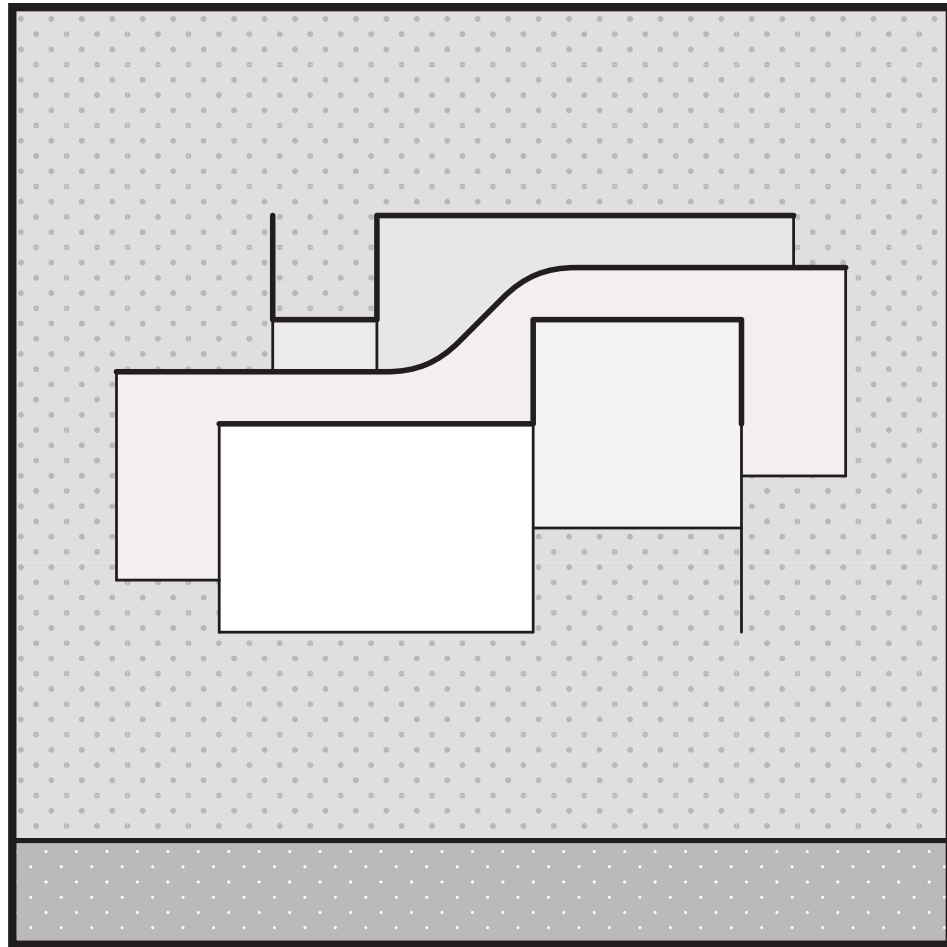
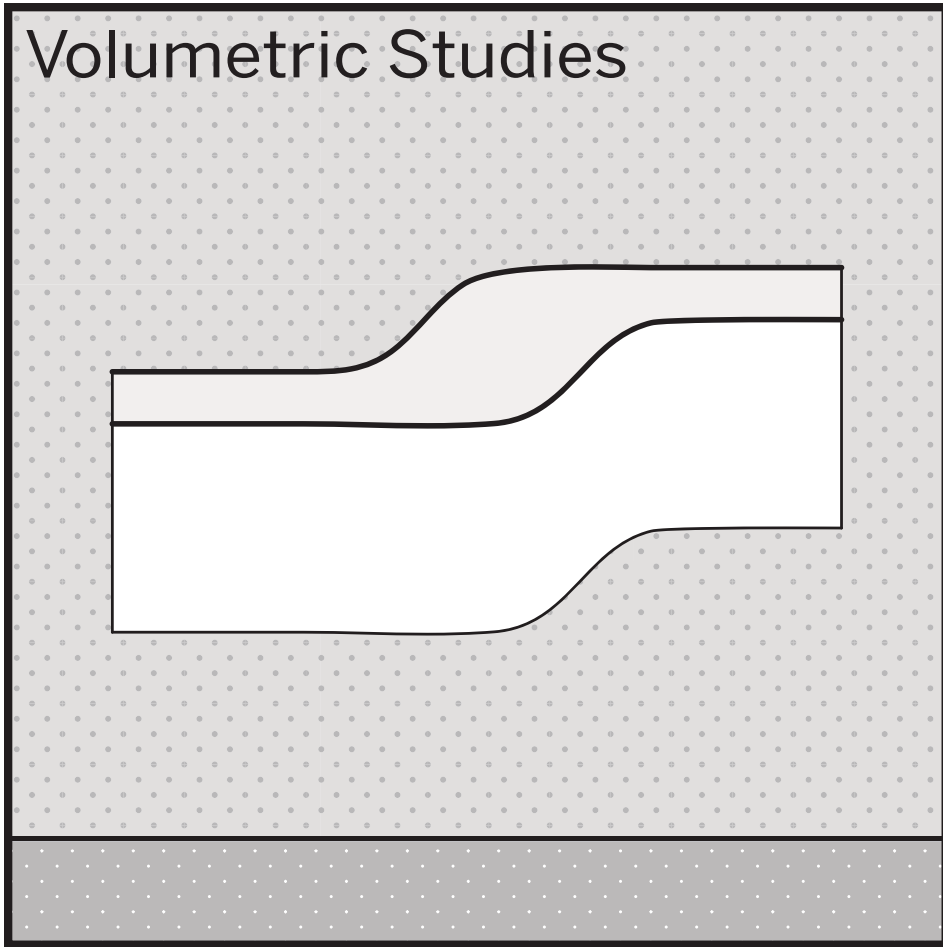


### Formal Studies

The relationship between the two sides, the bureaucratic and the repatriatic, was explored through a series of studies in which a pair of interlacing programmatic ribbons ossified, mediated by a service zone. The intermediary zone is not merely a dividing line; rather it is thickened such that it may itself define space and shape the bi-ribbonic relationship.

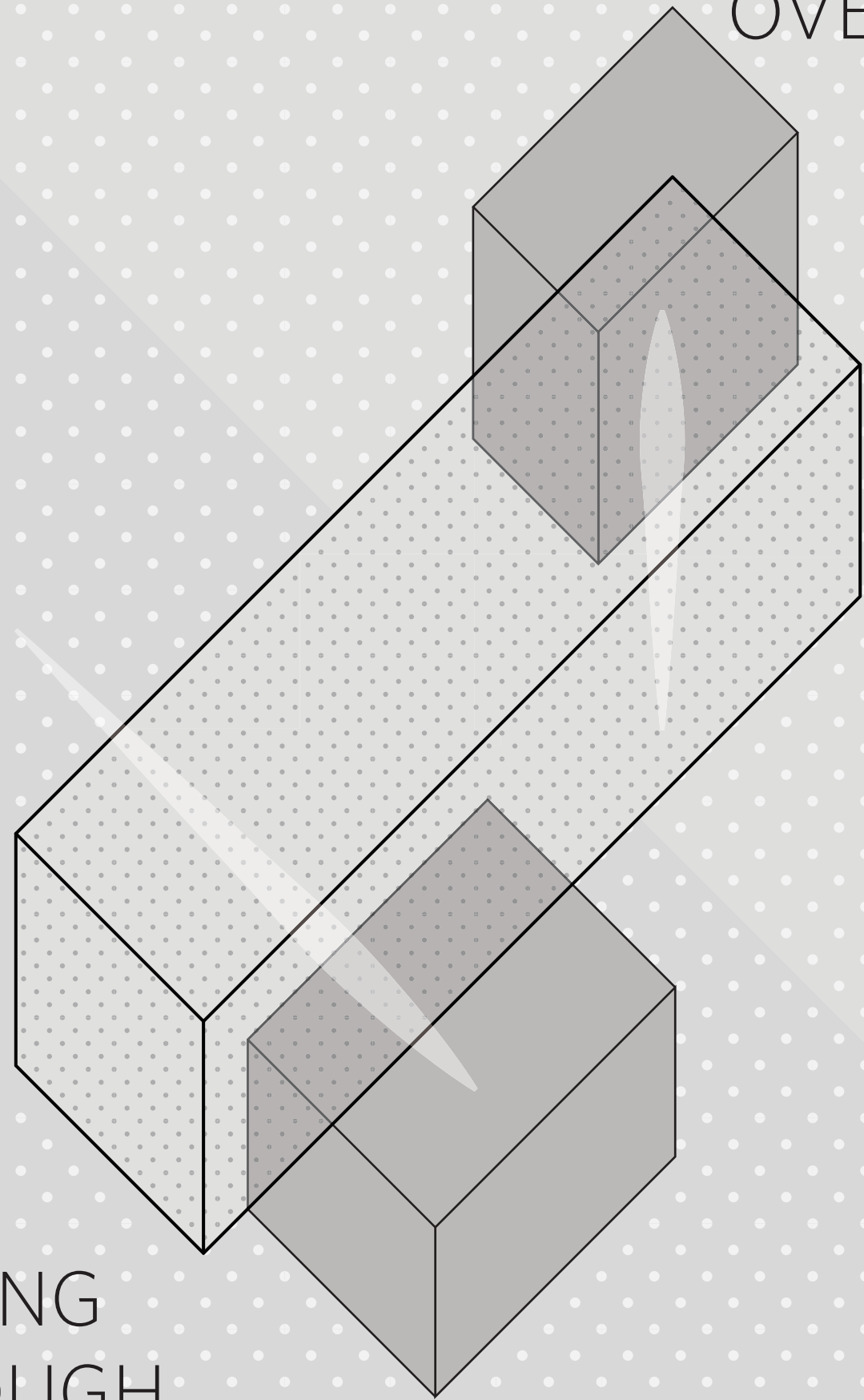


Volumetric Studies

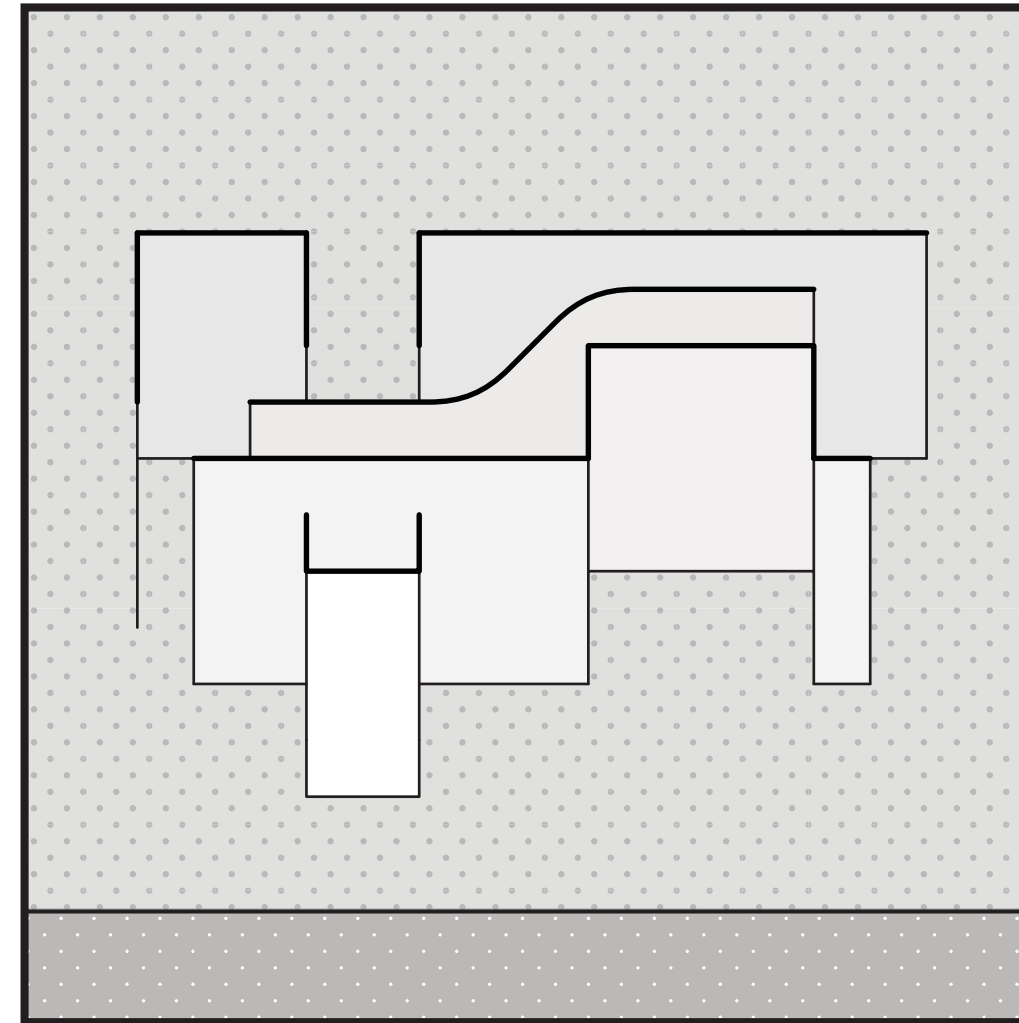




OVERLOOKING  
PROCESS

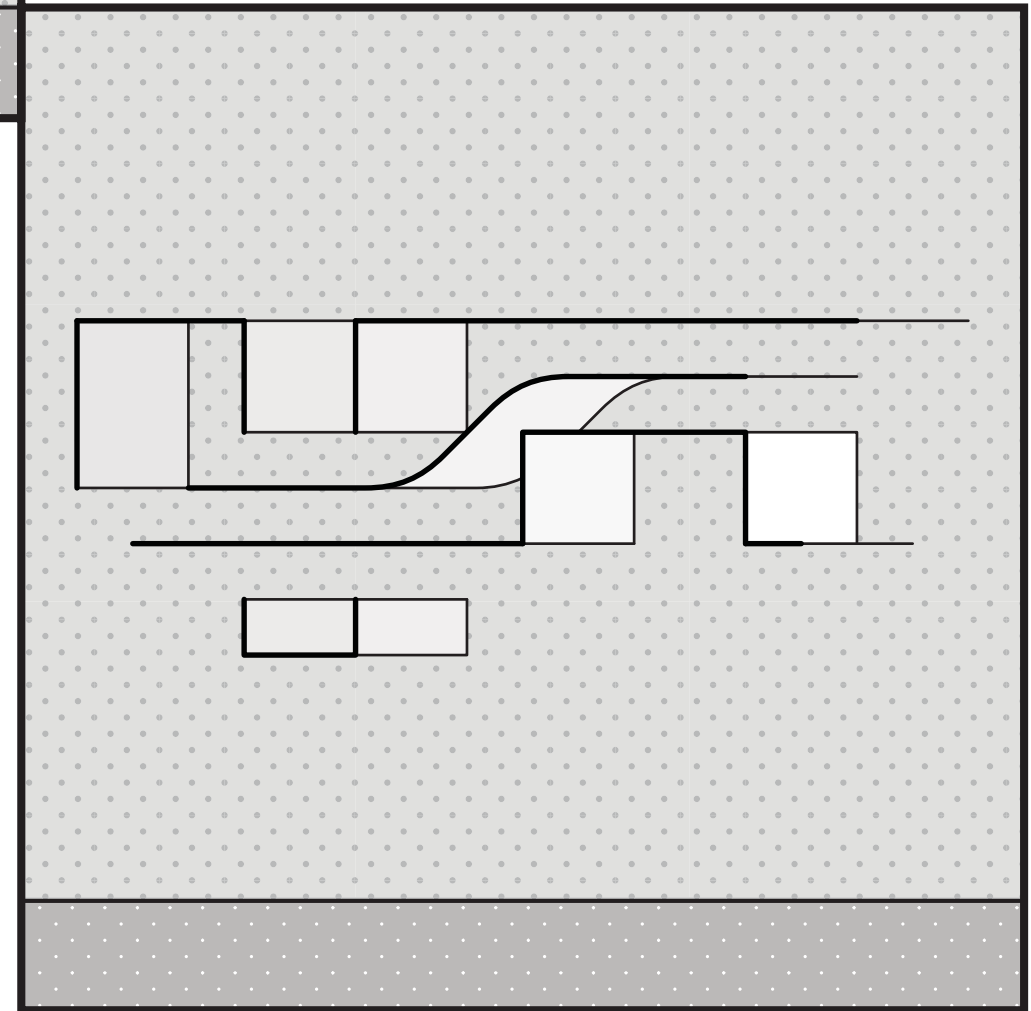


PASSING  
THROUGH

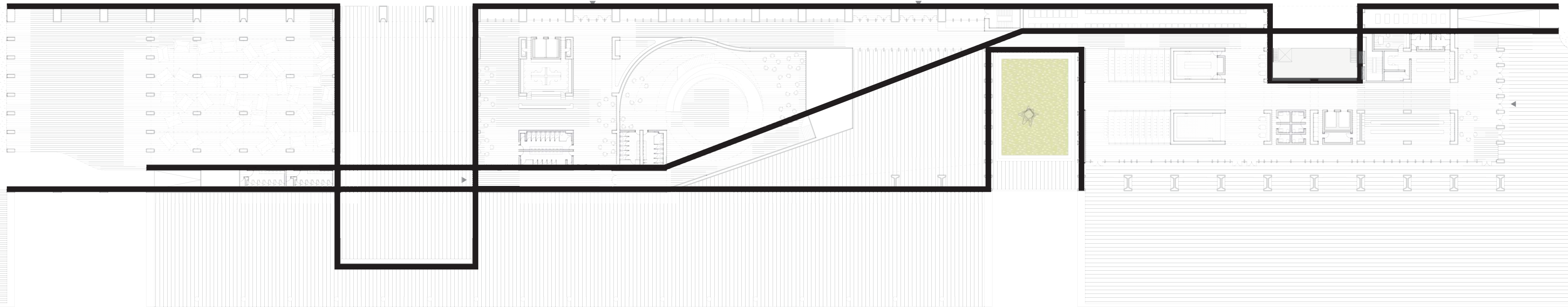
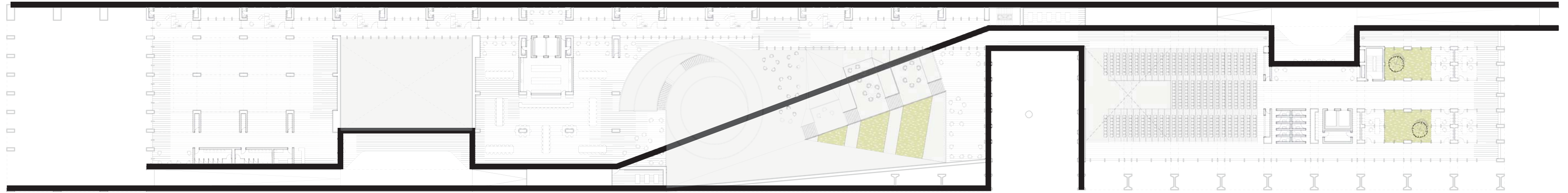


### Volumetric Studies

The relationship between the two sides was not solely explored as a planimetric strategy but also as a volumetric one in which a series of walls engage and intersect one another to create a variety of spatial conditions—moments of expansion and contraction, cavities and punctures, repetition and rhythm. The result is a three-dimensional construct that emphasizes different vectors of movement at opposite ends. The repatriatic sector embodies horizontal movement through voids in and through the building. The bureaucratic sector embodies vertical growth from a public base to a position from which to oversee the repatriatic process.



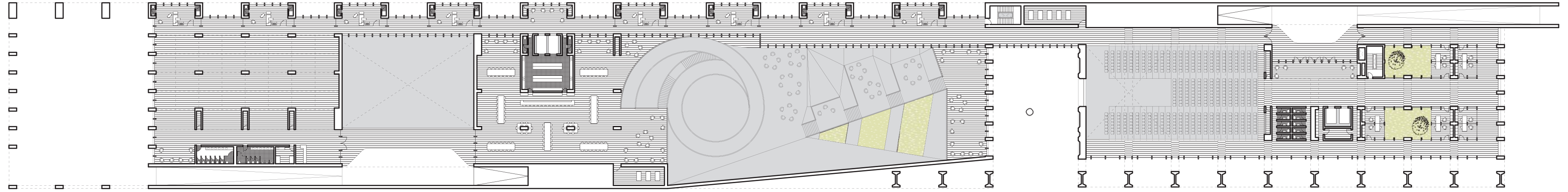




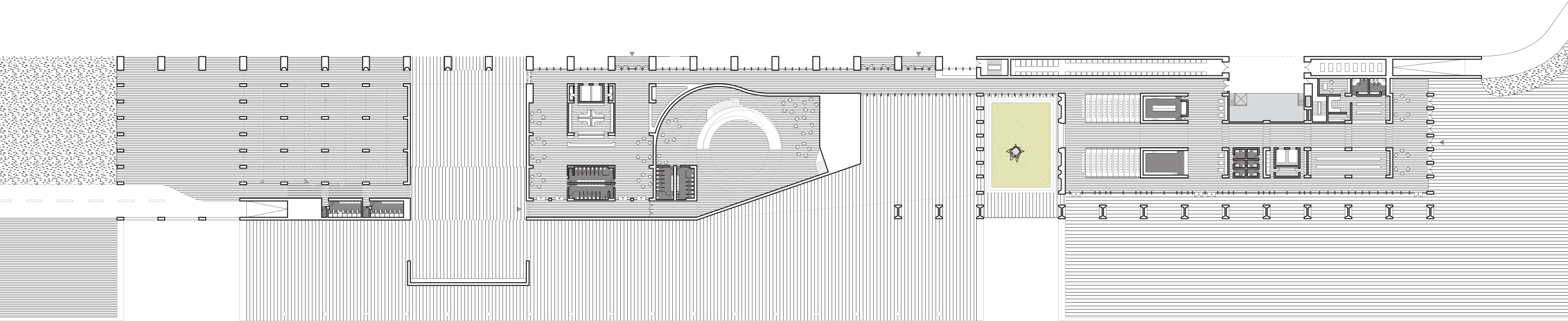


0 25' 100'

# Plans

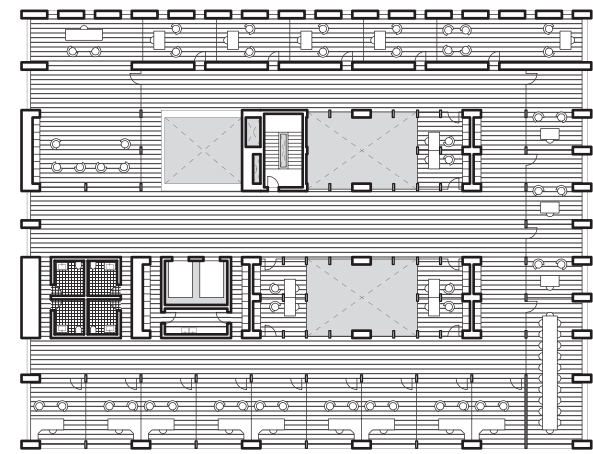


2ND

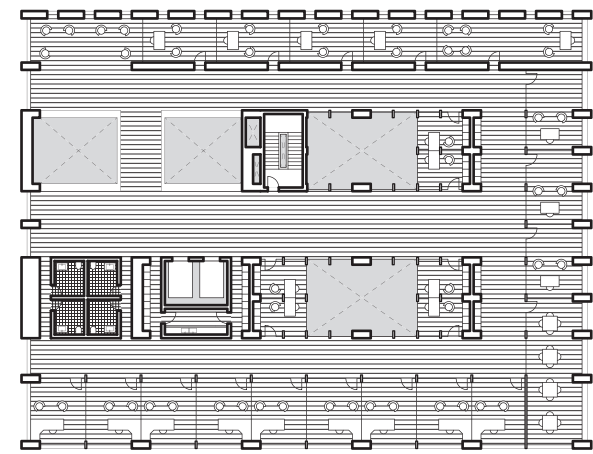




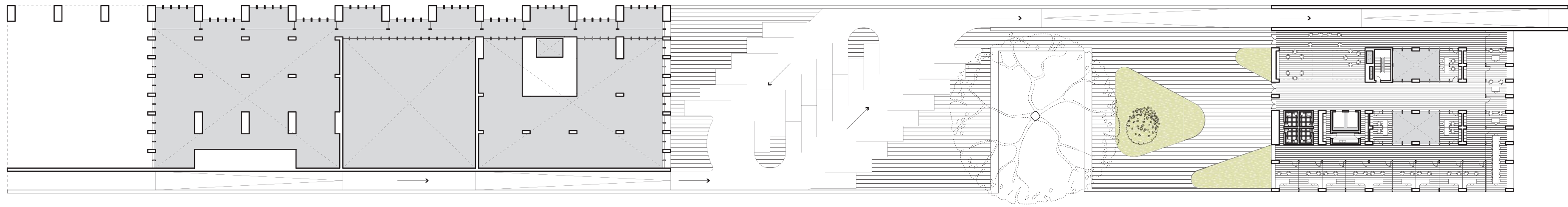
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5TH



4TH

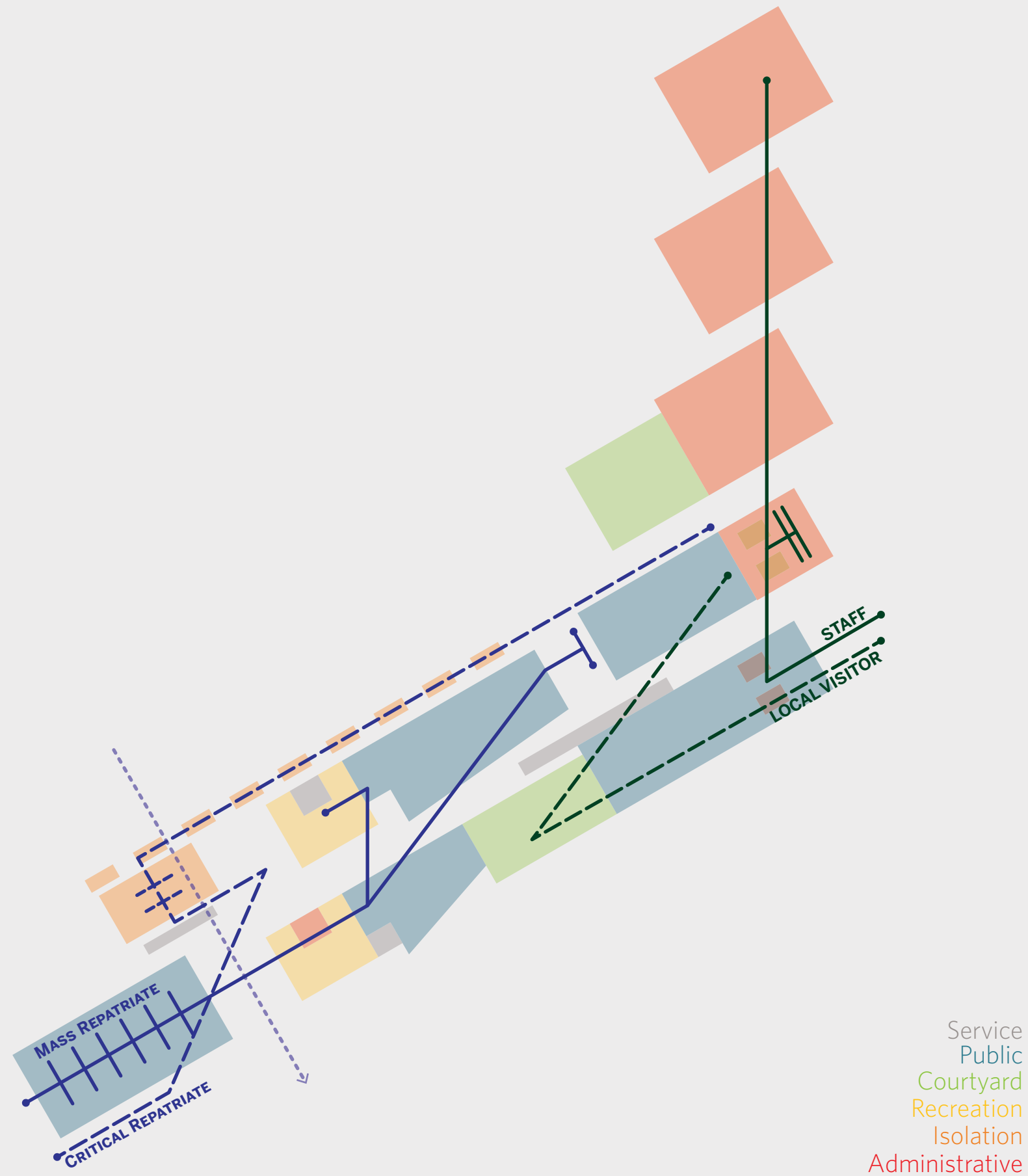


3RD

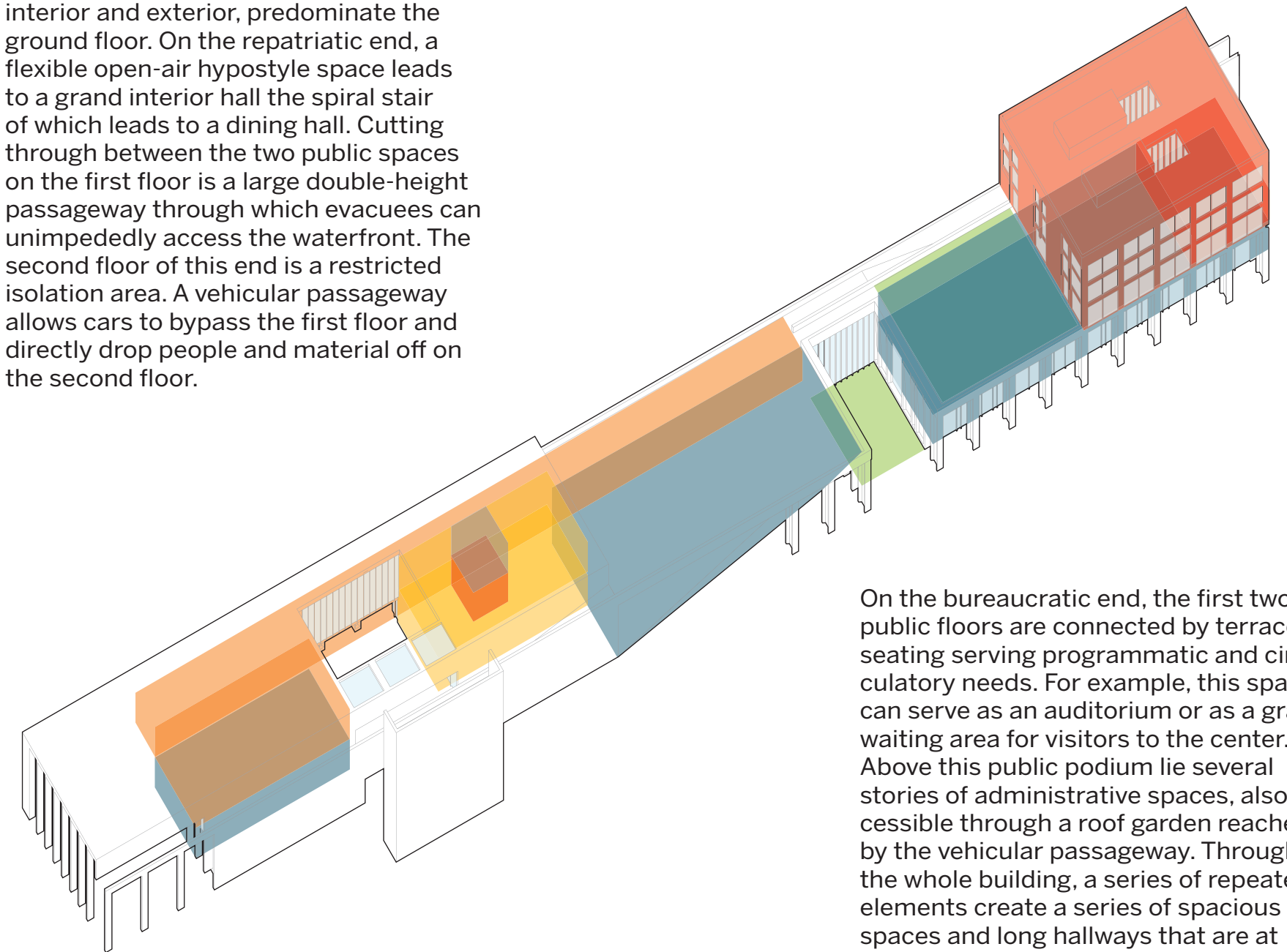




# User Circulation and Program Distribution



A series of large congregational spaces, interior and exterior, predominate the ground floor. On the repatriatic end, a flexible open-air hypostyle space leads to a grand interior hall the spiral stair of which leads to a dining hall. Cutting through between the two public spaces on the first floor is a large double-height passageway through which evacuees can unimpededly access the waterfront. The second floor of this end is a restricted isolation area. A vehicular passageway allows cars to bypass the first floor and directly drop people and material off on the second floor.



On the bureaucratic end, the first two public floors are connected by terraced seating serving programmatic and circulatory needs. For example, this space can serve as an auditorium or as a grand waiting area for visitors to the center. Above this public podium lie several stories of administrative spaces, also accessible through a roof garden reached by the vehicular passageway. Throughout the whole building, a series of repeated elements create a series of spacious spaces and long hallways that are at once steadfast and bathed in light.



0 25' 100'

# Sections

Gap Passageway



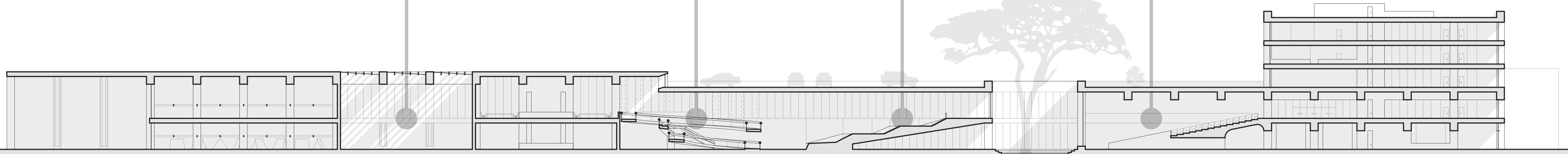
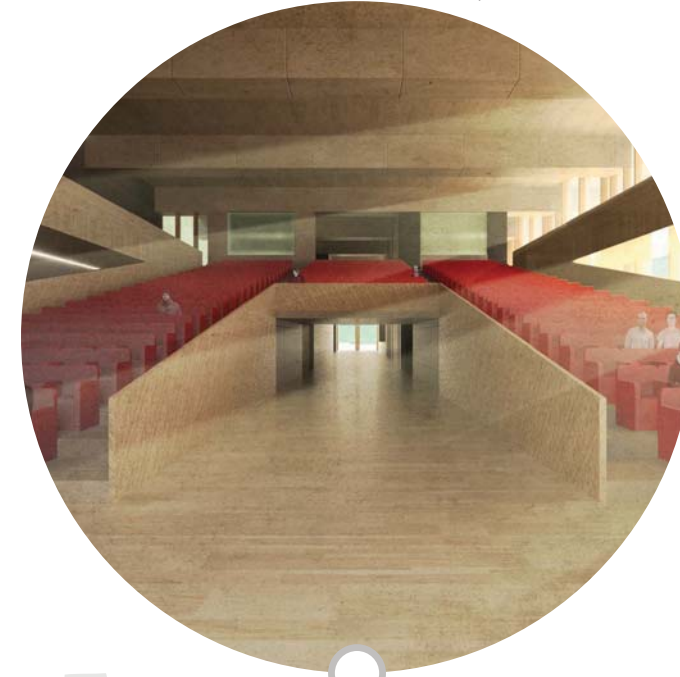
Grand Space Terrace



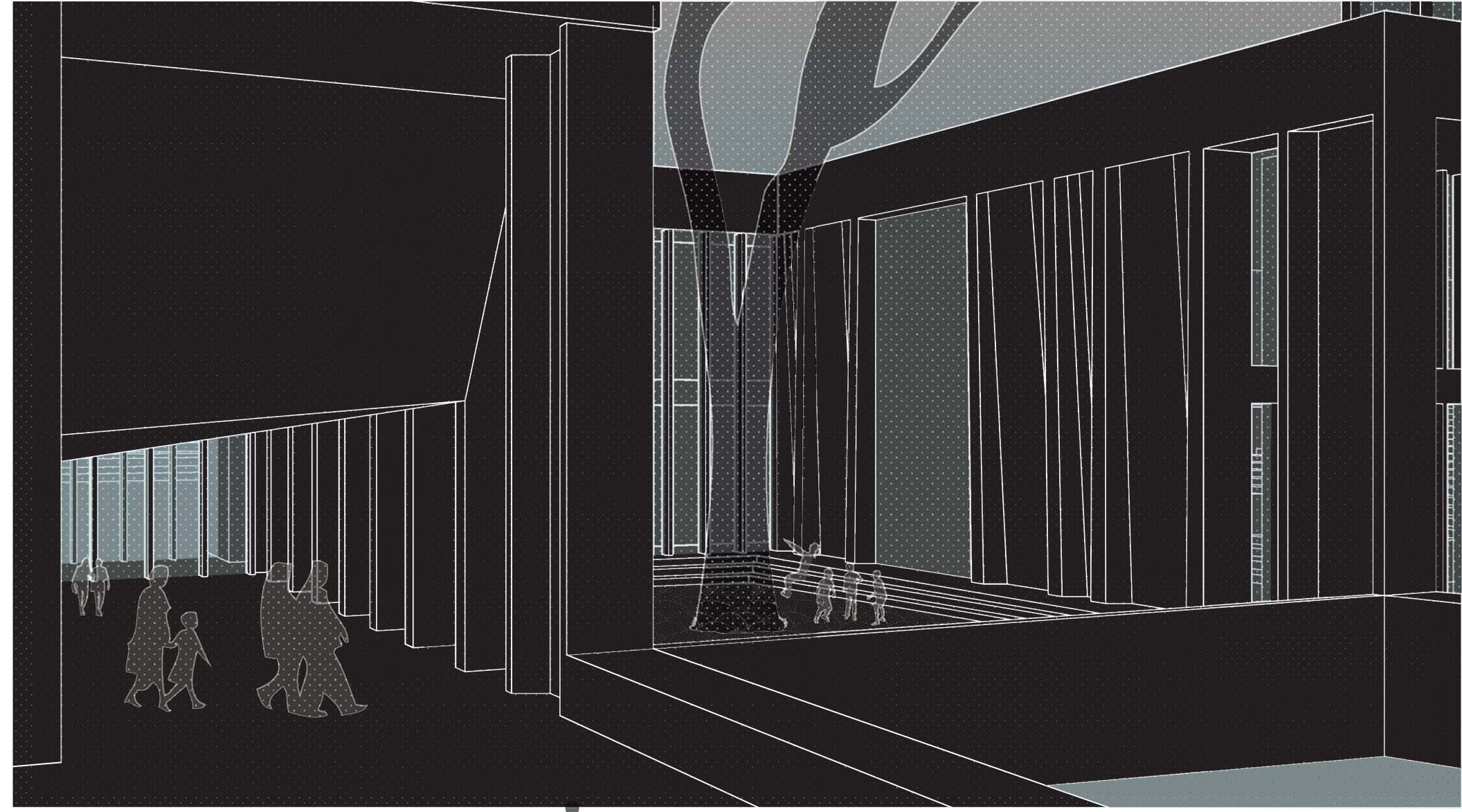
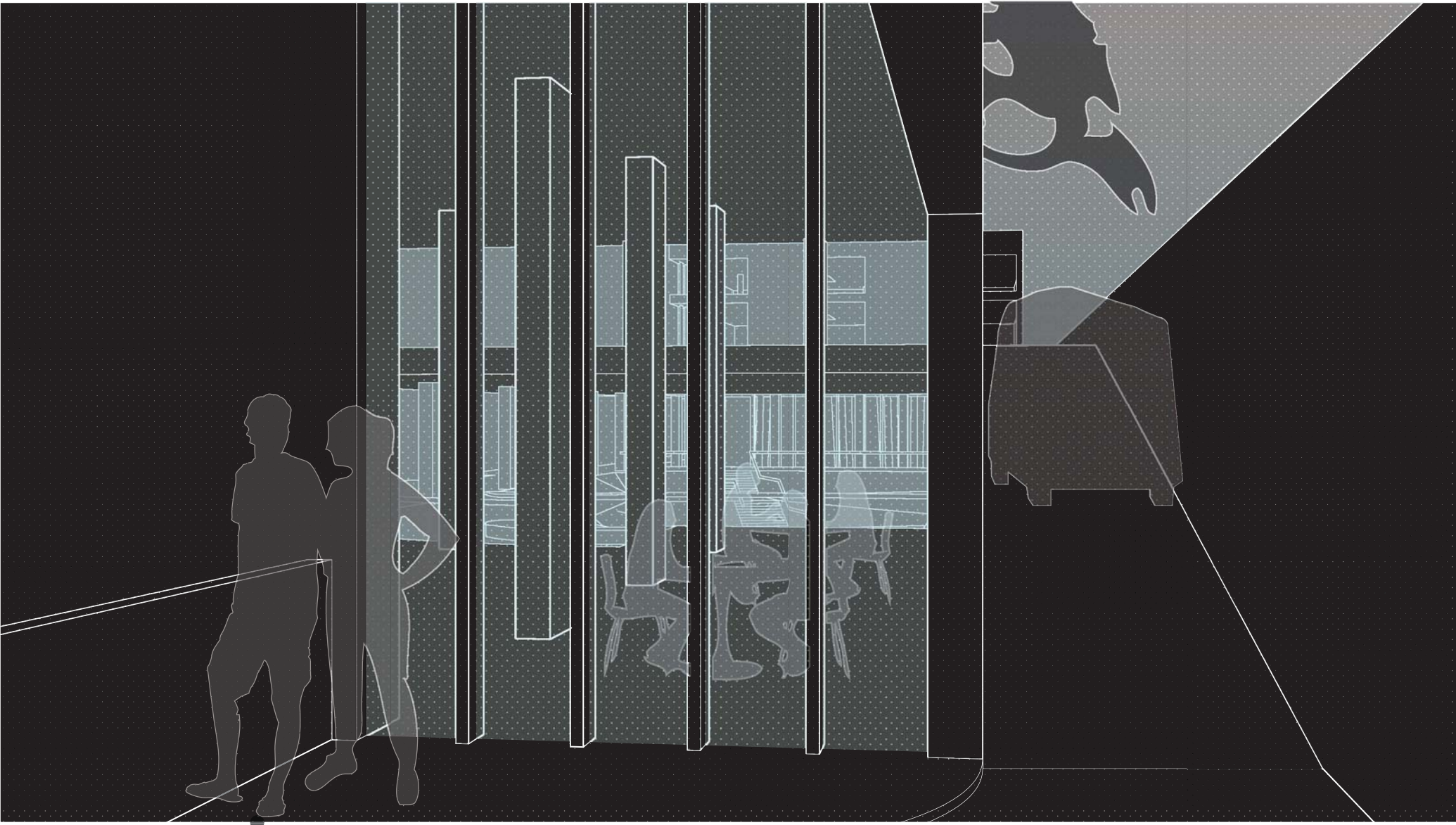
Grand Space Spiral Staircase



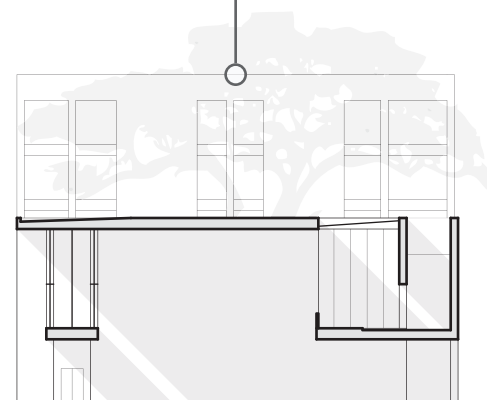
Public Auditorium



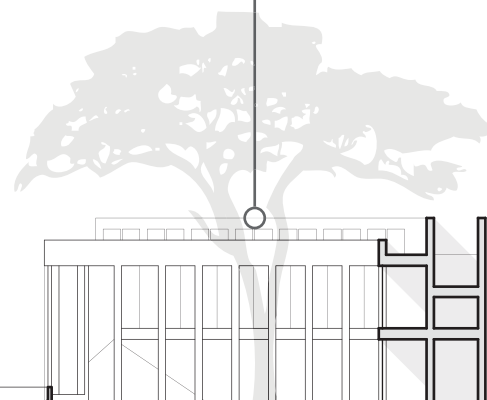




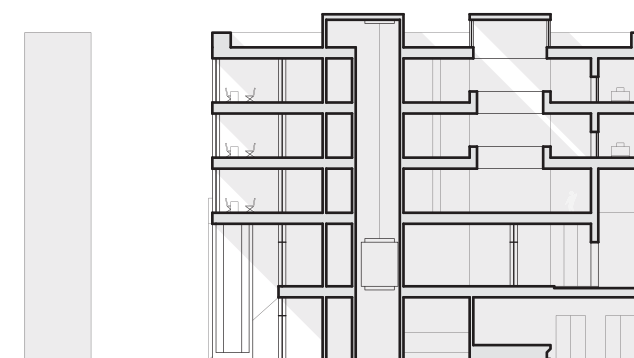
0 25' 100'



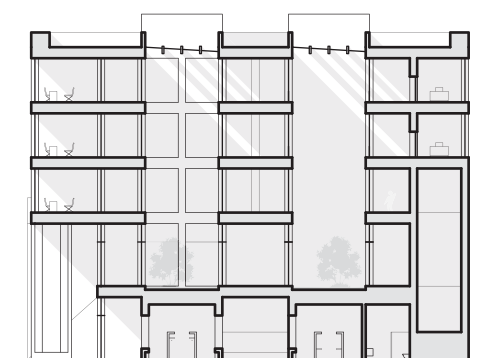
Gap Passageway



Waterfront Courtyard

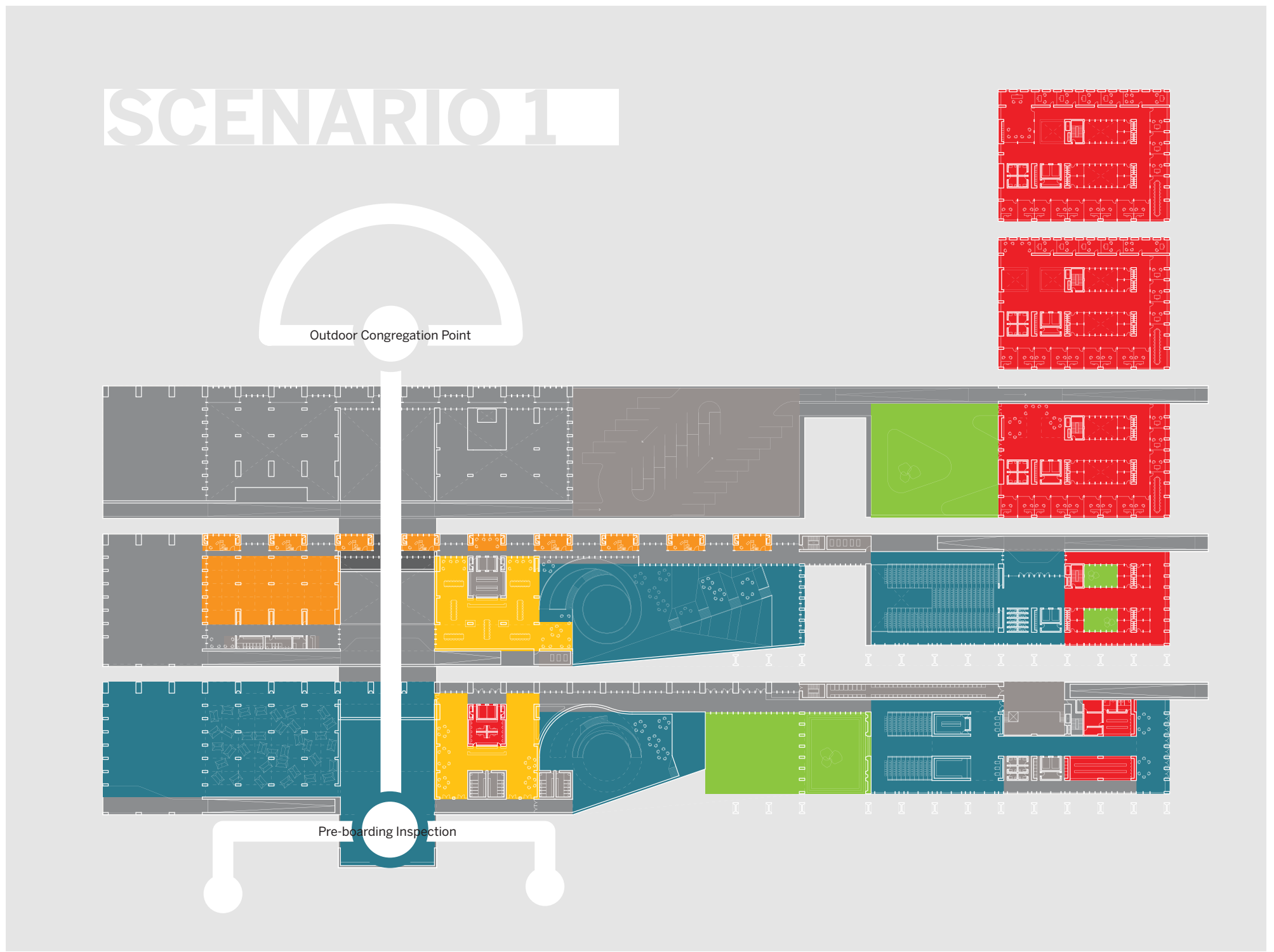
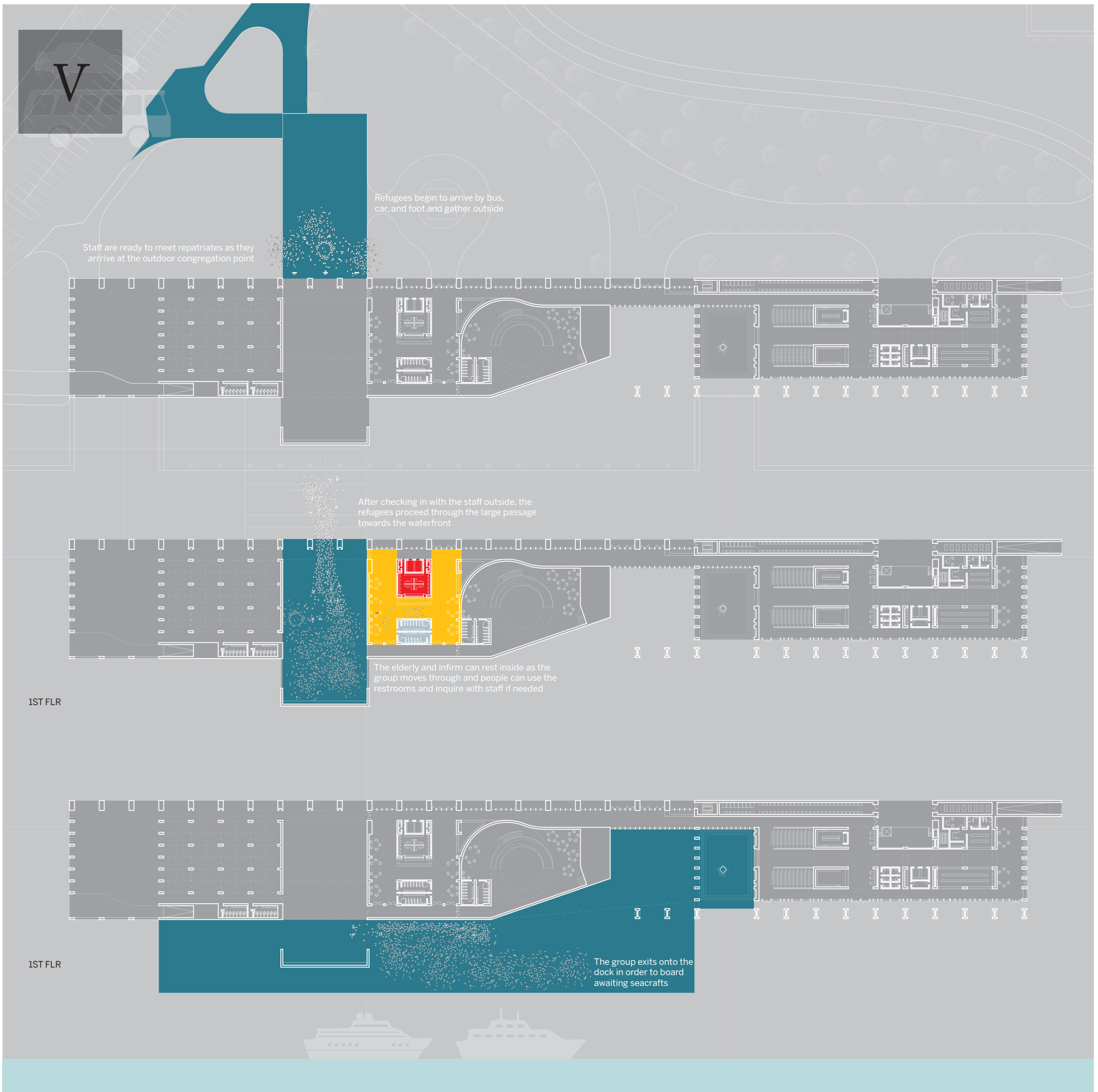


Loading Dock and Administrative Levels



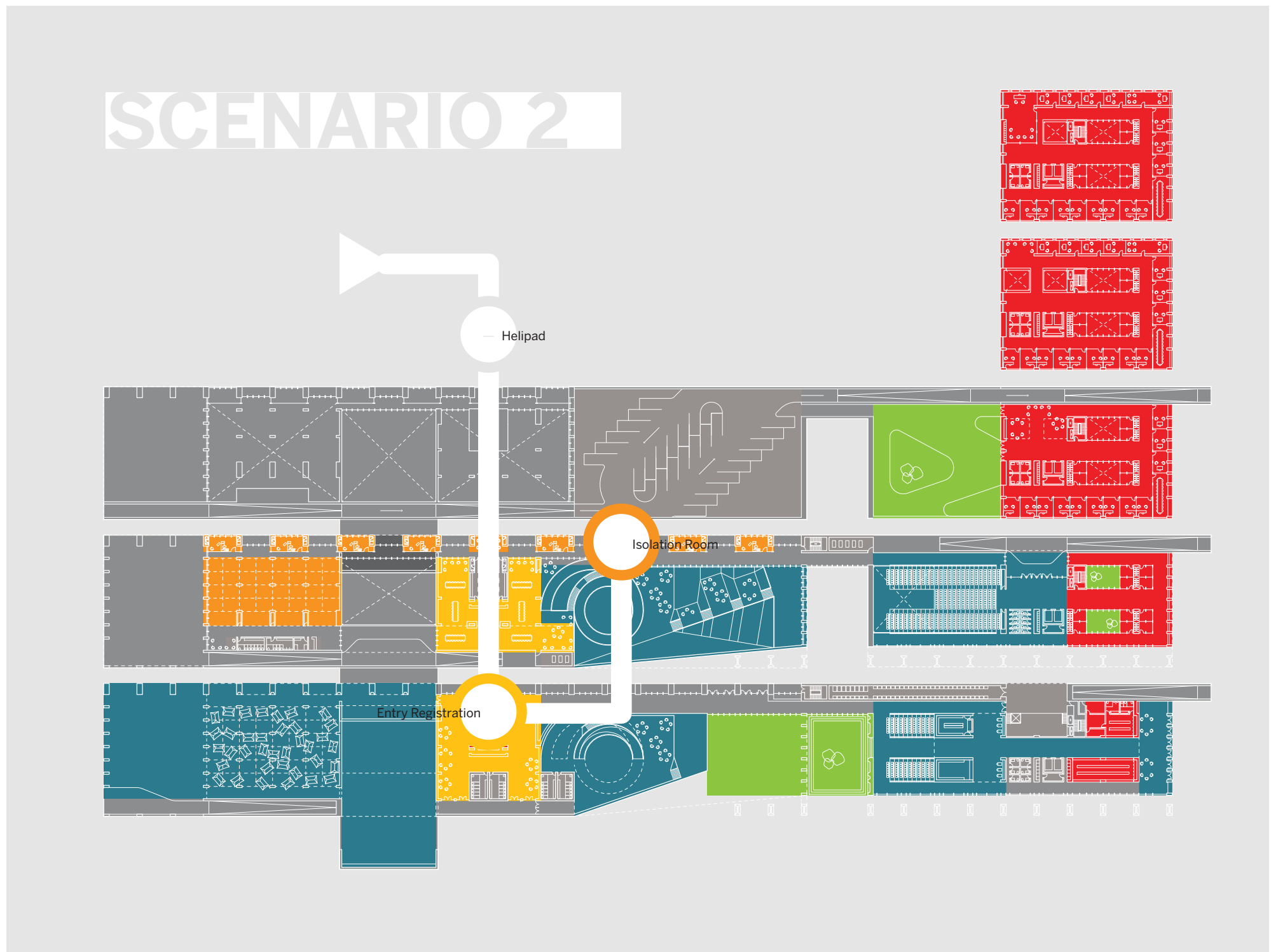
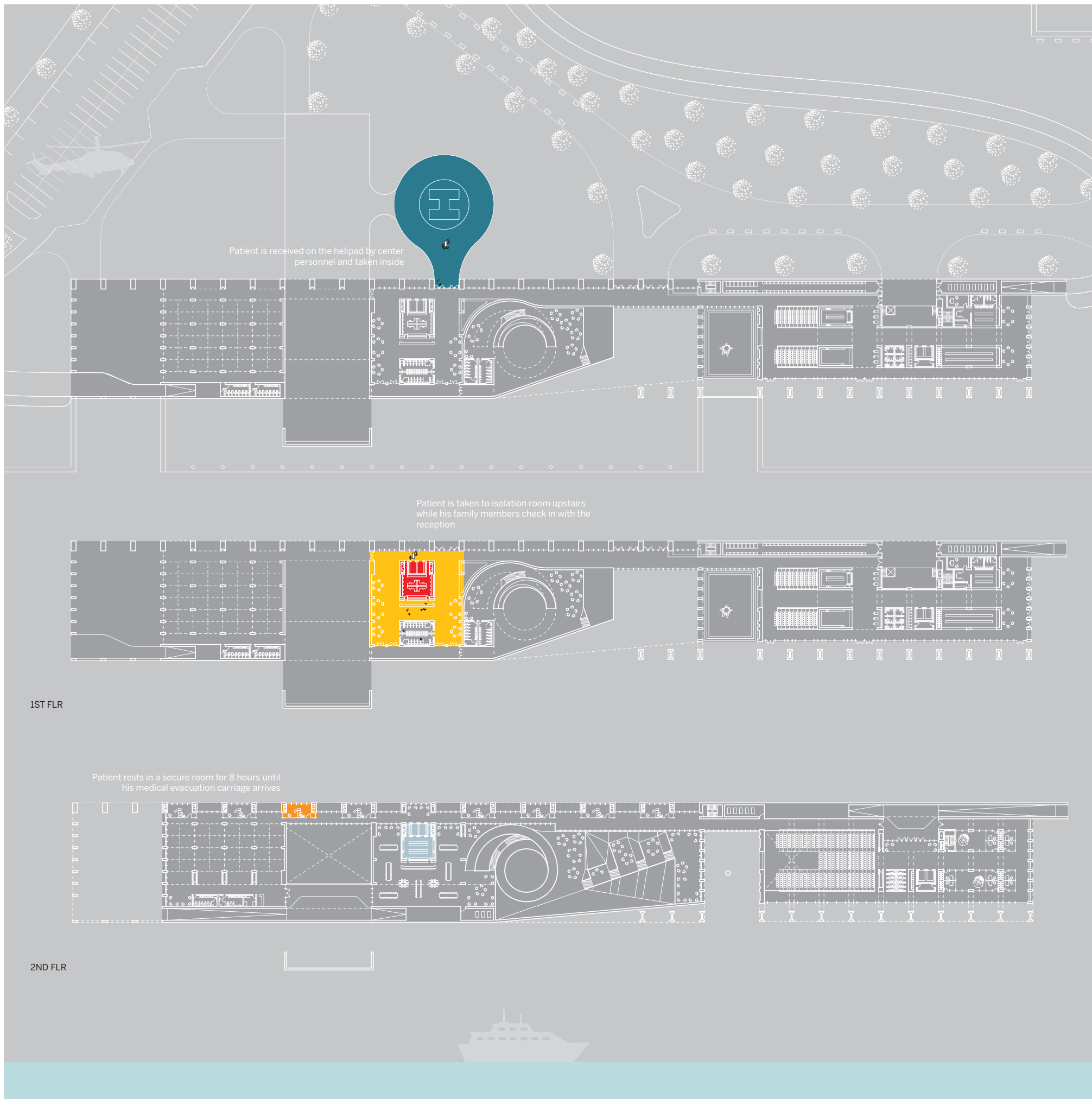
Administrative Sector Atria





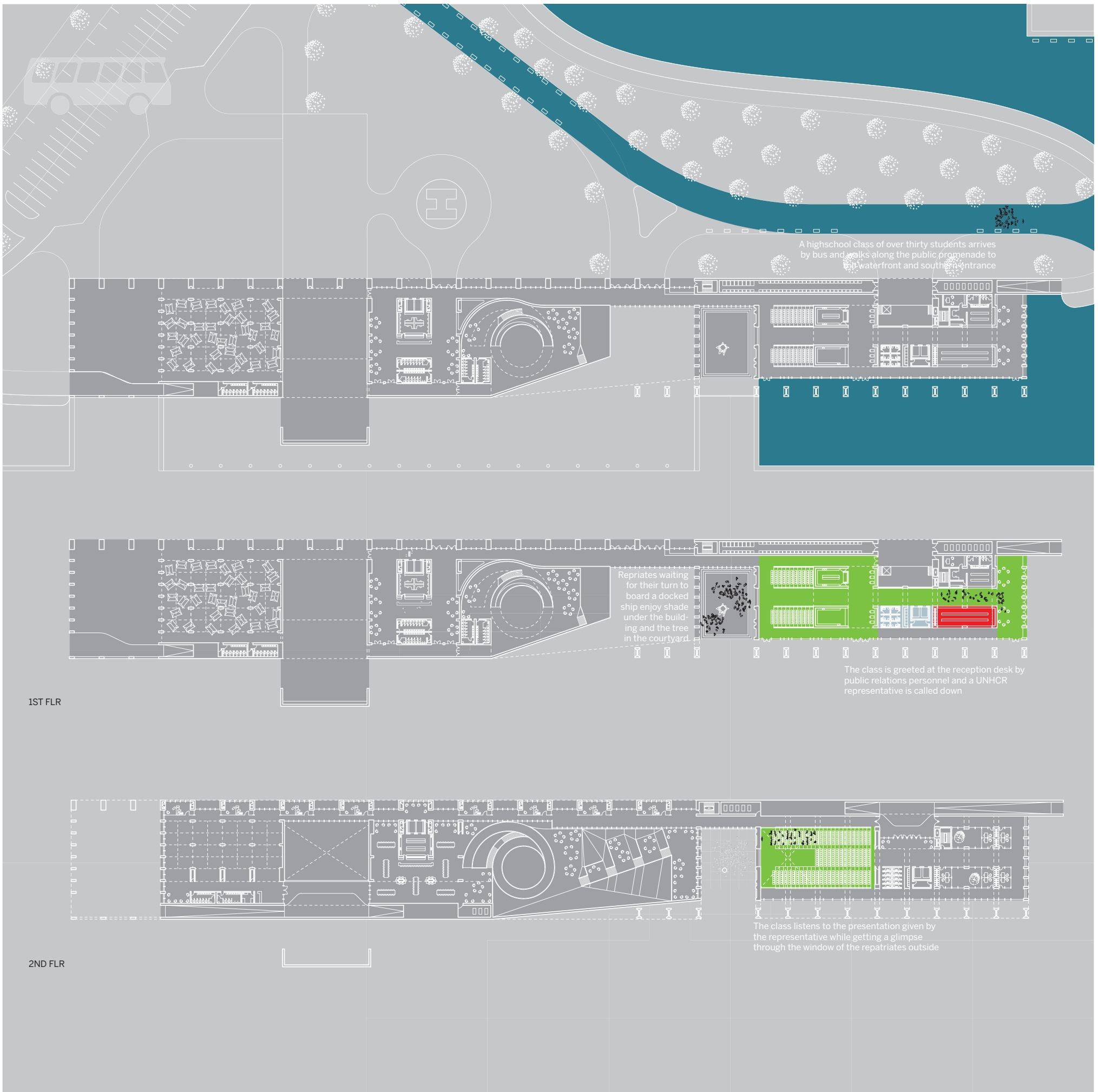
**1000 displaced refugees** from neighboring Liberia arrive via **multiple modes of transportation** to be processed and **subsequently** board ships



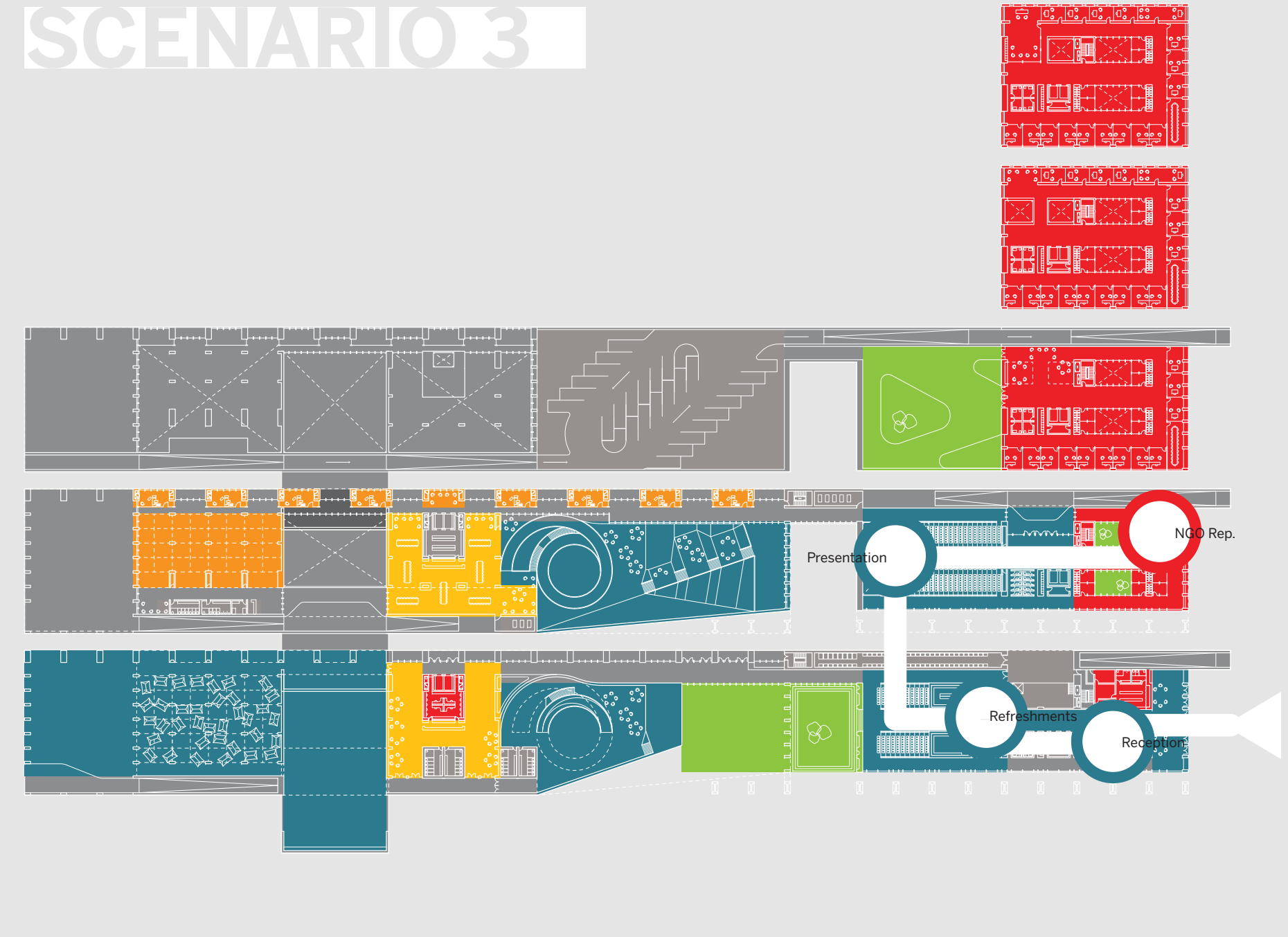


**A critical patient** harboring meningitis arrives by **helicopter** to stay in an isolation room for **1 day** until boarding ship for home country



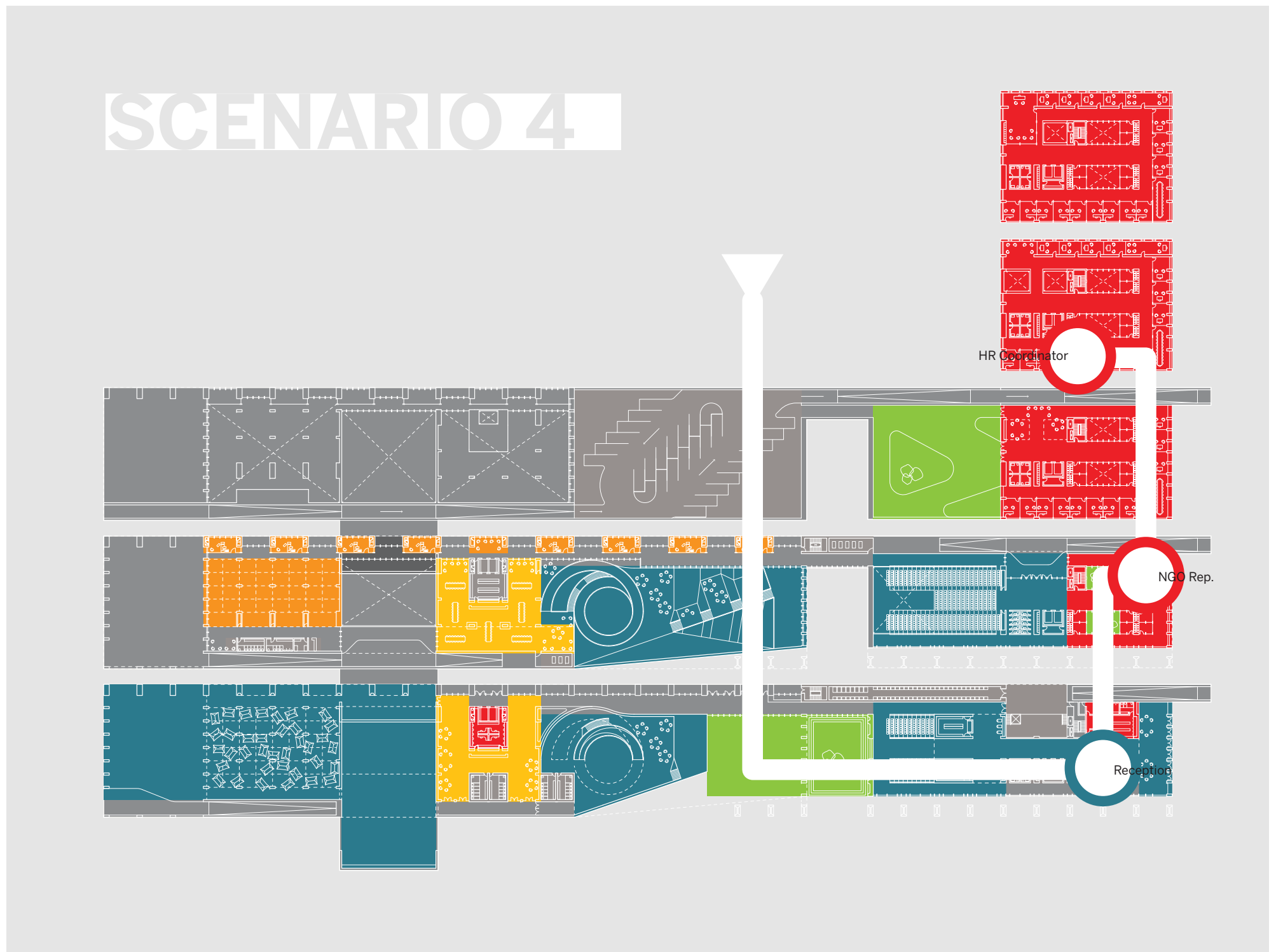
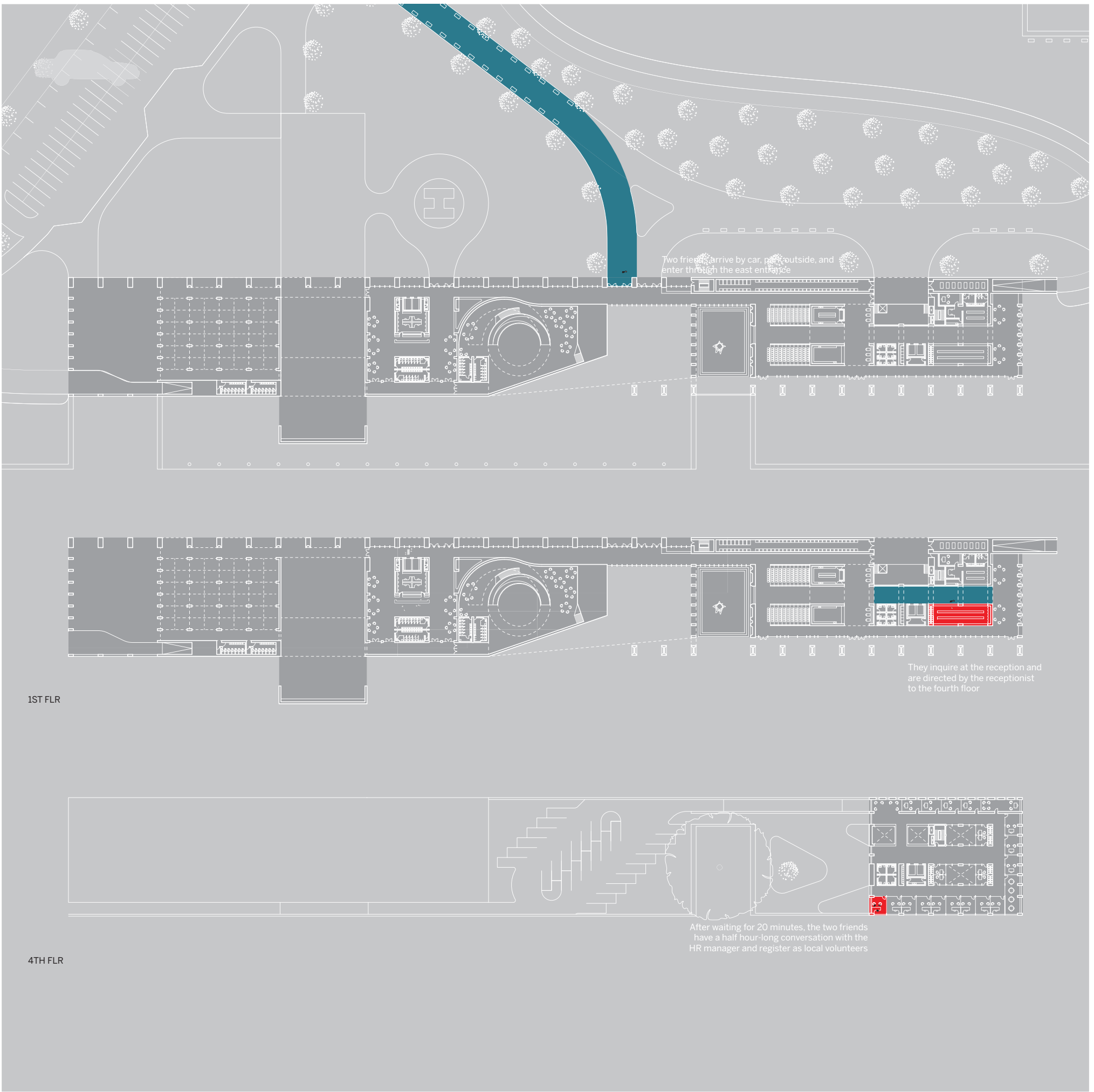


# SCENARIO 3



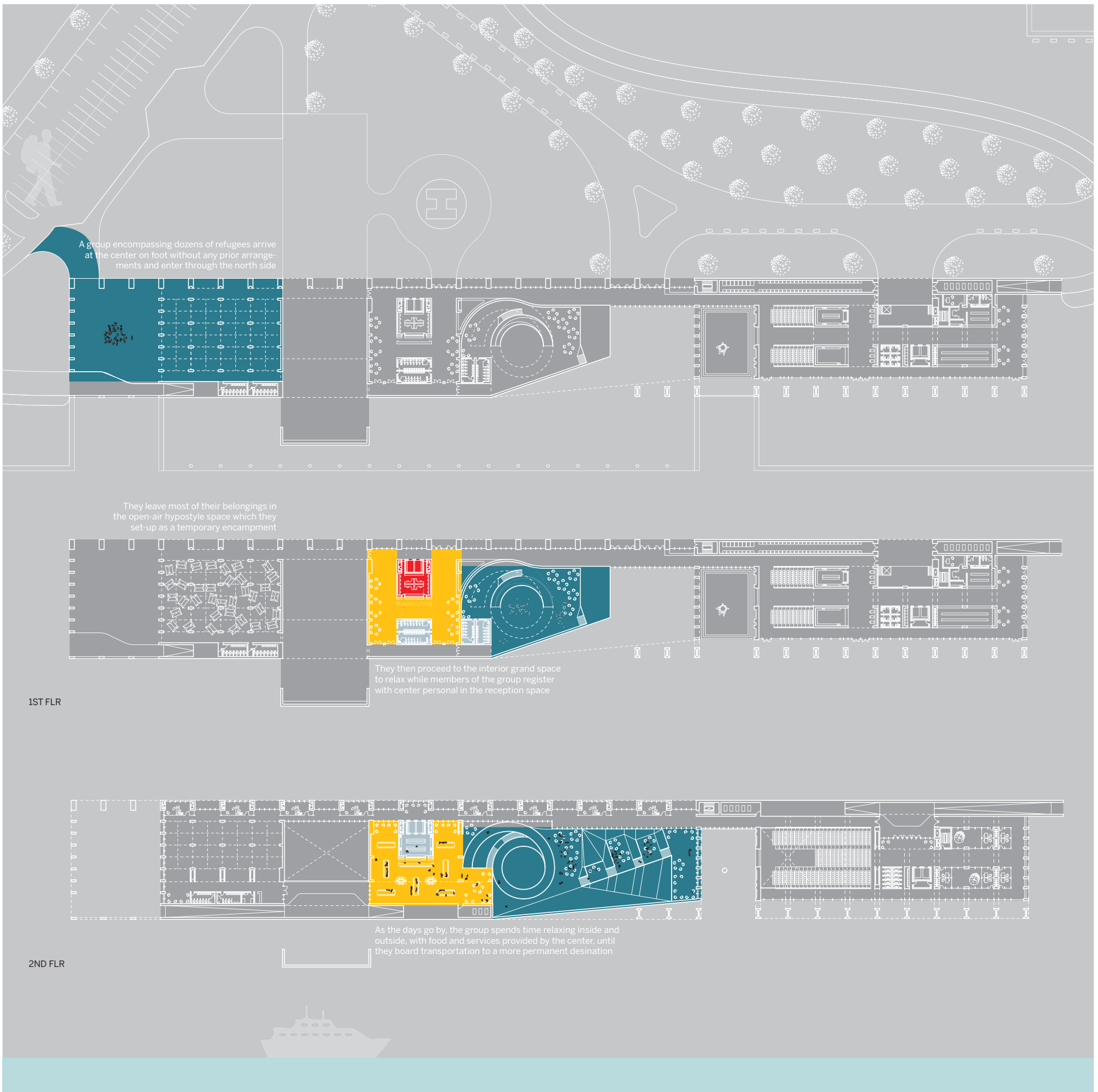
**A high school class arrives by bus for a 1 hour presentation and Q&A**



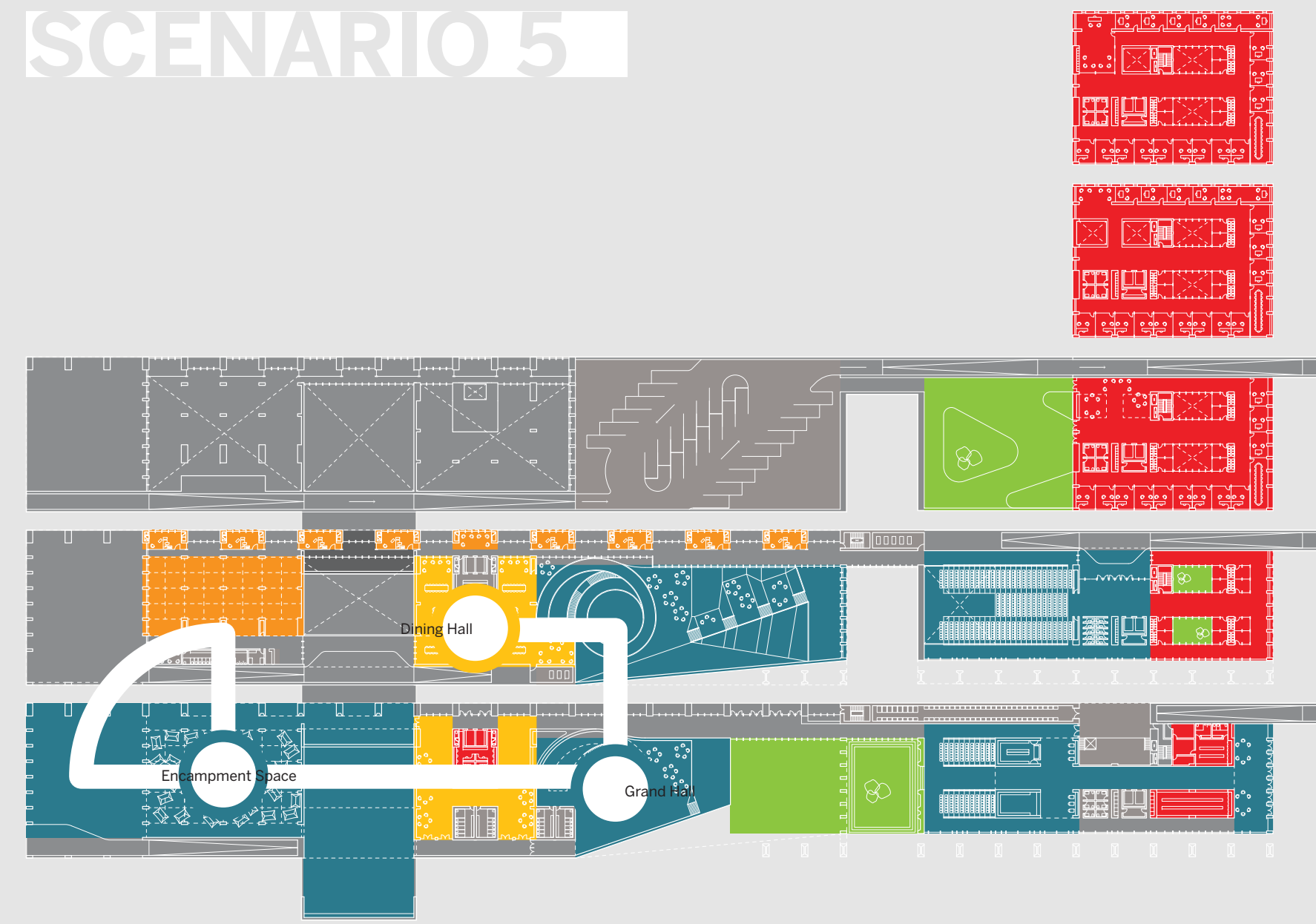


**2 locals**  
 arrive by **car** to inquire with NGO representatives  
 about registering as volunteers



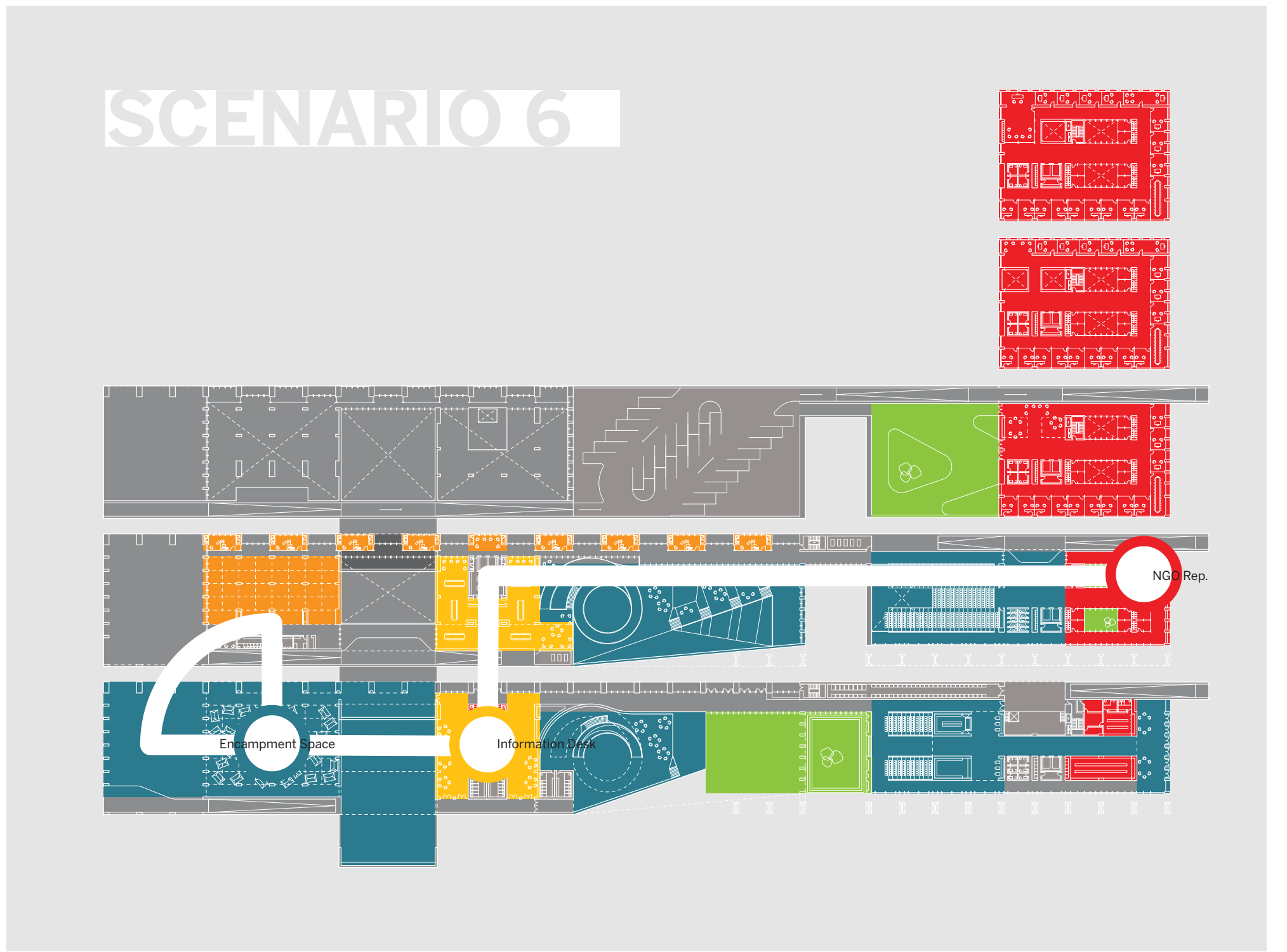
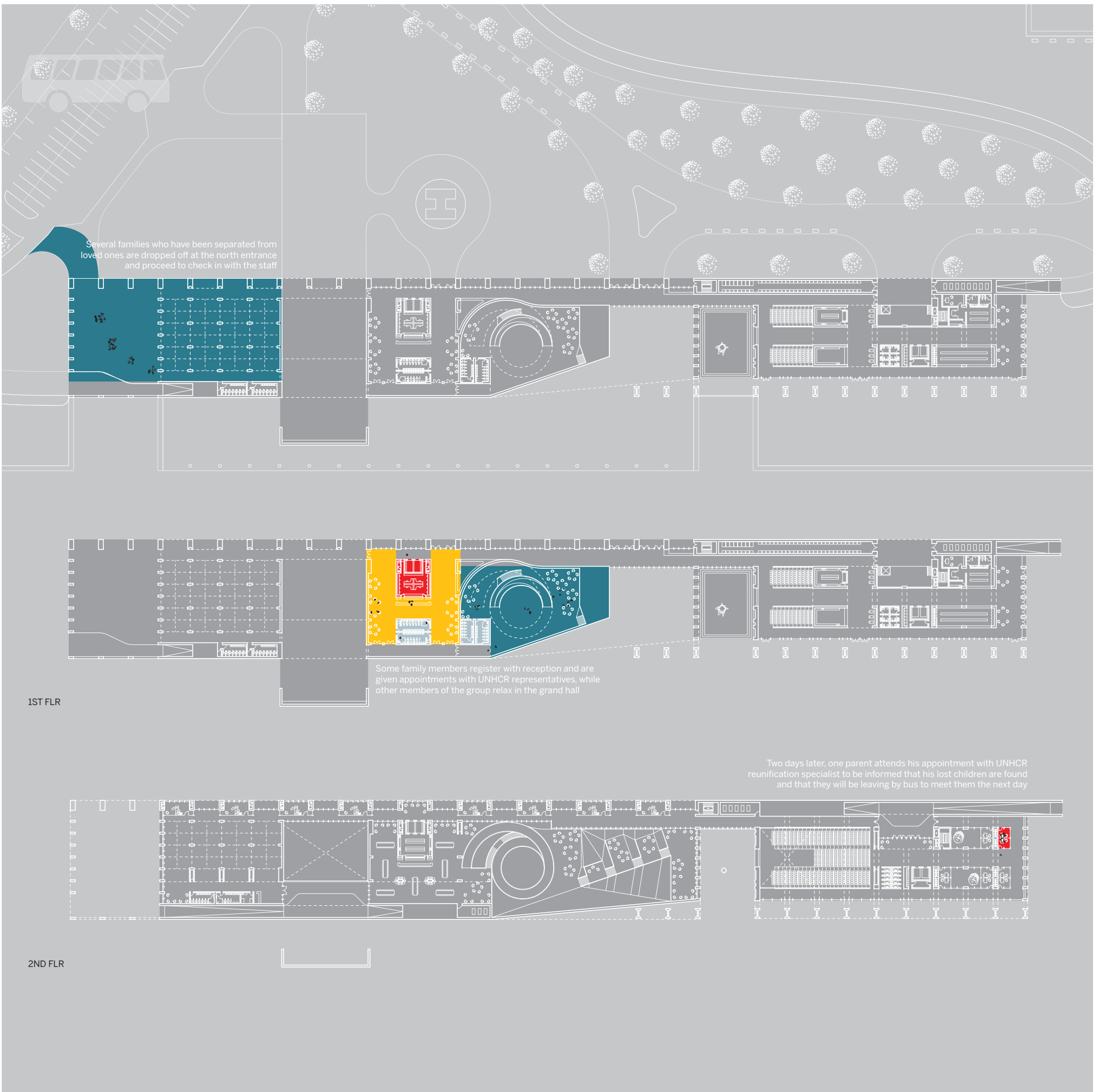


# SCENARIO 5



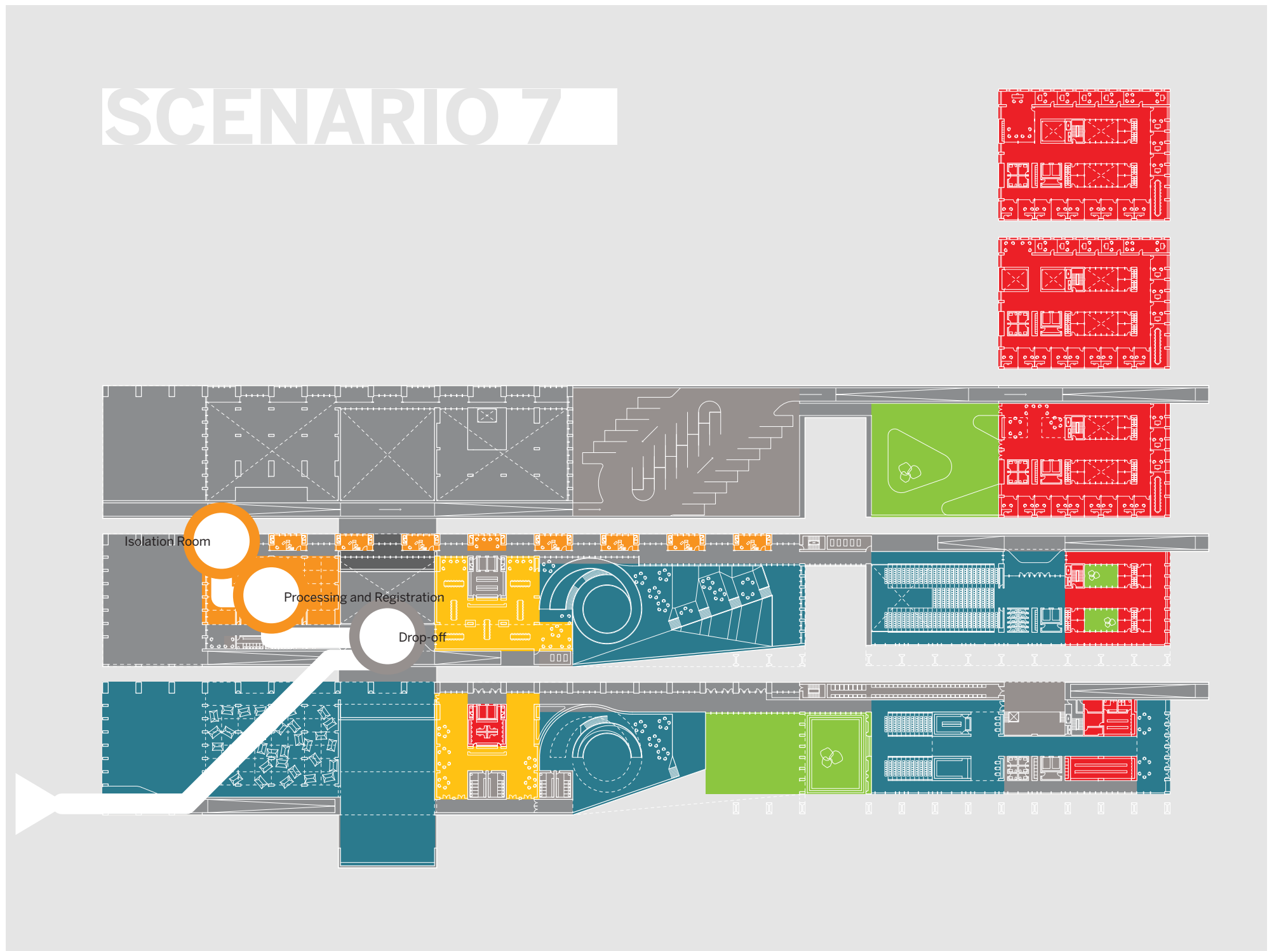
**40 Refugees** arrive on **foot** to take shelter for **a week or so** until a repatriation destination is determined





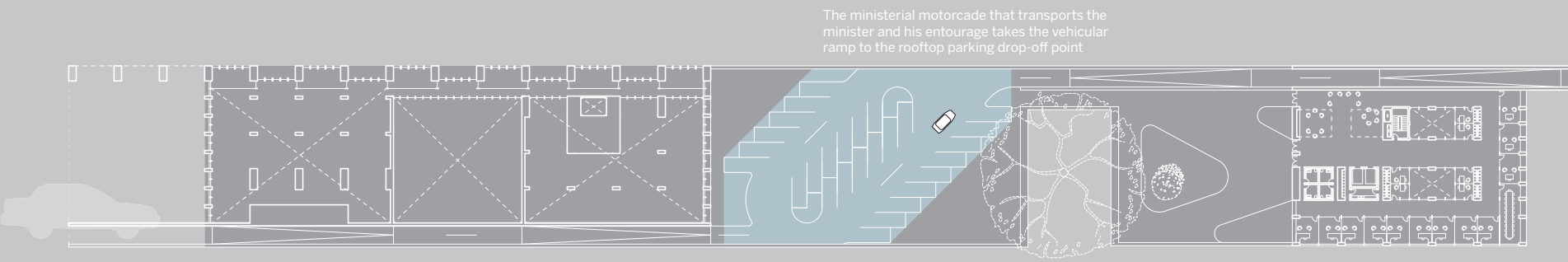
**4 Separated Families** arrive by UNHCR **bus** to inquire about their relatives' whereabouts and leave to be reunited **as soon as** they find out



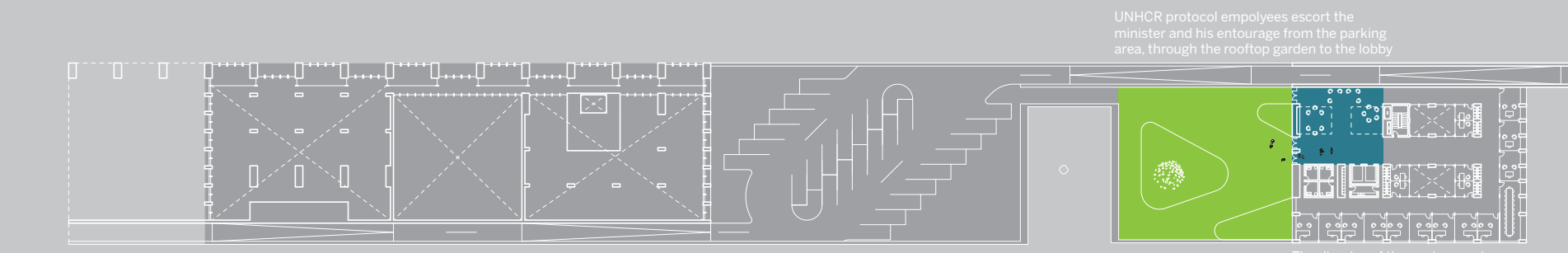


**2 Ebola Patients** referred by a medical institution arrive by **mobile quarantine vehicle** to be isolated for **5 days** until special evacuation ship accomodation is ready

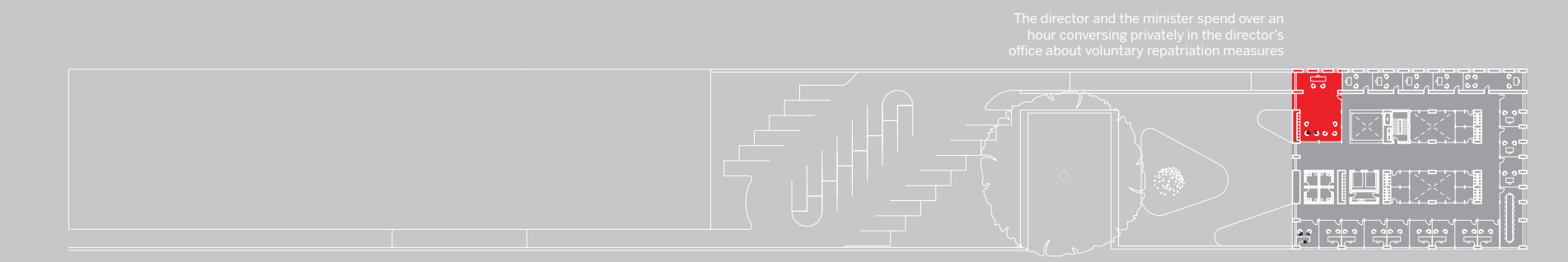




3RD FLR

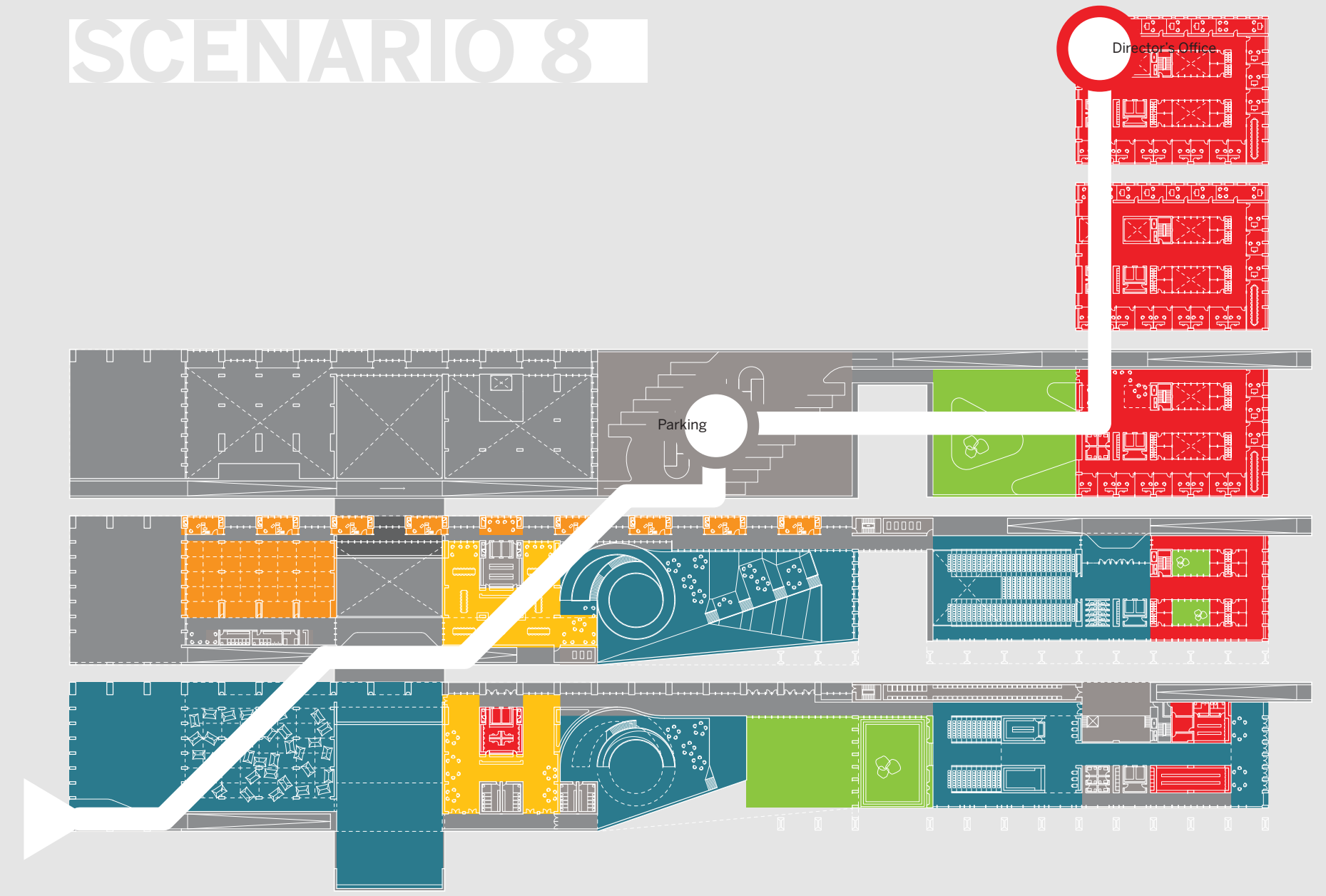


3RD FLR



5TH FLR

# SCENARIO 8



The **Minister of Cooperation and African Integration** arrives by **motorcade** for a **2 hour** meeting with the director



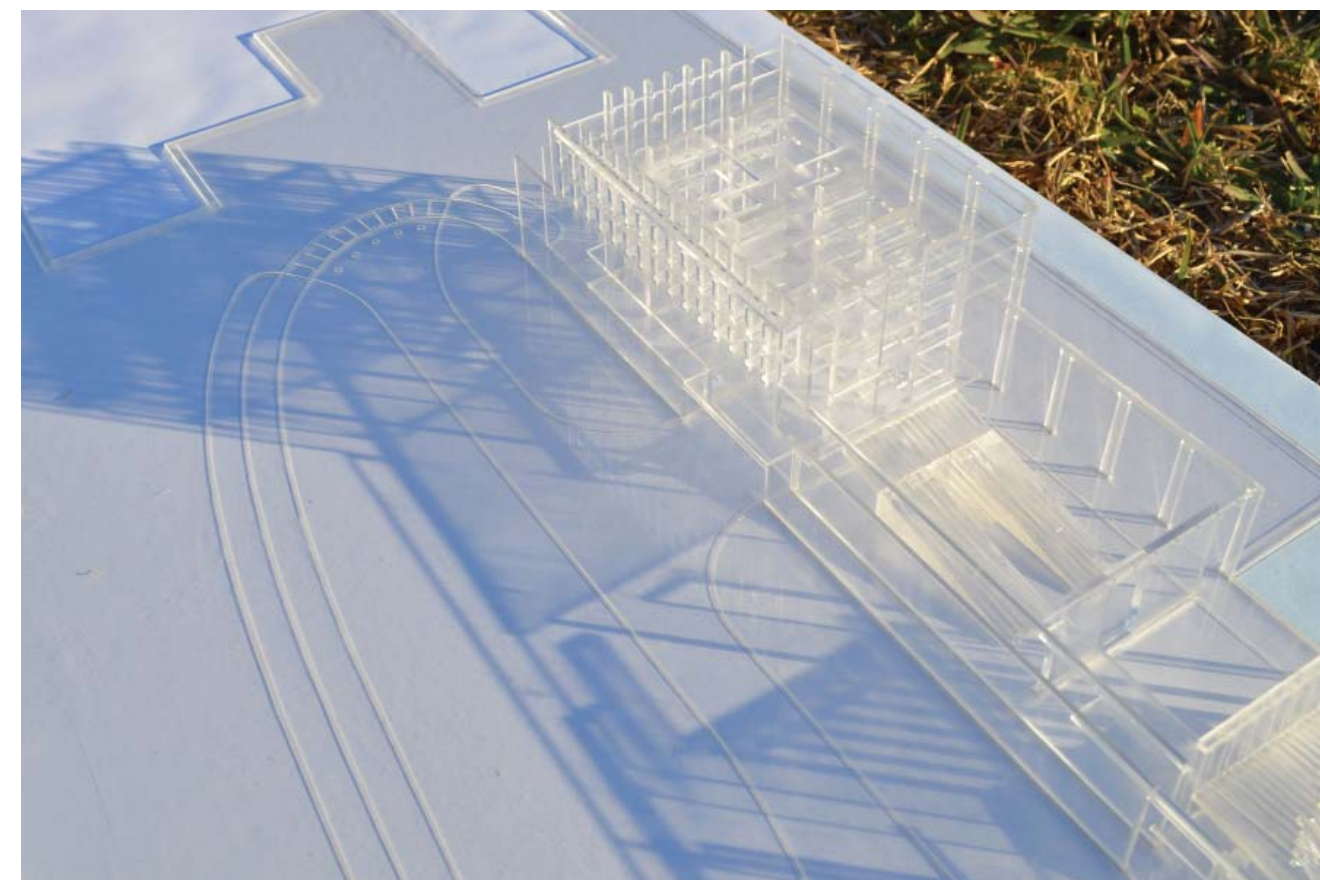
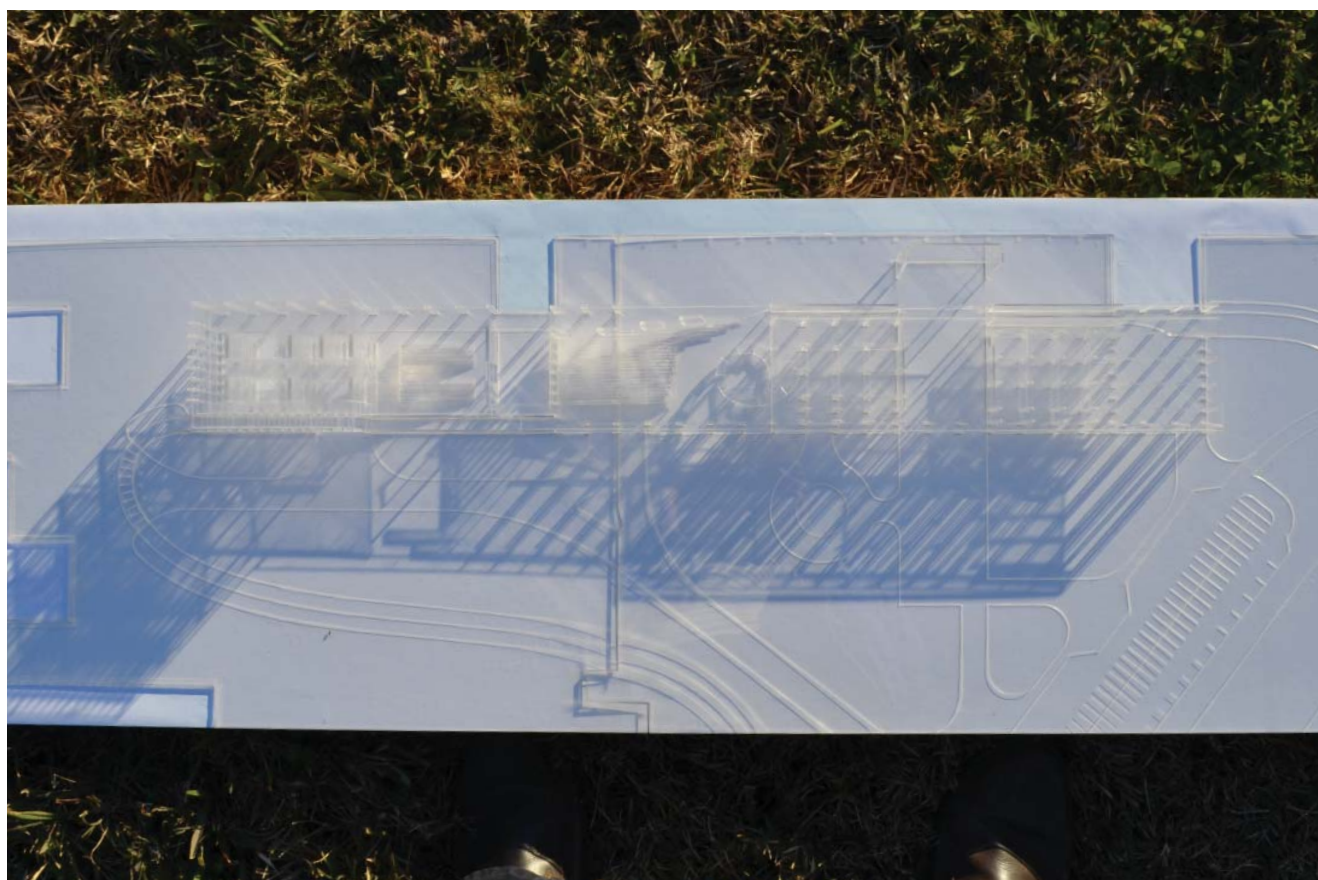
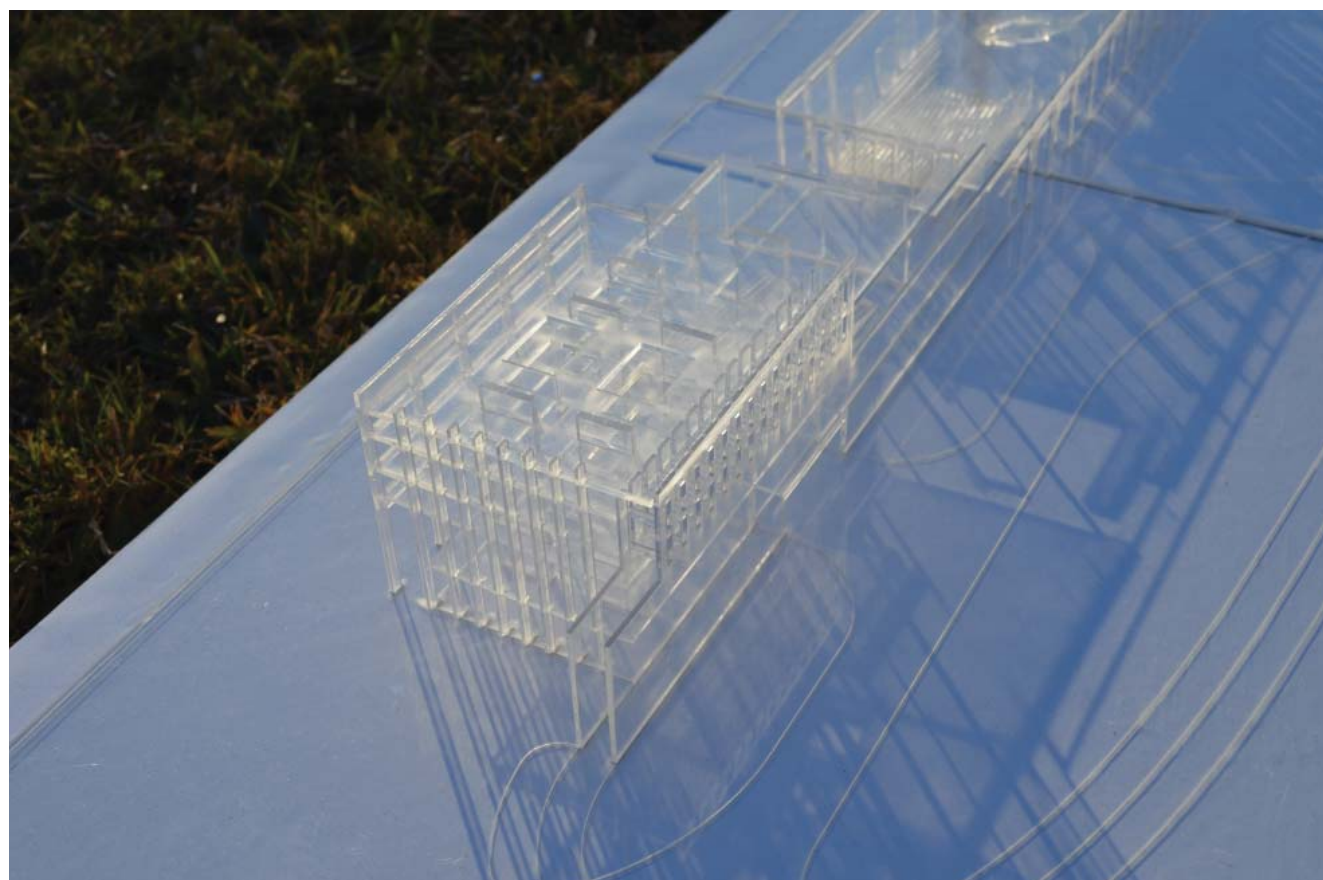
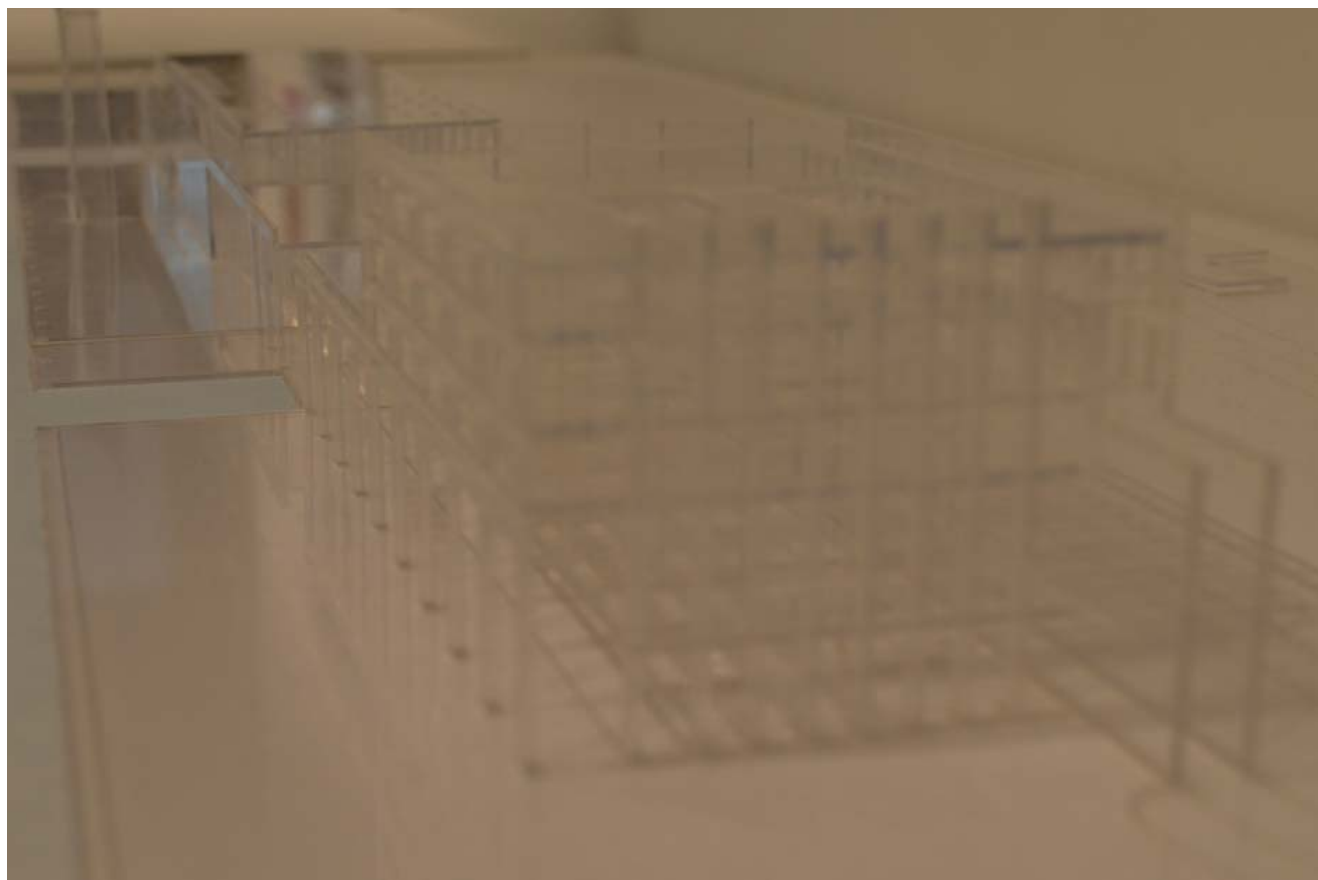
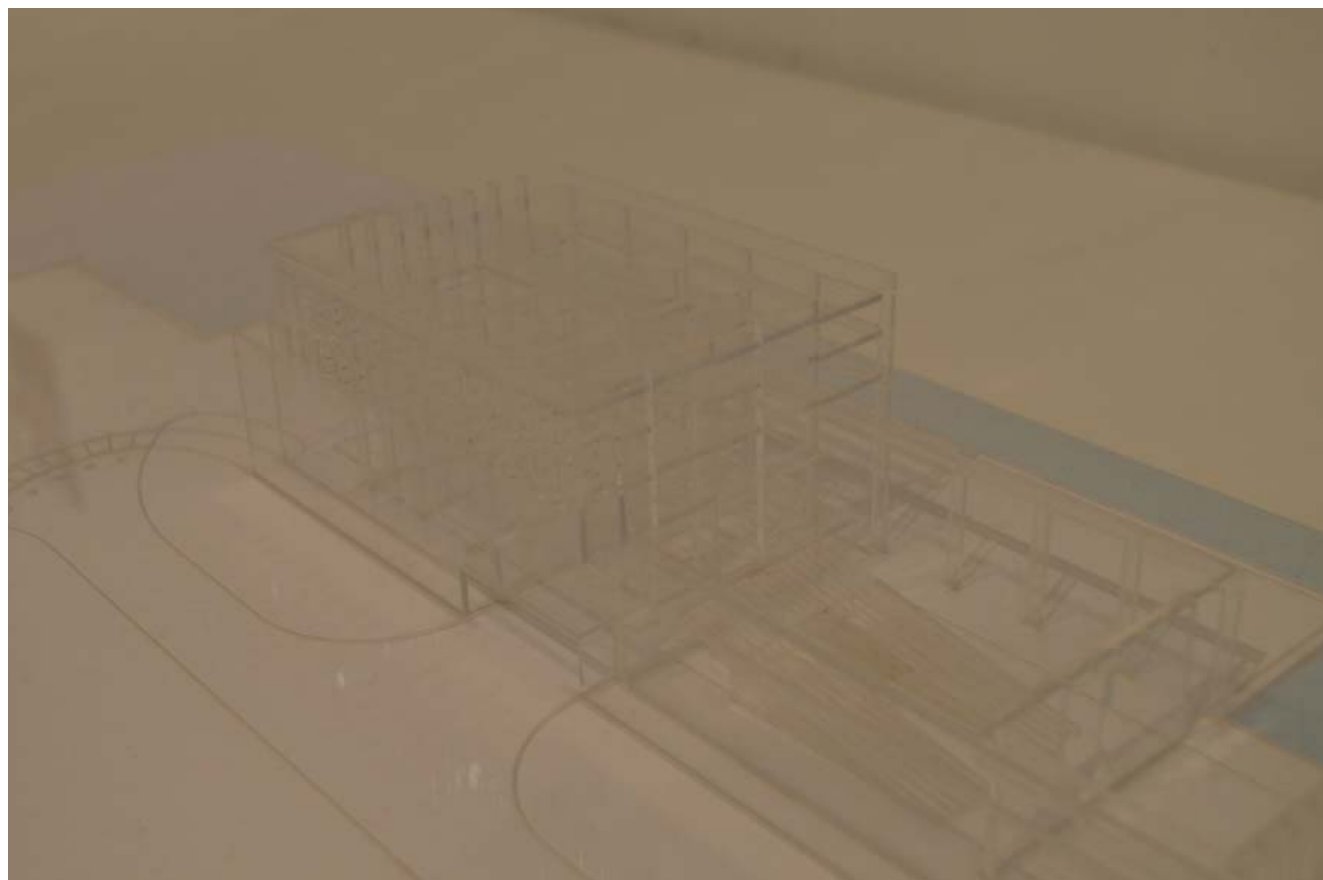
## VI

The UNHCR Global Service Center in Abidjan is an Ivorian institution. As a permanent outpost of the world's largest refugee agency, it constitutes an unprecedented administrative presence in the Global South—a presence that is rational, dignified, and contextual without sacrificing flexibility. It is an architecture that gives weight to the adversity of those who are in search of home. Straddling land and sea, it offers the public physical access to a humane bureaucracy that touches so many lives. Signalling its presence to the world, this hybrid repatriation center is a waterfront icon for this city, in this world.





# Appendix: Physical Model





# Credits

## **Thesis Advisor**

Carlos Jimenez

## **Thesis Coordinator**

Scott Colman

## **Photographs**

AlJazeera News: city in ruin, refugee registration, train transportation

Pinoy News: overcrowded refugee ship and dock

The Guardian: refugee boat at sea

Wikimedia Commons: UNHCR Global Service Centre in Budapest

United Nations Photo: Aerial view of Abidjan