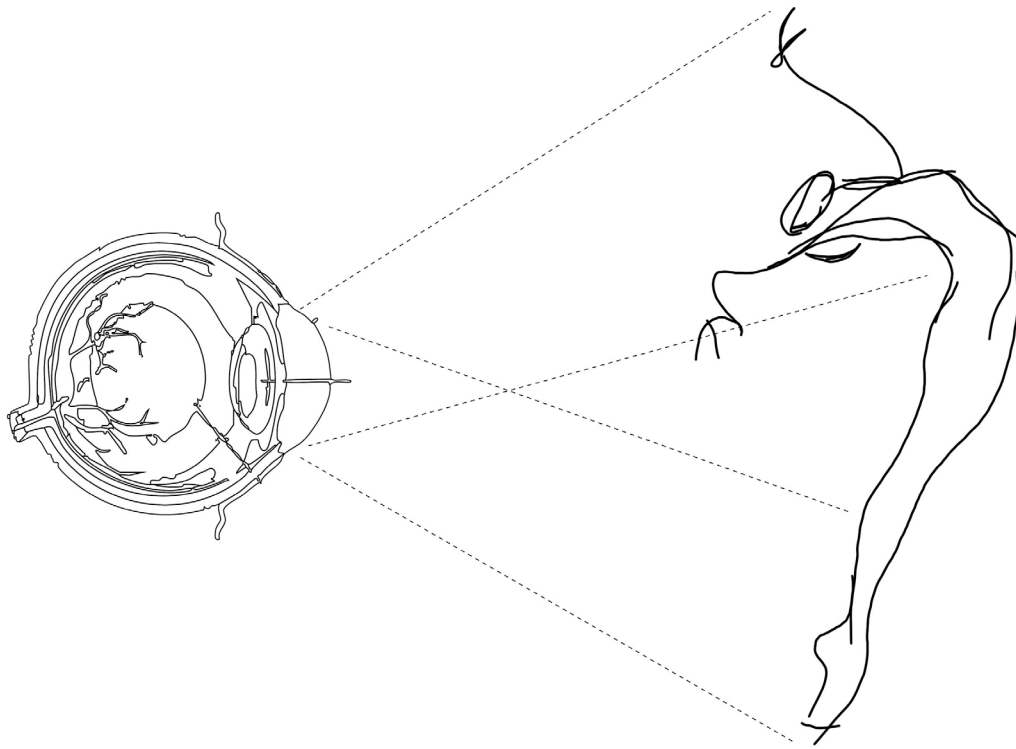


The Observatory of Performing Arts

Space for appreciation of body movement



Delfina Żółtowska
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
2025
Examiner: Björn Gross
Supervisor: Mikael Ekegren



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Delfina Żółtowska

Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Master's Thesis in Architecture and Urban Design
June 2025

Examiner: Björn Gross
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Abstract

Architecture interlinks with various cultural expressions. Performing arts and architecture have much in common as they are both creative disciplines that shape and define spaces for deeper interpretation. When engaging with architectural environments, individuals rely not only on visual perception but also on physical movement. Thus, how can architecture and performing arts influence each other? How can architects design with motion in mind?

The thesis explores how common features of architecture and movement can be implemented into the building of a performing arts venue. The secondary question evaluates how the wooden framework and material qualities of a cultural venue for performance can evoke a sense of movement.

The thesis is grounded in the basis of phenomenological theory, examining the relationship between the body and space. It also draws on concepts of performative architecture and arts related to movement. The main principle of applying the materiality is the common features that architecture and movement share. Explorations of these relations involve using different tactile materials, transparencies, shadow play, or rhythms to create an immersive experience.

The methods used in the thesis are research for design and research by design in an iterative design process. Research for design includes literature and case studies, mapping, site visits, and moodboards. Research by design comprises sketching, conventional drawings, digital drawings, and 3D modeling.

The thesis explores the importance of cultural venues and the role of art in enhancing the vibrancy of the city center. The result is a design for an Observatory of Performing Arts located by Vallgraven in Gothenburg. The building reflects its function on the outside and the program provides a space to experience and observe body movement art in the inside.

Student background

West Pomeeranium University of Technology in Szczecin, Poland

Bachelor of Science in Architecture

November 2019 - July 2023

Chalmers University of Technology, Goteborg, Sweden

Master of Architecture and Urban Design

September 2023 - June 2025

Studios

- ACE400 Architecture in the Anthropocene
- ACE380 Sustainable development and the design professions
- ACE475 Material and technique
- ACE420 Archtictetural competitions
- ACE335 Color and light in spacial contexts
- ACE525 Building on building
- ACE370 Master's thesis preparation: Academic approaches and general structure
- ACE425 Master's thesis preparation: Design approachees and narratives
- ACE490 Building on contexts and buildings
- ACEX35 Master's thesis in Architecture

Internship

CO Architekci, Szczecin, Poland

March 2023 - May 2023

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Reading instructions

This master's thesis is divided into four chapters, each with different parts. The first one, the introduction, consists of the aim, research questions, delimitations, and methods. The second chapter refers to case studies and literature studies. The third chapter is the project proposal itself, with an explanation of the context, including introduction, history, and surroundings. This is followed by site analyses and drawings of the projected building. The conclusion closes the thesis with a discussion part and bibliography.

Introduction

Aim

Research questions

Delimitations

Methods

Aim & Research questions

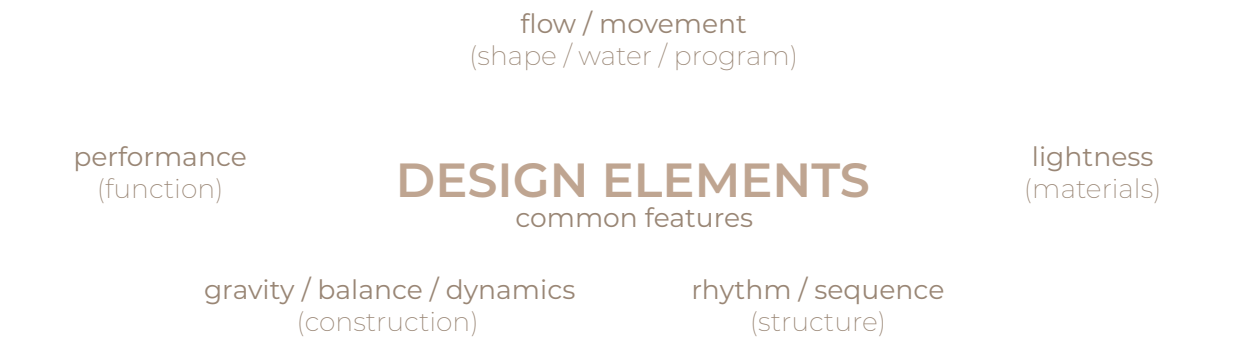
This paper aims to examine how wooden structure and materiality can inform the purpose of the building. The question is motivated by the observation that many existing performance spaces does not engage with the nature of the movement they host. These spaces often treat architecture and materiality as a neutral backdrop, rather than an active participant in the experience of dance and performance. The sub-question covers the concern of how materials can improve the perception of performing arts, enhancing physical and sensory experience. By refering to reference projects and basics of multisensory architecture, and phenomenology in architecture this thesis seeks to understand how architecture can more deeply connect with the dynamic, embodied nature of movement in performance and offer further insights into how movement shapes our understanding of space. Since dance expresses gravity, rhythm, and the diverse potential of the moving body, the architectural environment should ideally resonate with these qualities. The paper reflects on how architecture can better respond to and support the choreography of the body.

Research question:

How can themes such as rhythm, dynamics and gravity, as chosen universal features of both movement and architecture, be implemented into the performing arts venue proposal?

Thesis subquestion:

How can the wooden structure and materiality of a cultural building for performing arts inform the movement as its purpose?



Delimitations

In this thesis, I will not investigate the theory of movement, rotoscope method, or expression of the building connected to the dynamics of movement. In the thesis, I do not qualify the performing arts center as a big arts hub but as a local and intimate venue. Financial matters do not constrain the vision and idea proposed hereby. The examination of acoustics is limited to material and tectonics choices but not examined in depth.

IS ABOUT	TOUCH UPON	IS NOT ABOUT
wooden structure	acoustics	financial matters
tectonics	performance	urban planning
design elements	phenomenology	technical theory of movement
materiality	Gothenburg city center	mobility disabilities
public building design	interior design	
transparency	functional program	

"In a way, architecture is a performance. It stages the experience of movement. Every step, every turn, every pause becomes a part of the spatial narrative, much like a dancer interpreting choreography within a defined space." (Zumthor, 2006, p. 48)

Methods

Research for design

Literature studies

The literature research has been providing a wider point of view and inspiration in the context of the phenomenological aspect and understanding of movement as an art in a cultural context.

Case studies / References

Case studies have been used to find out about different design solutions and methods. The chosen methods of construction and materials were based on the references as well as inspiration for form and program.

Mapping, site visits, and analyses

Mapping techniques were helpful for investigations of analyses of context, including site and its surrounding, urban, cultural, and social context.

Moodboard

Grouping different visual references was used to get inspired and realize what is preferred and what is not wanted in the design.

Research by design

Digital modeling

Exploring different variations of visual expressions and size volumes allows both to connect the design to the context and feel the interior atmosphere better.

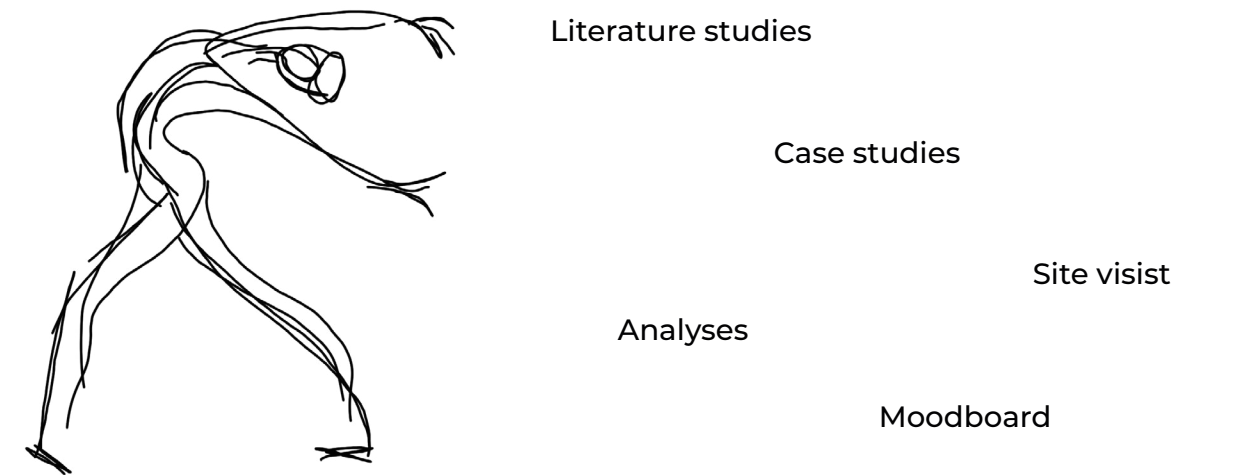
Conventional drawings

Working with both draft drawings and detailed drawings throughout the whole process made a significant impact on the design of the building and the understanding of the proposal.

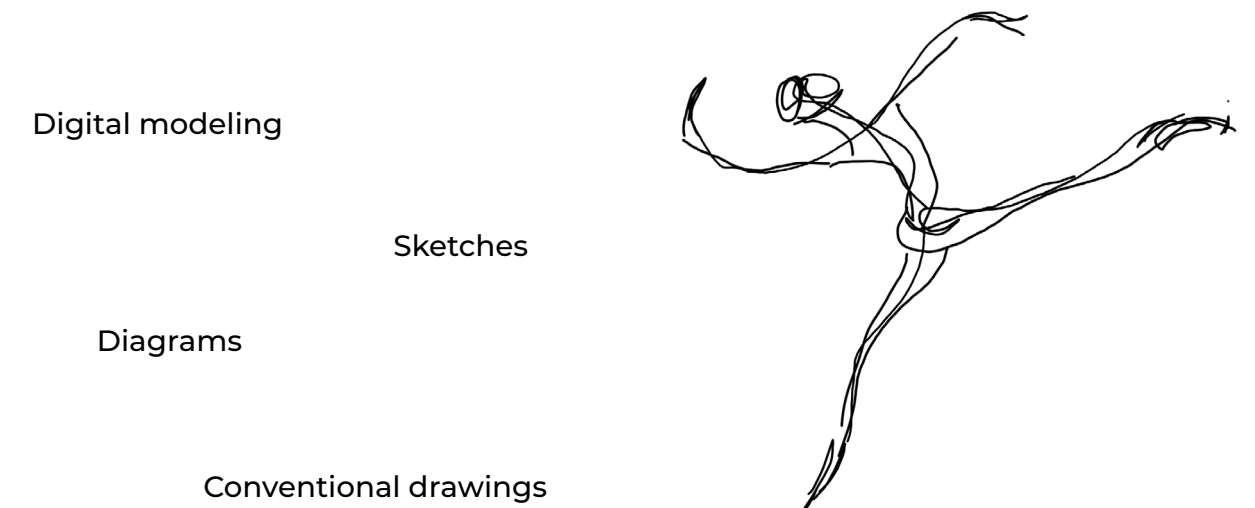
Sketches and diagrams

Sketches made the design process freer and easier, especially in the creative process, and diagrams allowed to program the building faster but also acknowledge main design principles better.

Research for design



Research by design



Aspects of theoretical research and design work affect each other continuously, resulting in the final design proposal.

Background / Theory

Case studies

Literature

Theory / Reference projects

Szczecin Philharmonic Hall- Barozzi Veiga (Poland)

Following with an expressionist mindset, architect used the geometry to shape a rhythmic composition which balances massiveness and verticality. The building from the outside seems to be a weightless volume with glazed facade – sometimes translucent, sometimes opaque – depending on its use. The designed system of LED lighting turns the building into a glowing lightbox by night which I find especially interesting for testing in the proposal. Another feature that I took inspiration from are the concert halls are suspended inside the building as the cetral parts. Both of them have balconies allowing to maximalise the space and number of audience. To create a unique route through the building different foyers are organized around them that my proposal includes too. The spiral staircase acts as an sculptuaral element of interior in an elegant manner which I also found worth including in the design.

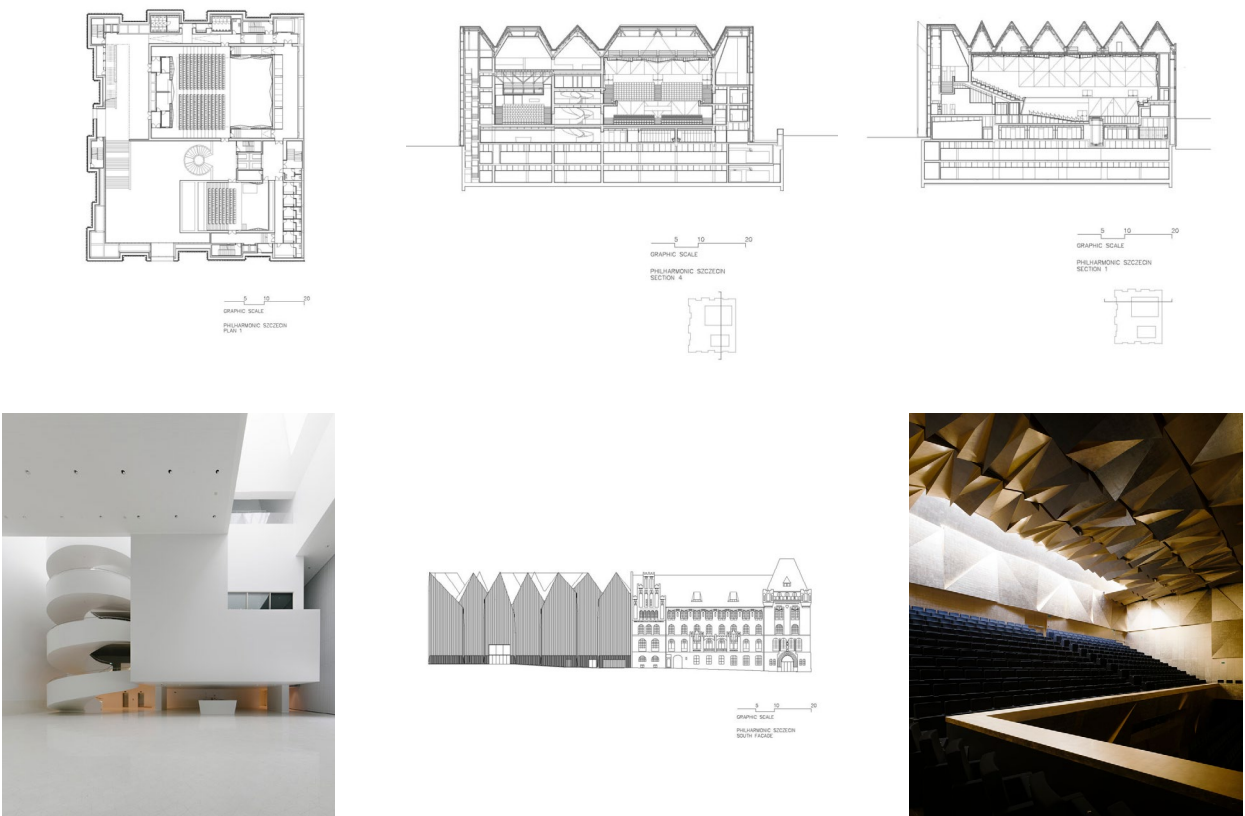


Figure 1. Plan, sections showing concert halls and main communication, interiors, and façade

Theory / Reference projects

Space Guy Môquet Cultural Center - Oeco architectes, Cabestany (France)

The building and its layers are predominantly constructed from wood, steel, and concrete. It showcases transparency and a lighten-up façade. The irregular layout of windows gives a greater sense of freedom, and the façade becomes less rigid. The scale of the building is reduced thanks to the volume of the basement. Some façades are permeable and possibly protected by sun breezes or overhangs, and others are opaque, depending on the orientation and wind. What I found interesting for my proposal were the references to the movement in its rhythmical nature of the façade, caused mainly by vertical sun breakers and a cut corner entrance. The entrance has a vertical direction that further creates more dynamics. I also made use of the basement for selected functions to save some space above the ground for a proper program. Due to the glazed parts, I also designed an overhanging and a skin wrapping layer to prevent the excess sunlight.



Figure 2. Exteriors

Theory / Reference projects

Teatro de Todos (Arts Theatre)- Tomás Villalón, Nicolás Norero and Leonardo Quinteros, Panguipulli (Chile)

„A theatre is commonly understood as a blind, dark room, a sort of large body where the magical and dreamlike world that transcends the stage is hidden.” (Nicolas Valencia, 2017) The rhythmical wooden structures give the feeling of sequencing, the performing space is located in the core of the building as the most important part what I find also important for my proposal. The diagonal, dynamic elements of the structure also inspired me. What is interesting is that performance places are „movable,” which means that they can be held inside or outside the building in different configurations. The main hall has a view of the garden, but it is also possible to cover the curtains and manipulate them with both natural and artificial lighting. The building from the outside is lit up, which creates a welcoming atmosphere and adds a cozy feeling around the boulevard and I am creating similar atmosphere in the design too.

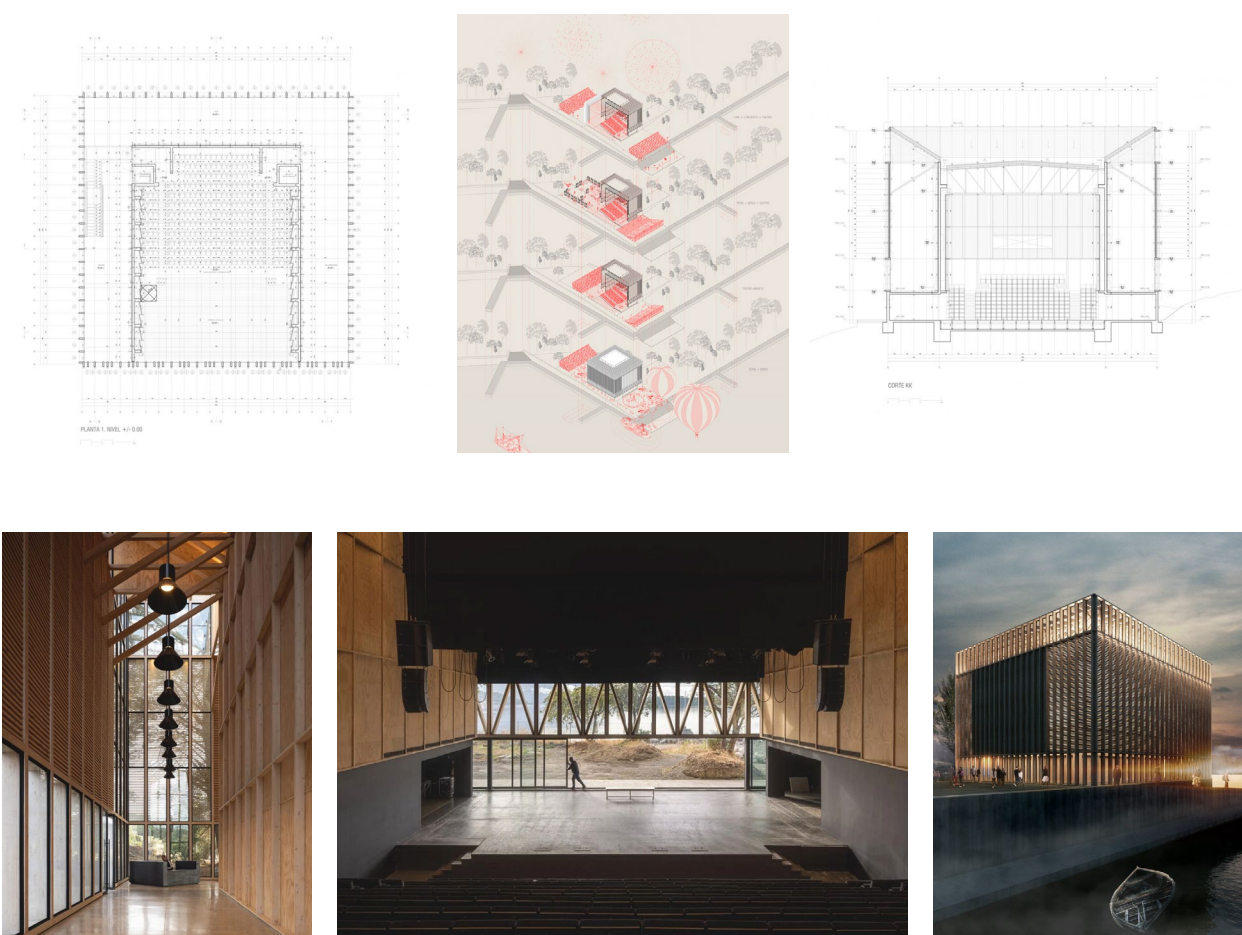


Figure 3. Plans, diagram, interiors, and exterior

Theory / Literature

Literature has been used mainly as inspiration for exploration of the topic and gaining new, broader insights. In *Atmospheres*, Zumthor emphasizes the profound impact of materials on the sensory experience of space, highlighting how the tactile qualities and visual characteristics of different materials can shape the rhythm and atmosphere. Pallasmaa emphasizes the materiality of architecture, which encourages the exploration of how different textures and surfaces can influence the physicality of performance, informing choices in materials for the design.

Plans

"A building is like a sequence of spaces, each with its own rhythm. The design should allow for moments of quiet, intensity, and transition, just like in a dance performance. This sense of rhythm, of movement through space, can give architecture a living, performative quality."
(Zumthor, 2006, p. 58)

Materials

"Different materials invite different kinds of movement. A rough surface slows down our steps, while a smooth one accelerates them. Architecture, in this sense, choreographs our bodies, guiding us through space in a dance that is influenced by texture, form, and structure."
(Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 56)

Structure

"The repetition of architectural elements—columns, windows, beams—creates a rhythmic pattern that echoes the rhythms of the body's movement. These patterns guide our movement, allowing us to feel the passage of time and space through a bodily, rather than merely visual, engagement with the architecture." (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 73)

Rhythm

"When I design, I think of rhythm—the rhythm of spaces and how materials shape that rhythm. The way you walk, how you turn a corner, or how light touches a surface—these moments create a sequence, a rhythm that gives life to the space. In this sense, architecture is a dance of materials and the body's movement through them."
(Zumthor, 2006, p. 43)

Project

CONTEXT

Introduction

History

Surrounding_site visit

SITE ANALYSES

Communication

Connections_urban scale

DESIGN

Situation

Program

Plans

Diagrams

Context elevation

Section + Elevation

Sections

Details

Elevations

Perspectives

Model photos

Introduction

The project for my master's thesis is the design of a cultural center focused on body movement, incorporating spaces for dance, improvised performances, and physical theatre. The site is located by the Vallgraven on a parking lot adjacent to the Boplats Väst in Göteborg, Roselundsplatsen. It is a close neighborhood to the Feskekôrka, so it is a dynamic urban environment rich in cultural heritage and contemporary vibrancy. The location is well-connected and already part of the city's cultural circuit, making it suitable for a performing arts center.

The Observatory of Performing Arts will serve as a hub for body-centric performing arts, providing space for performances as well as area for practice. The design allows performers to move seamlessly through the building and express their art within the architecture itself. The building will house both formal and experimental shows. Public areas on the top and bottom will foster engagement with the broader community and connection with the city and performers.

Materially, the design uses wood and glass with the addition of fabric in the interior. This combination should allow to make a structure that is open and tactile. Playing with light and shadow in the perforated copper facade will create a lantern-like effect at night, where the movement inside the building can be observed from the outside, symbolizing the transparency of the performance.

My motivation for choosing this project comes from my interest in both architecture and the movement. I have always been fascinated by how the body interacts with space, especially after many years of experience as a dancer. Additionally, the cultural richness of Göteborg offers an opportunity to create a building that connects with its surroundings and forms an art hub for movement events. It should be an immersive place that brings people closer to the art of movement, regardless of whether they are participants or observers.

WHY?

human body / movement / artistic explorations

How do materiality and tectonics correspond with the feeling of movement?

Can architecture be both a stage and a participant in the performance?

HOW?

materiality / wooden structure / flow / rhythm

Design of a building with specific features like rhythmical, structure, circulation flow and dynamic character.

WHAT?

appreciation of movement as an art / tectonics

Observatory of performing art that celebrates movement. A venue that allows creativity and connects artists.

Project / Context / History

Vallgraven

Within the Moat is the original Gothenburg, and here you can find old buildings such as the Crown House, the Ostindiska House, the Sahlgrenska House, and the City Hall.

Inom Vallgraven, the original Gothenburg, was established in the 1620s with ramparts, moats, and canals inspired by Dutch urban planning. It consisted of two squares: Stora Torget (now Gustaf Adolfs Torg) and Fisketorget (now Lilla Torget). Although stone houses were ordered along the canals, most buildings came out as wooden, which caused severe damage during fires in 1669 and the 18th century.

By 1803, wooden houses were banned, and solid Empire-style merchant houses replaced them. In the 19th century, public buildings like the Town Hall and Cathedral were added. In the late 1800s, Inom Vallgraven became a commercial hub with banks and businesses instead of a residential area.

Despite 20th-century changes, including the development of Nordstan, many historic stone buildings remain, preserving the area’s cultural significance.



Figure 4. Historical photo of Vallgraven



Figure 5. Historical photo of Rosenlundskaalen



Figure 6. Current photos with far views



Feskekôrka

One of the landmark buildings by the moat is Feskekôrka, which was built according to the project plans of the Gothenburg city architect Victor von Gegerfelt and was inaugurated in 1874 as a fish auction hall. Apart from its unusual exterior, the interior architecture of Feskekôrka is also remarkable for its time, as the substructure of the roof was designed to allow the large hall to function entirely without supporting walls or pillars.

Following the architecture of early Scandinavian stave churches as well as neo-Gothic church buildings, Gegerfelt created a futuristic building for its time. At first glance, it is a church building rather than a profane market hall.



Figure 7. Historical photos of Feskekôrka



Figure 8. Current photos of Feskekôrka

Project / Context / Surrounding / Localization

Zooming out



Project / Context / Surrounding / Site visit

Site visit

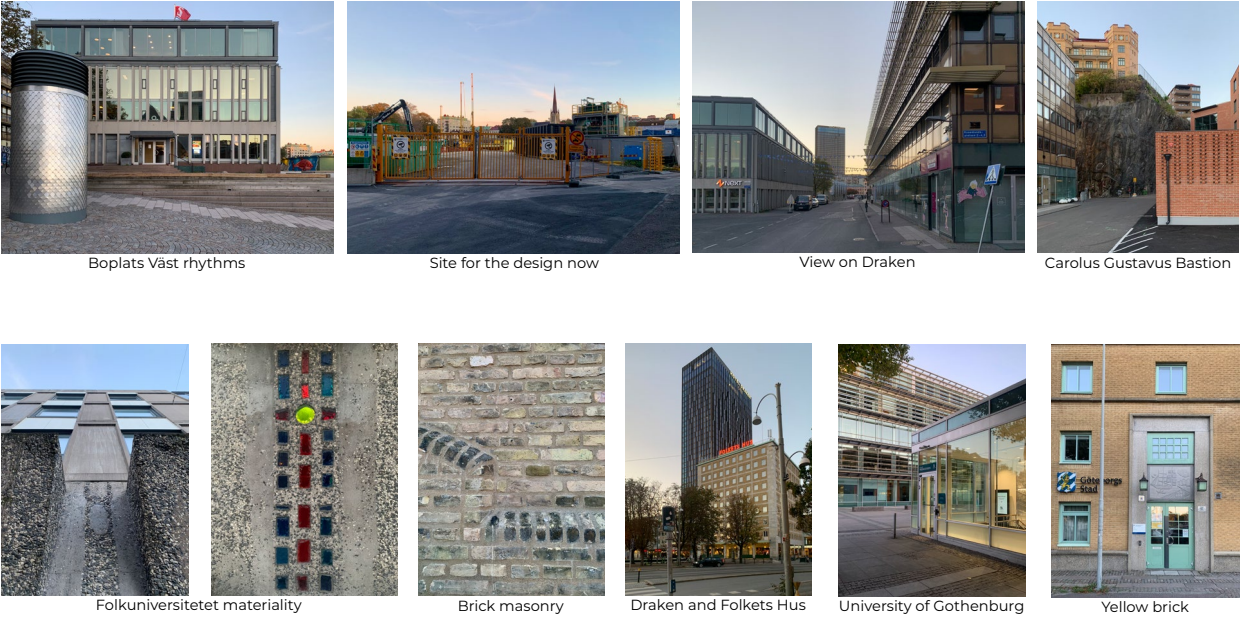
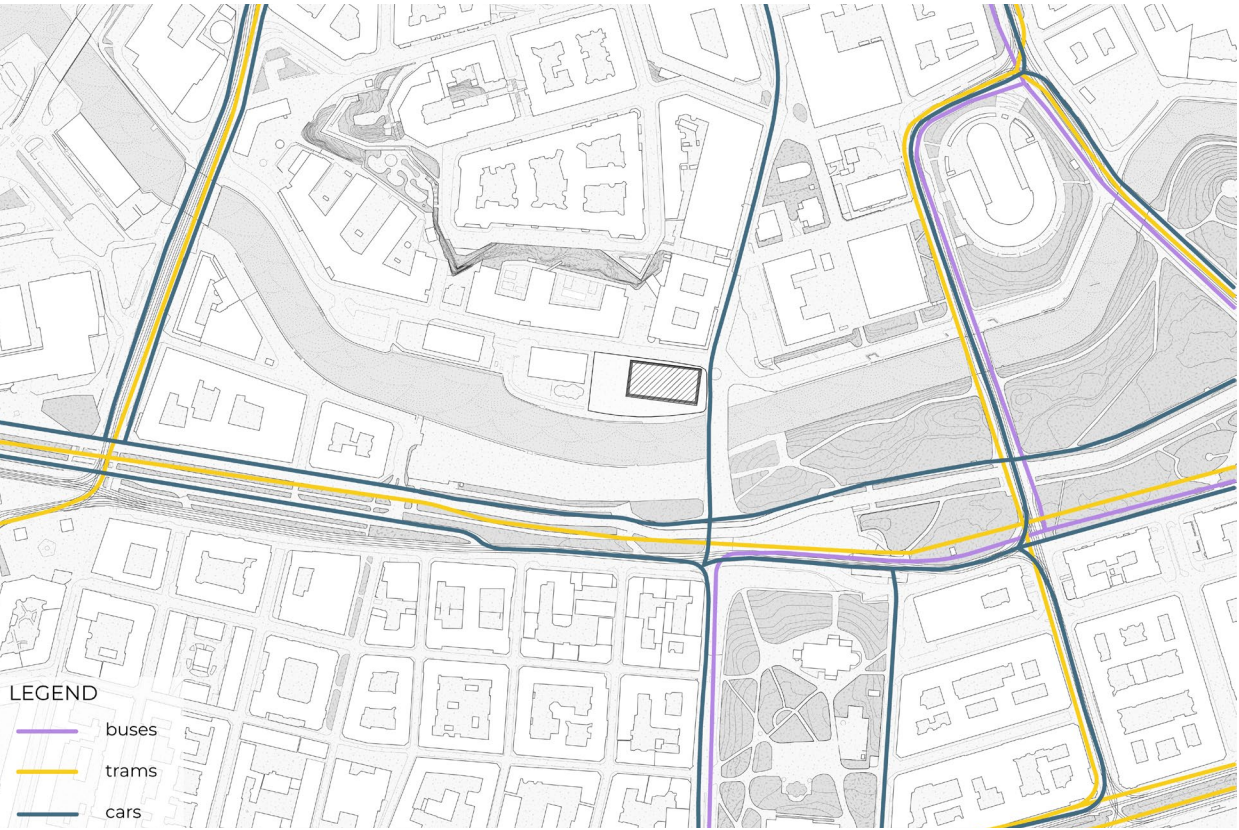


Figure 9. Site visit photos

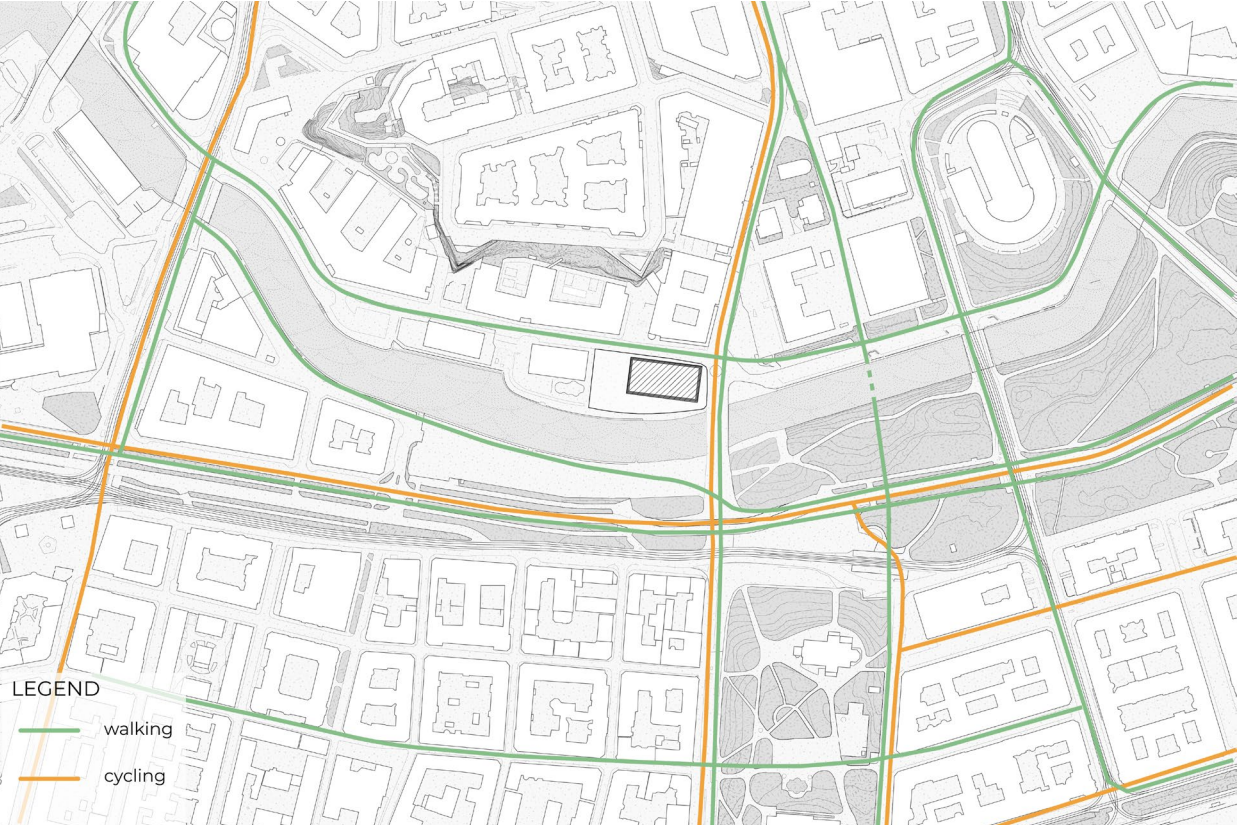


Figure 10. Map with photos of the buildings

Project / Site Analyses / Communication



Map 1. Analysis of main public and car transport flow



Map 2. Analysis of main walking and cycling paths

Project / Site Analyses / Connections

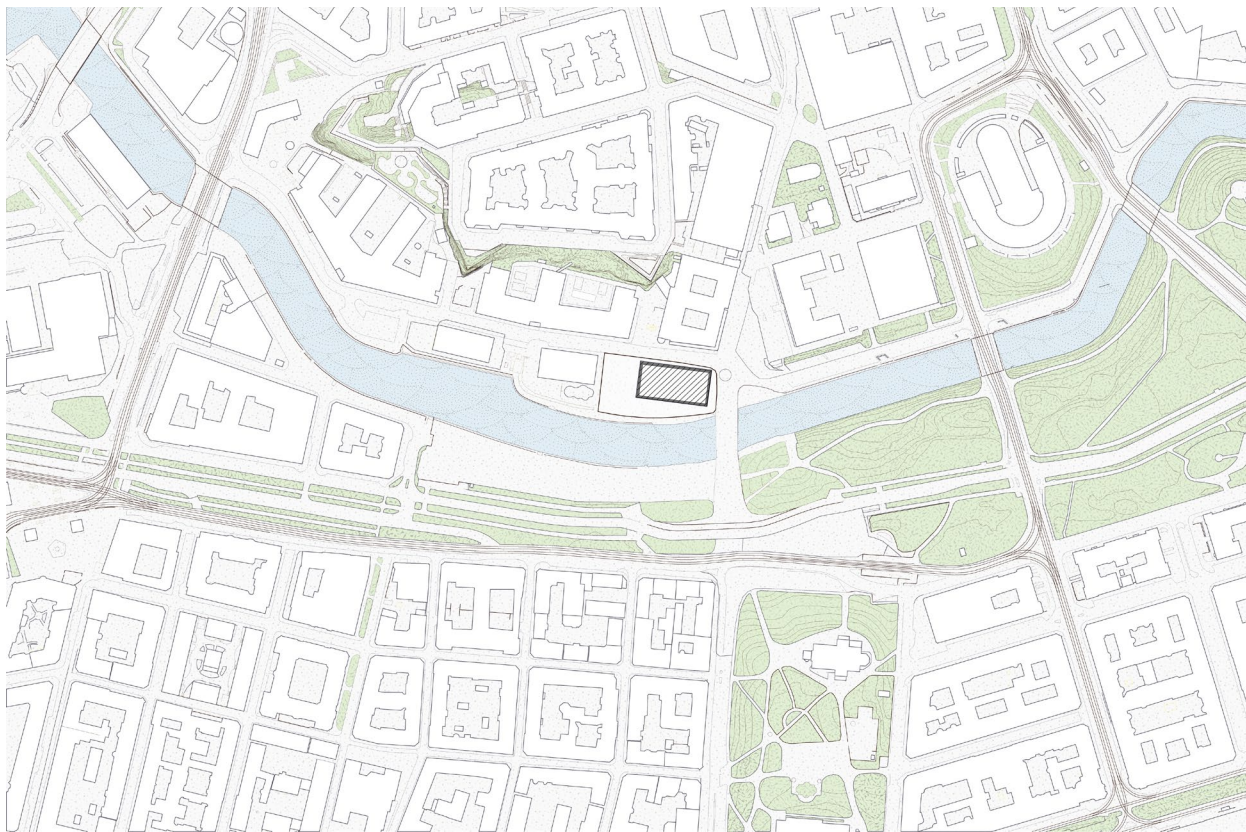


Map 3. Schwarzplan



Map 4. Zoomed out map with dance schools and theaters

Project / Design / Situation plan



Situation plan

Project / Design / Program

-1	wc with showers	50 m²	h = 3,2 m
	sauna	19 m²	
	changing room	11,5 m²	
	administrative / utility room	27 m²	
	social facilities	35,5 m²	
	meeting room	35,5 m²	
	maintenance room	47,5 m²	
	workshop	35,5 m²	
	technical + audio-visual room	35,5 m²	
	storage	60 m²	
	personnel wardrobe	5 m²	
	circulation	180 m²	
TOTAL		564,5 m²	

Project / Design / Program

0	reception + tickets	15,5 m²	h = 3,65 m
	cloakroom	14 m²	
	cafe	140 m²	
	lounge	40 m²	
	wc	25 m²	
	lobby	510 m²	
	circulation (staircases)	90,5 m²	
TOTAL		835 m²	
1	performing arts space (theater)	180 m²	h = 3,65 m
	warm-up room	37,5 m²	
	backstage	27,5 m²	
	technical backroom	12 m²	
	audiovisual room	15,5 m²	
	storage	15,5 m²	
	staff room	19 m²	
	foyer + balconies	495 + 563 m²	
	wc	25 m²	
	circulation (staircases)	90,5 m²	
TOTAL		1480,5 m²	
2	auditorium balconies	65 m²	h = 3,65 m
	mirror hall	35,5 m²	
	green room	10m²	
	rehearsal room	26,5 m²	
	physiotherapy room	19 m²	
	foyer + balconies	495 + 400 m²	
	wc	25 m²	
	circulation (staircases)	90,5 m²	
	TOTAL	1170,5 m²	
2+	sky bar	344 m²	h = 2,5 m
	backroom	43,5 m²	
	other	670,5	
	circulation (staircases)	112,5 m²	
	TOTAL	1170,5 m²	

Total height ≈ 12 m (+ roof & basement)

Total size (without 2+) ≈ 4050,5 m²

Project / Design / Program description

Basement

The basement is reserved for personnel and artists and primarily serves technical and administrative purposes. It creates the foundations for a public building, offering a range of facilities that are necessary for its functioning in the artistic building type context. It consists of storage, maintenance, and artists' backrooms, such as a sauna, a big bathroom, a workshop, administration rooms, and social facilities.

Groundfloor

The ground floor is the freest plan level of all. It informs people about access to the areas of their interest and creates the first impression of the open nature of the building and blurred boundaries between inside and outside. It also allows for interactions between the different groups of users. The floor is glazed from all sides with a warm three-layered curtain wall. It is also recessed to upper floors, which gives additional sun protection. The level comprises a reception area, café, lounge, and waiting area. The only volumes here are the staircase and the toilet. Two open spiral staircases connect the building from this level to the roof. Entrances are located on the long sides of a building, from north and south.

1. & 2. floors

The first and second floors are the key spaces of the building. The central part is a blackbox core with a theater and side functions. The surrounding is an ambient foyer with seating niches and balconies with views.

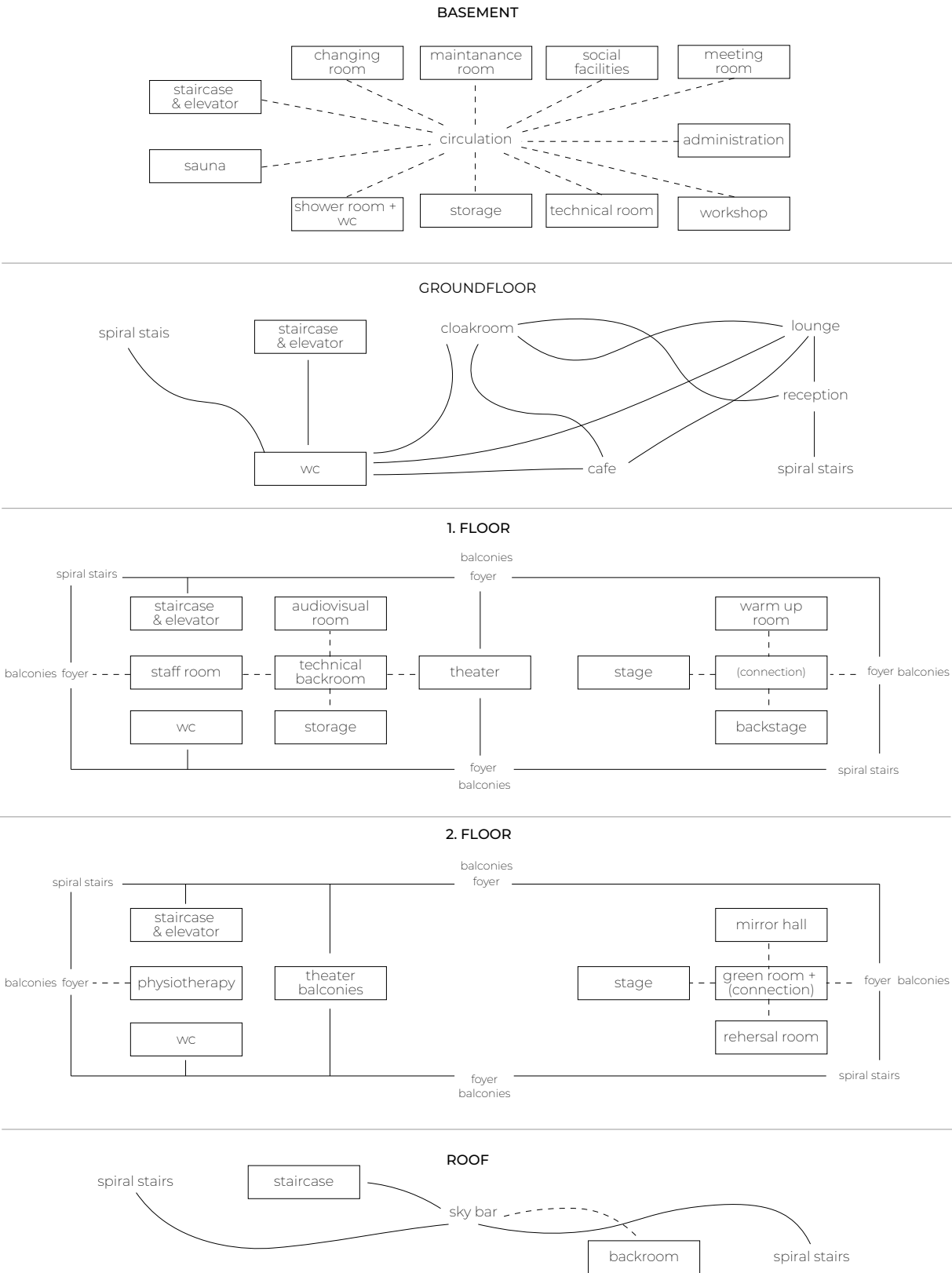
The first floor has 100 tribune places in the theater, an audiovisual room, a technical backroom, and a storage. Entrances to the theater are located on the northern and southern sides of the core. Behind the stage, there is a warm-up room and a backstage. The second floor has 51 places on the theater balconies and a physiotherapy room for artists, a mirror hall for practicing, and a rehearsal room for auditions.

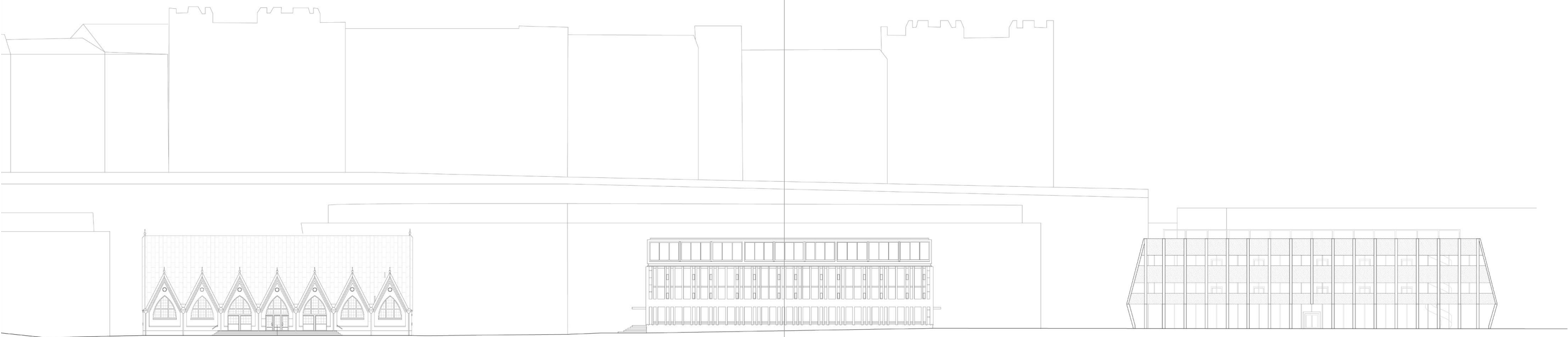
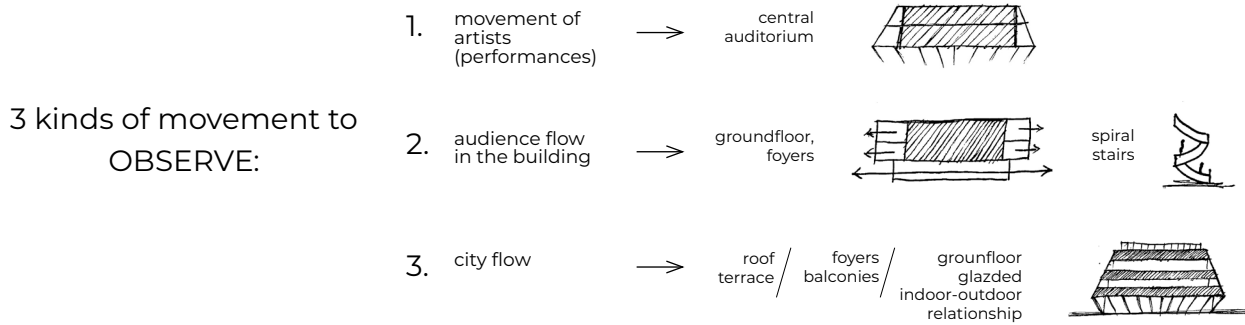
On both floors, there is an emergency staircase, elevator, and wc. Two spiral staircases lead from the ground to the rooftop. What is worth noticing, both floors offer a 360-view of the area, filtered with a copper grid. The connections between the closed, semi-open, and open spaces and the exterior shall underline the movement in the building.

Roof

The rooftop is dedicated to an open-air sky bar that offers a 360-view of the dynamic inner city of Göteborg around the Vallgraven. The rooftop is sheltered with a light construction roof from the rain in the seating area.

Project / Design / Program connections

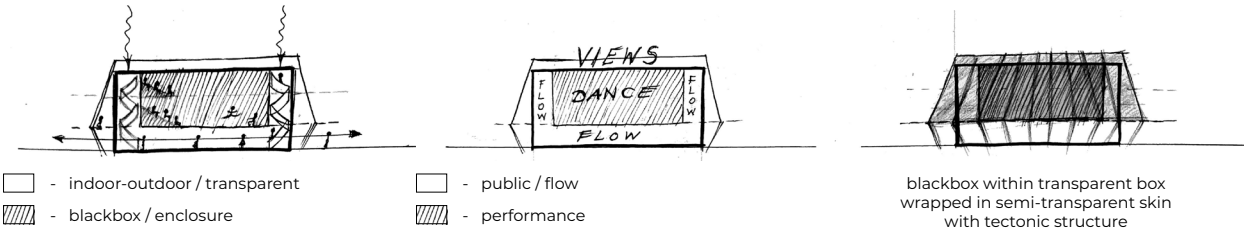


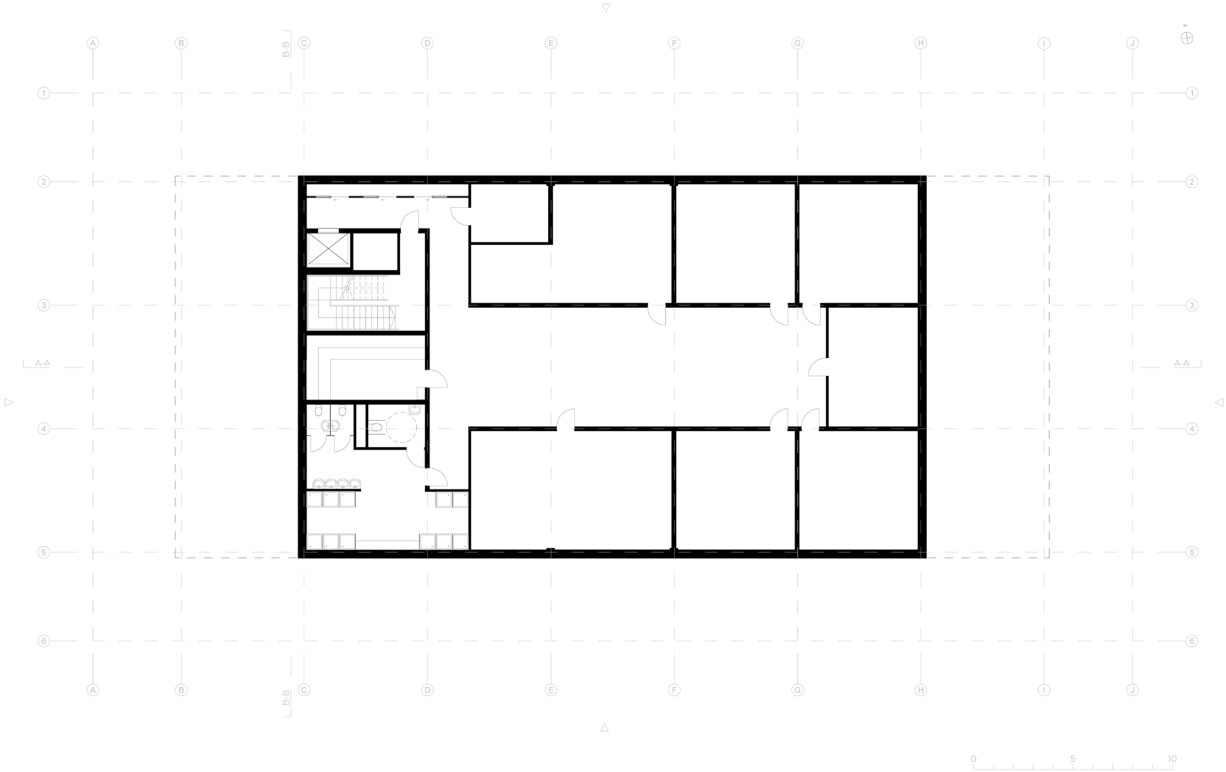
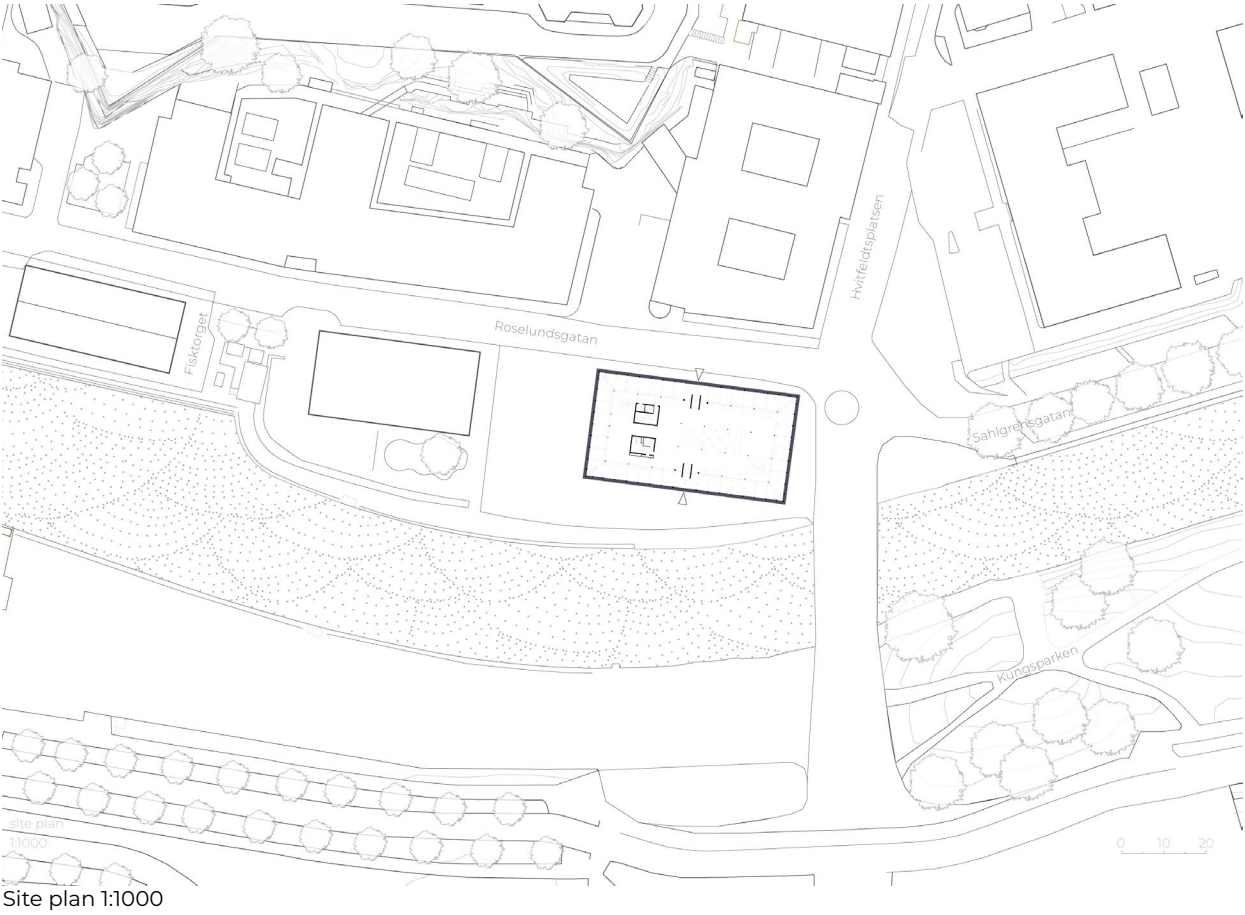


Feskekörka

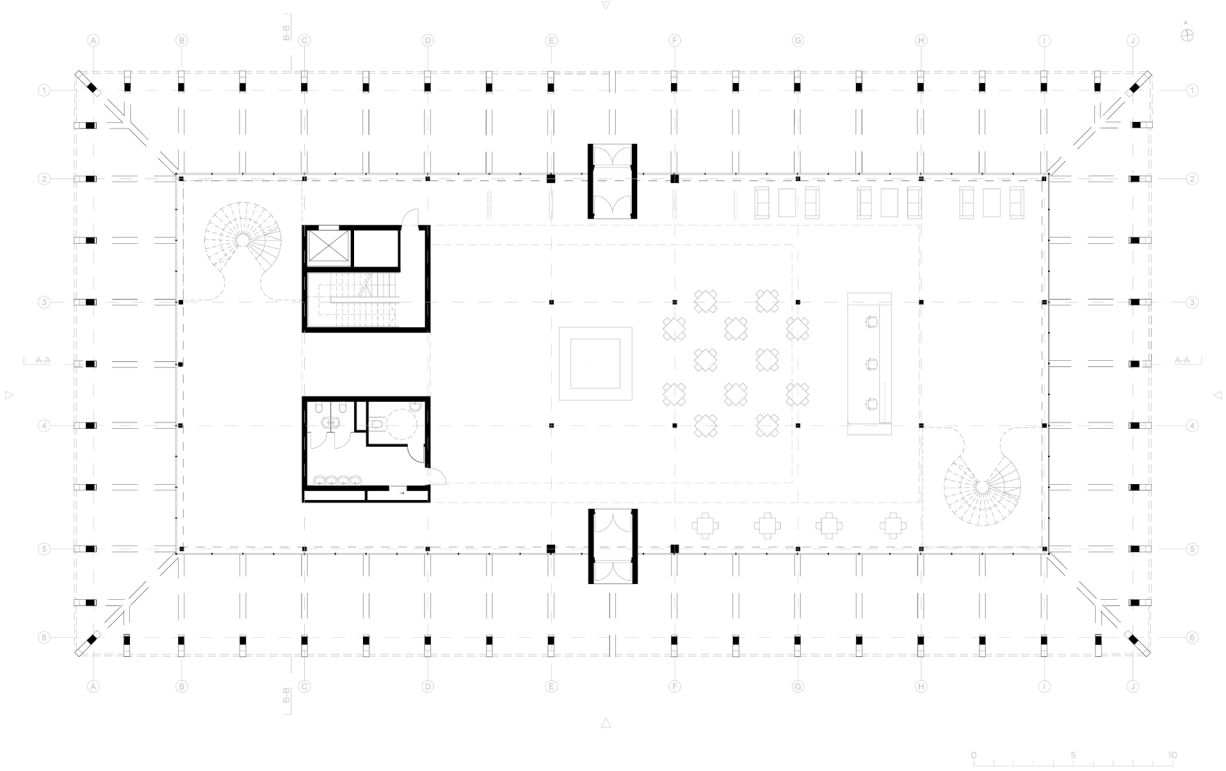
Fesketoget 2

Proposal

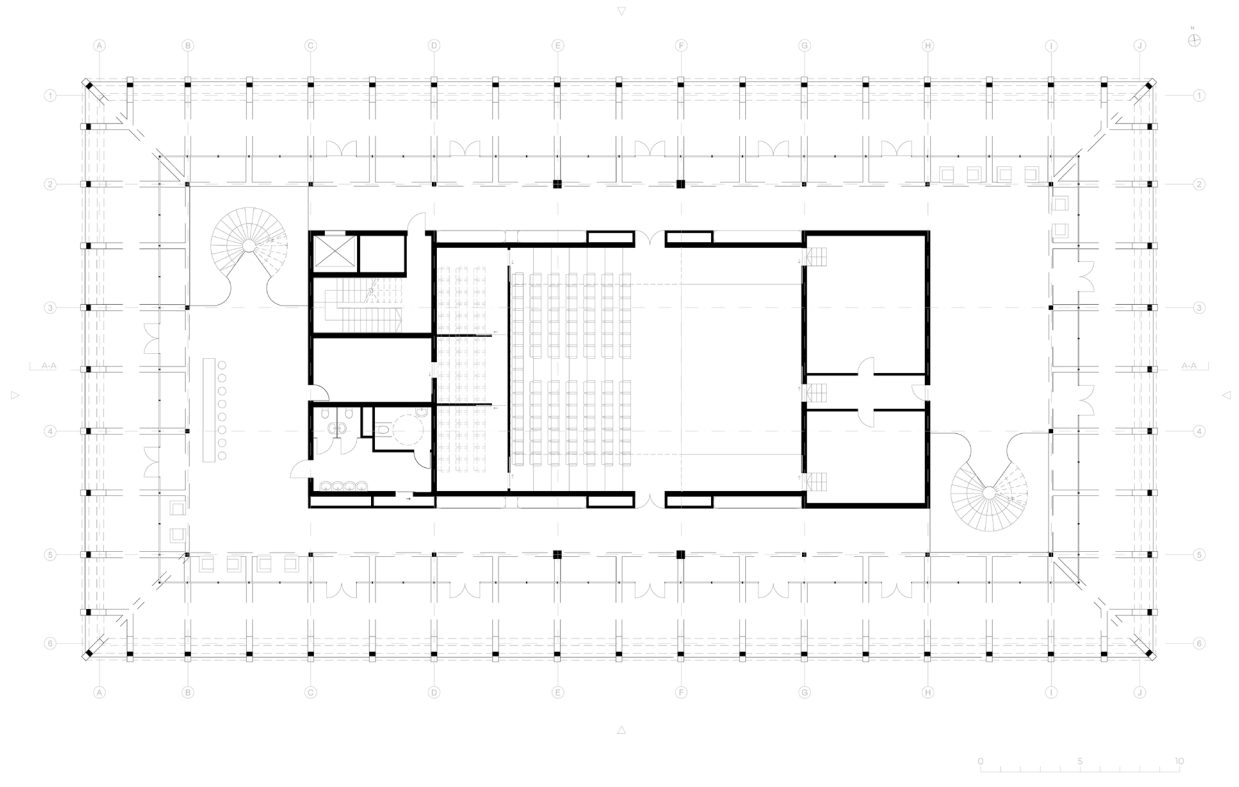




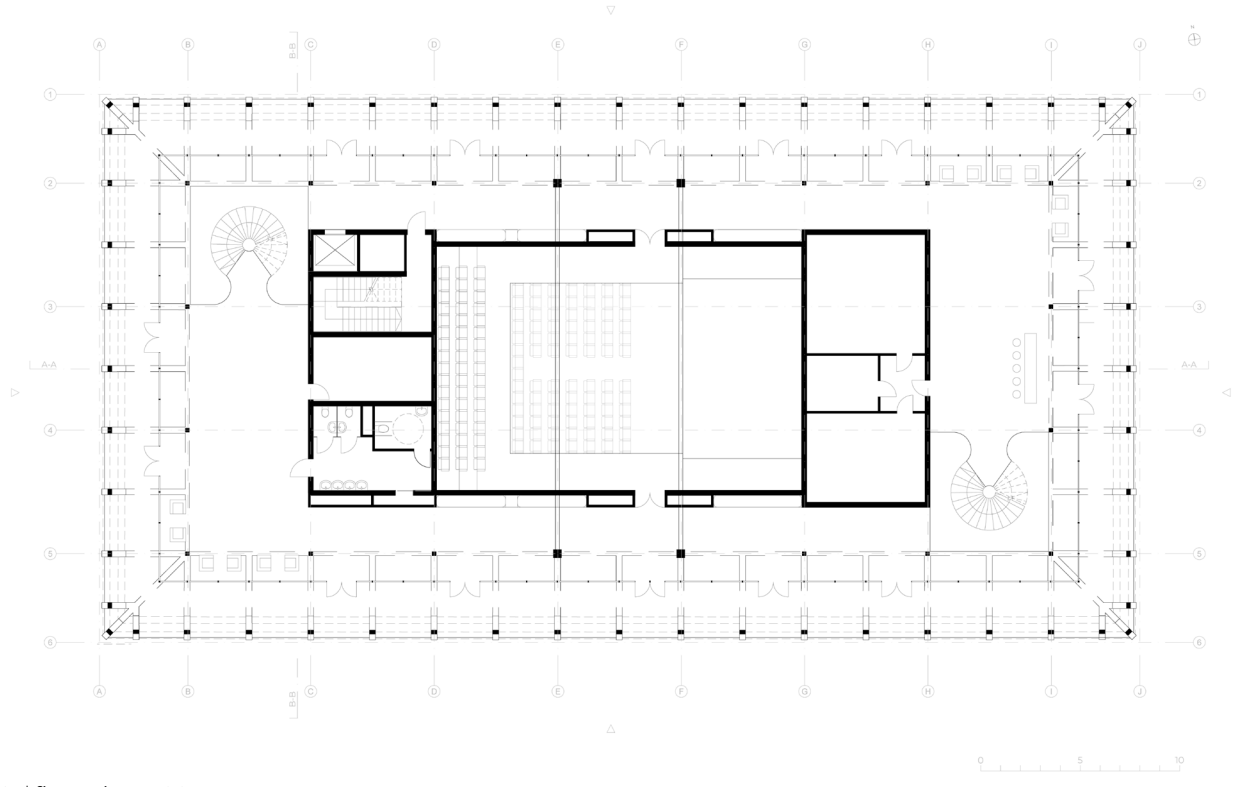
Basement plan 1:100



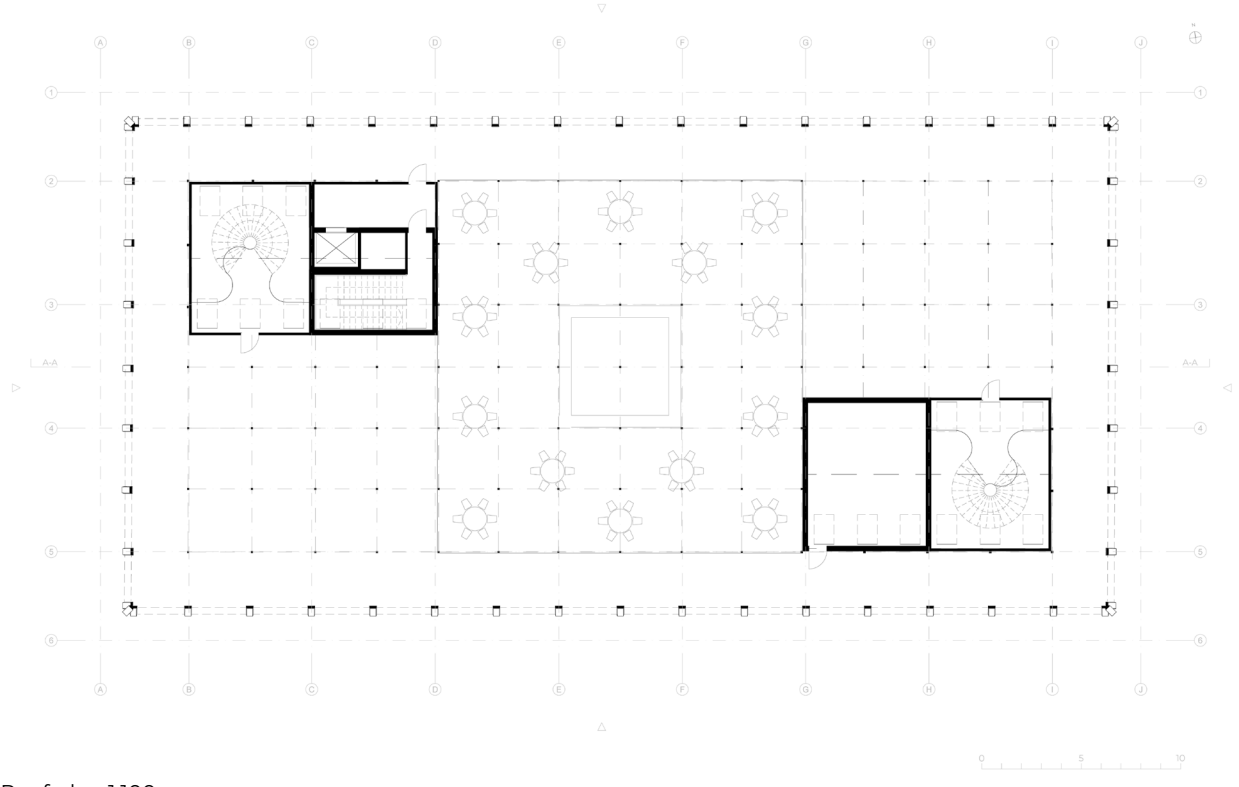
Ground floor plan 1:100



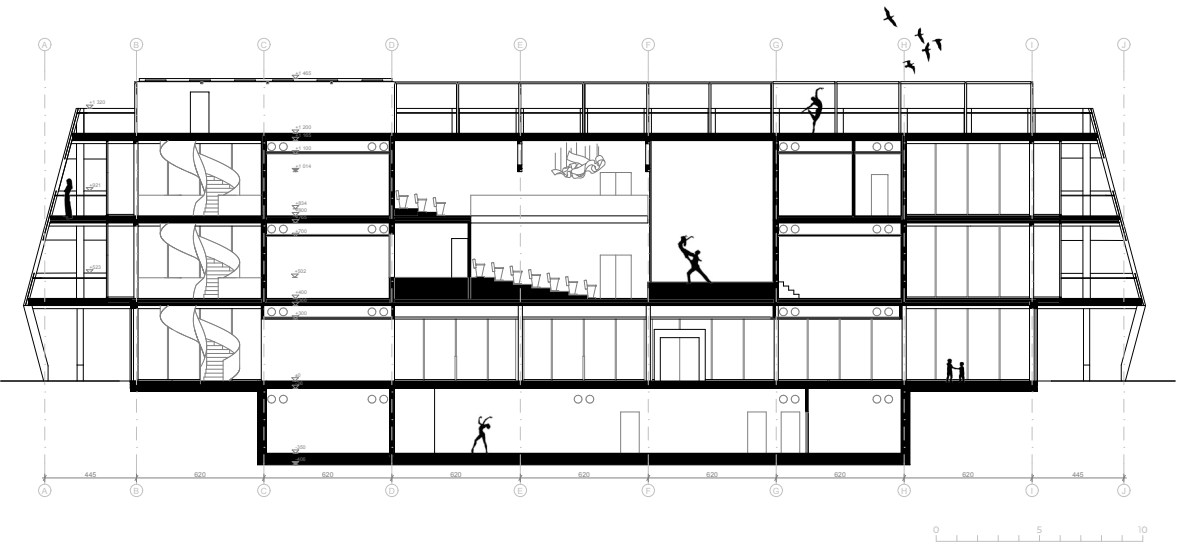
1st floor plan 1:100



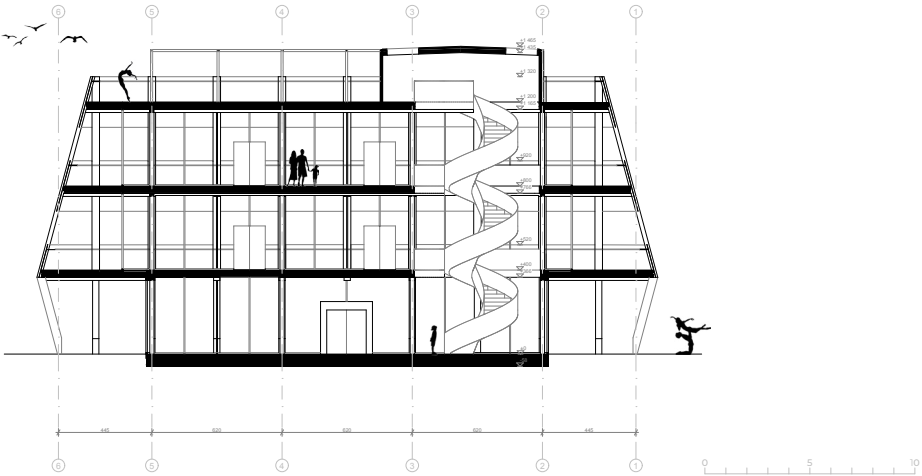
2nd floor plan 1:100



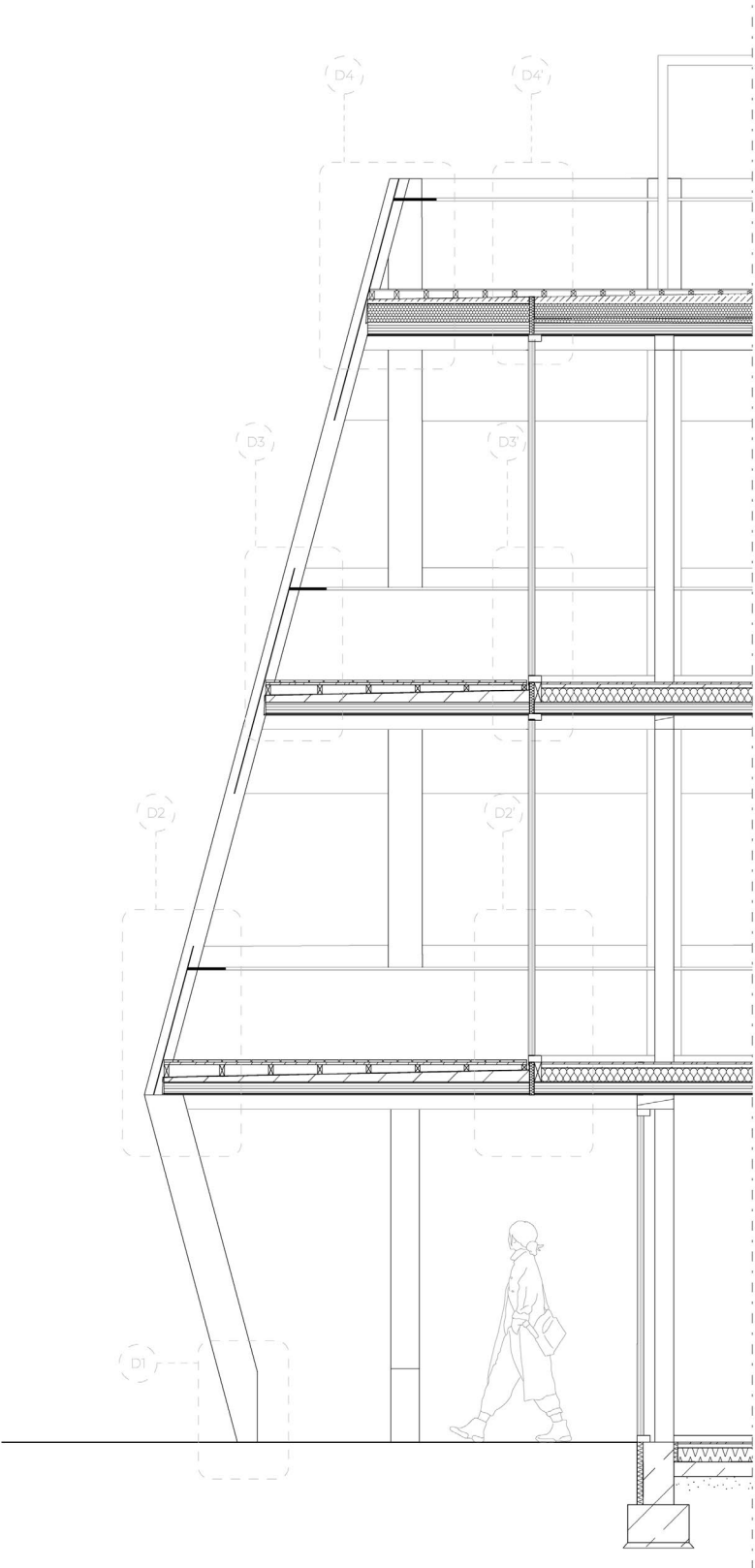
Roof plan 1:100



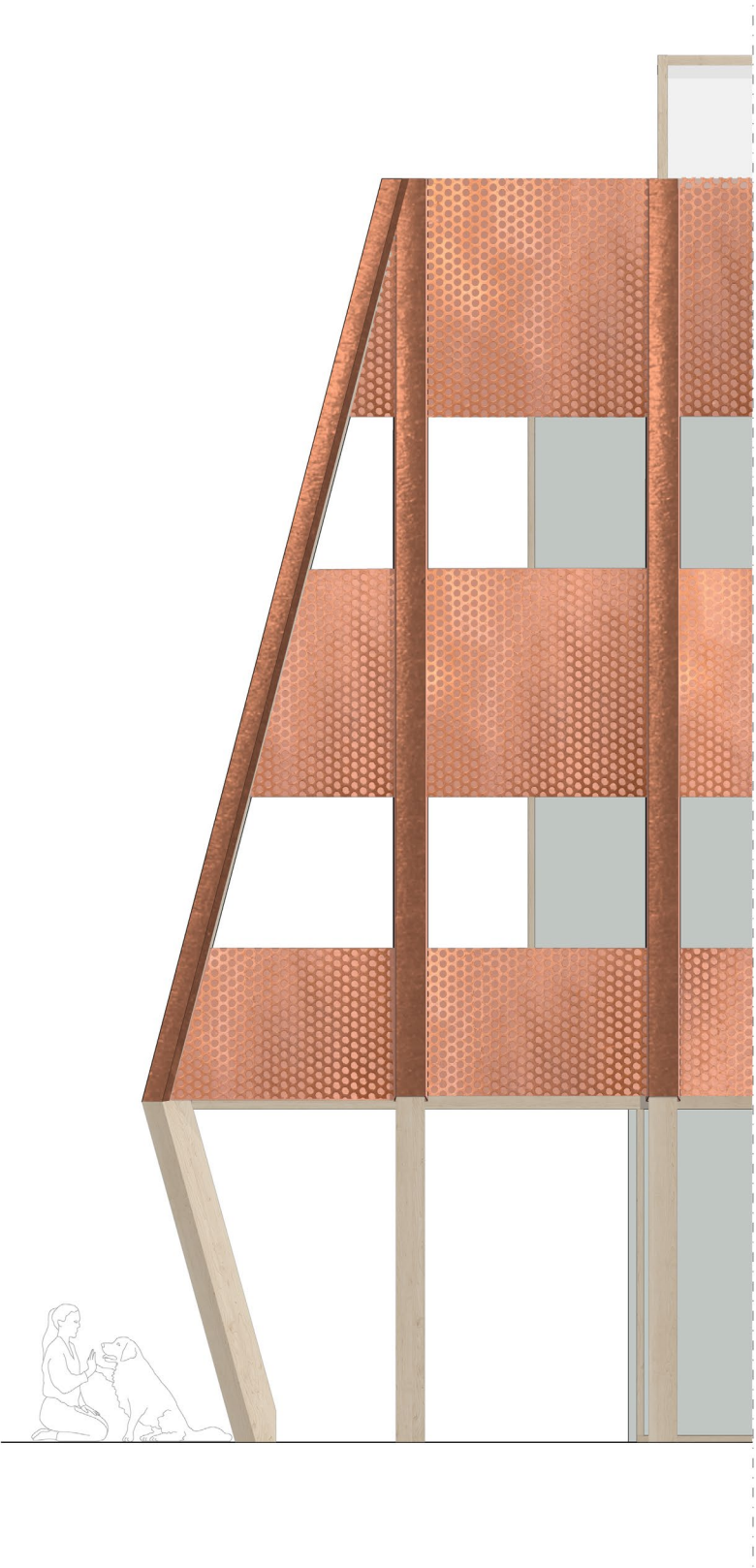
longitudinal section A-A 1:100



cross-section B-B 1:100



section and elevation
1:50



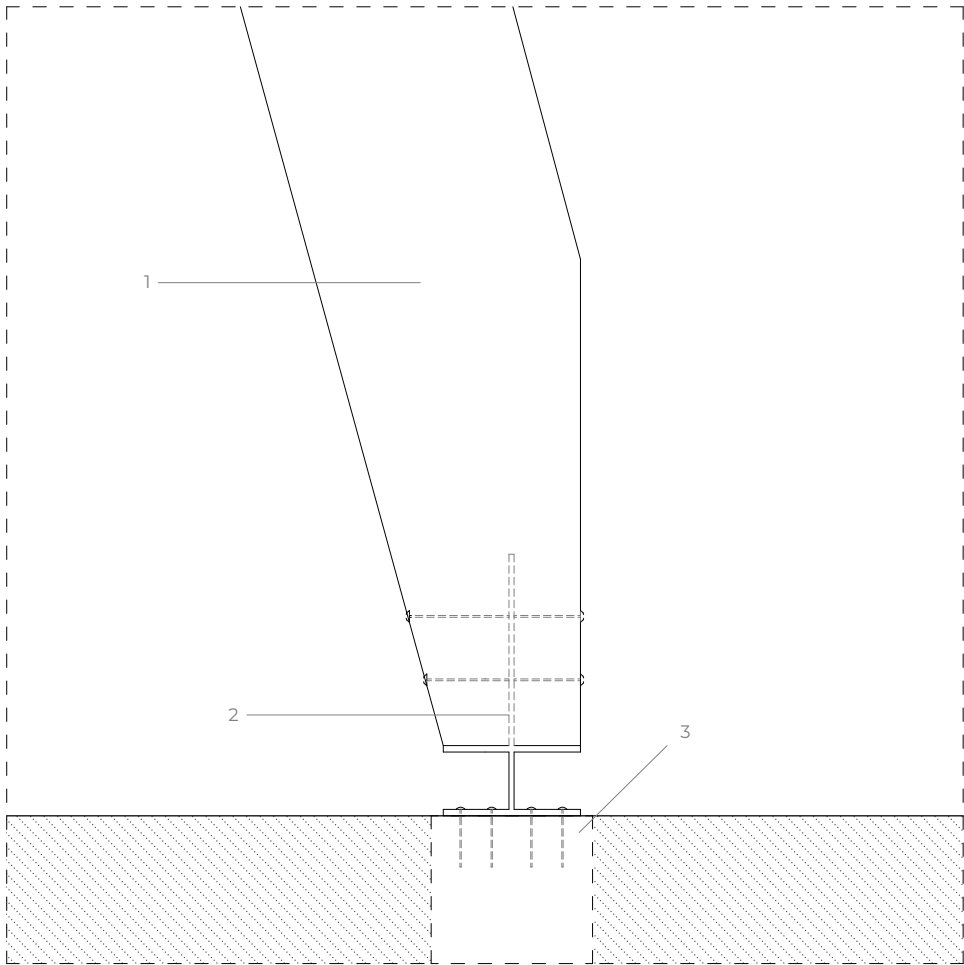
0 5

Project / Design / Details

1.
glulam slanted pillar

2.
double T-blade post base
connected with screws to
the glulam post and concrete base

3.
concrete base



vertical detail D1
double T-blade post base
1:10

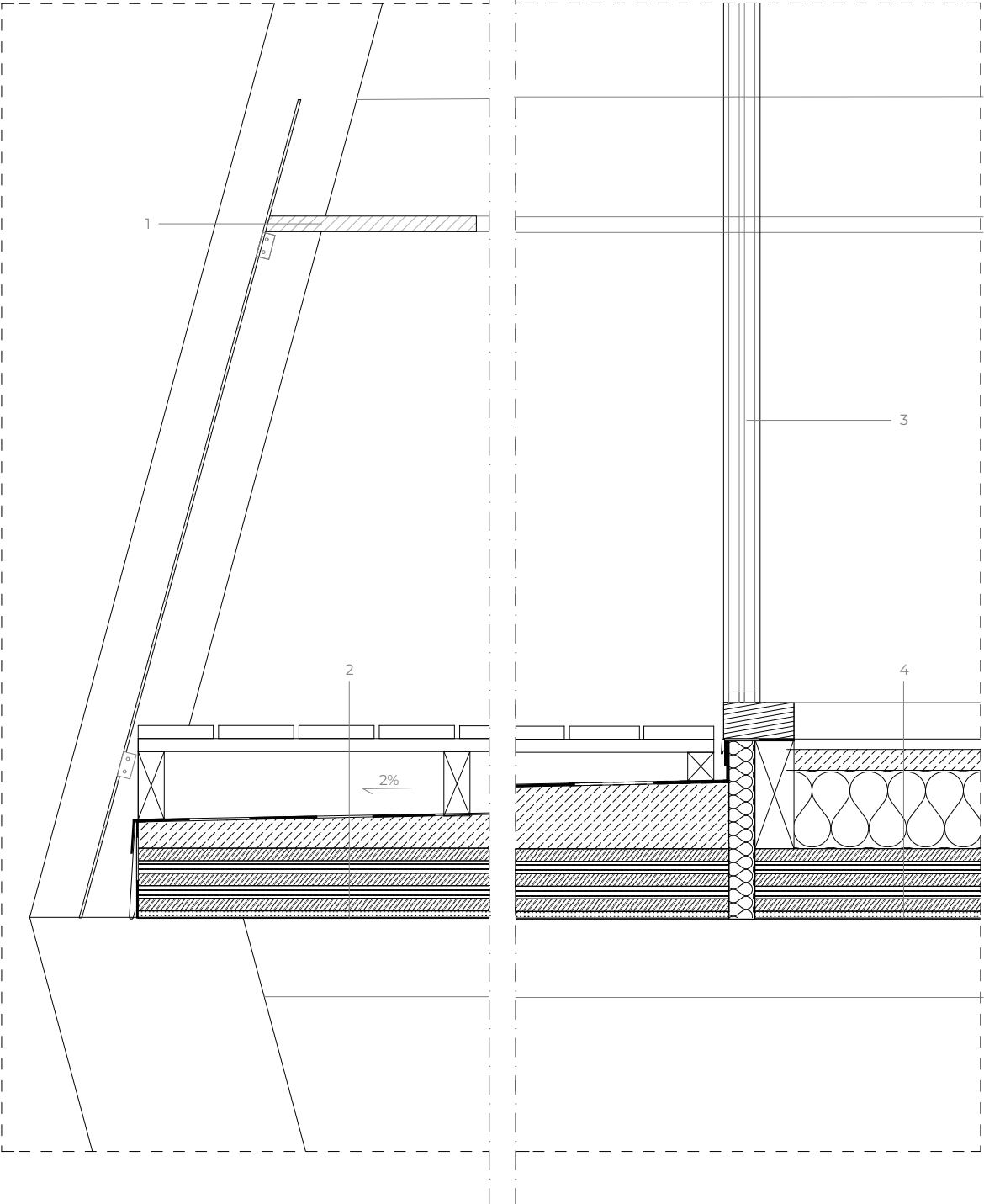


Project / Design / Details

1.
glulam slanted pillar wrapped with
protective copper profile from rainy side
with fixed beams for attaching
perforated copper panels & wooden table
wrapped in copper from above attached
with angle L-bracket

2.
2 x 12,5 Farmacell board
120 CLT
>40 screed slope
waterproofing membrane
20 composite decking boards on supports

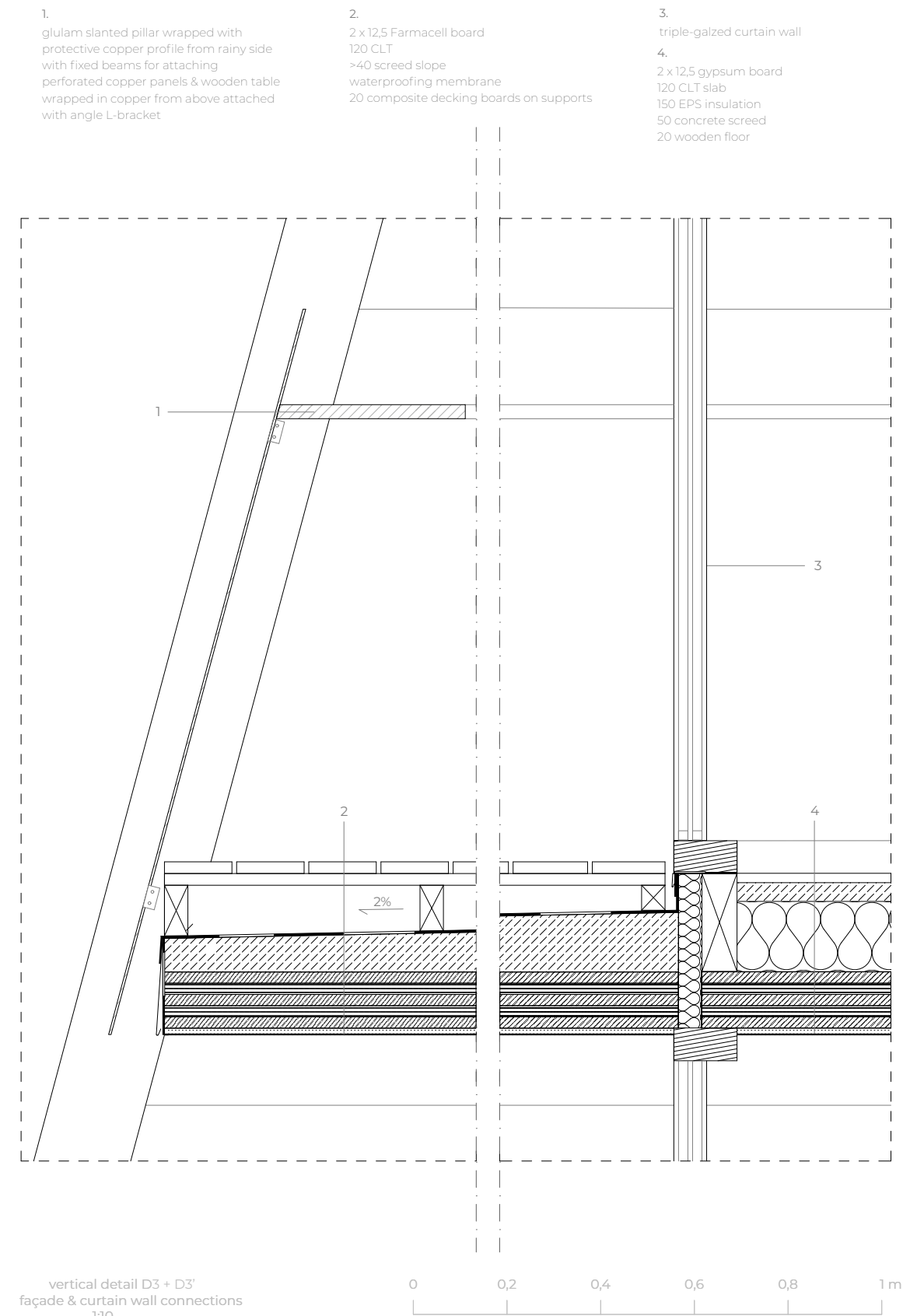
3.
triple-galzed curtain wall
4.
2 x 12,5 gypsum board
120 CLT slab
150 EPS insulation
50 concrete screed
20 wooden floor



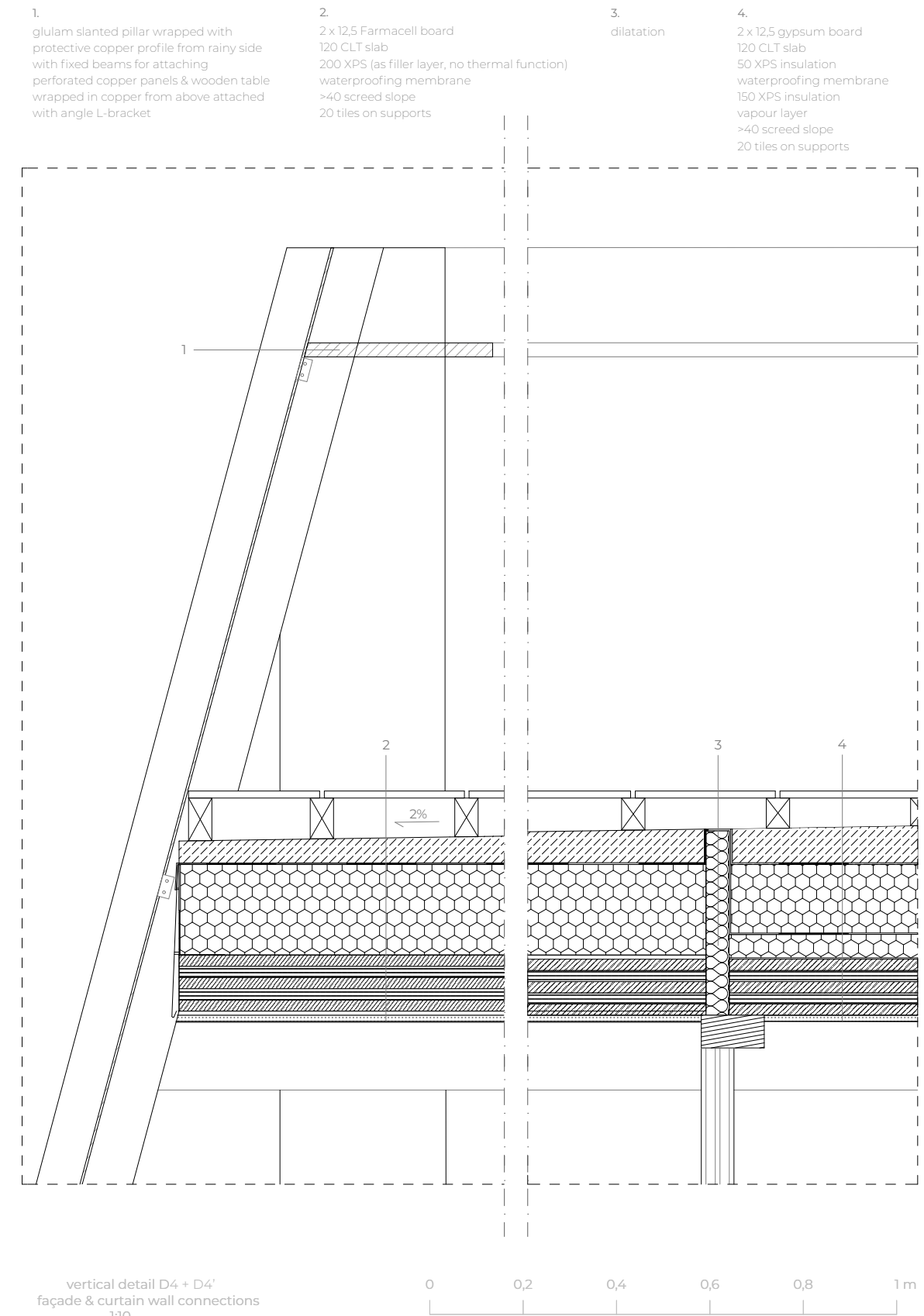
vertical detail D2 + D2'
façade & curtain wall connections
1:10



Project / Design / Details

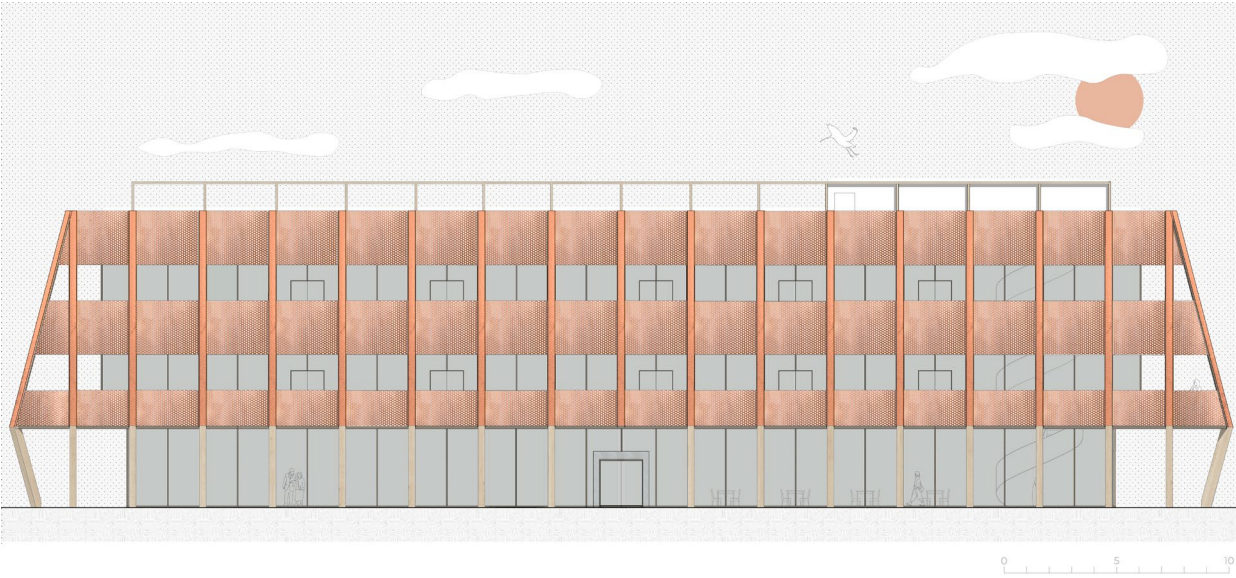


Project / Design / Details

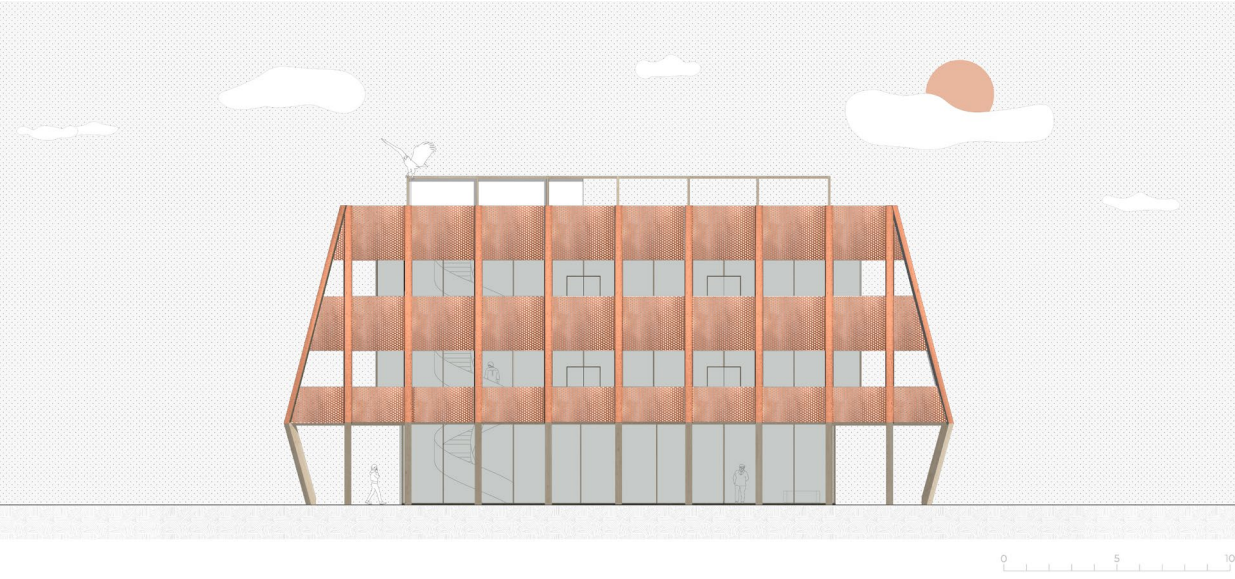




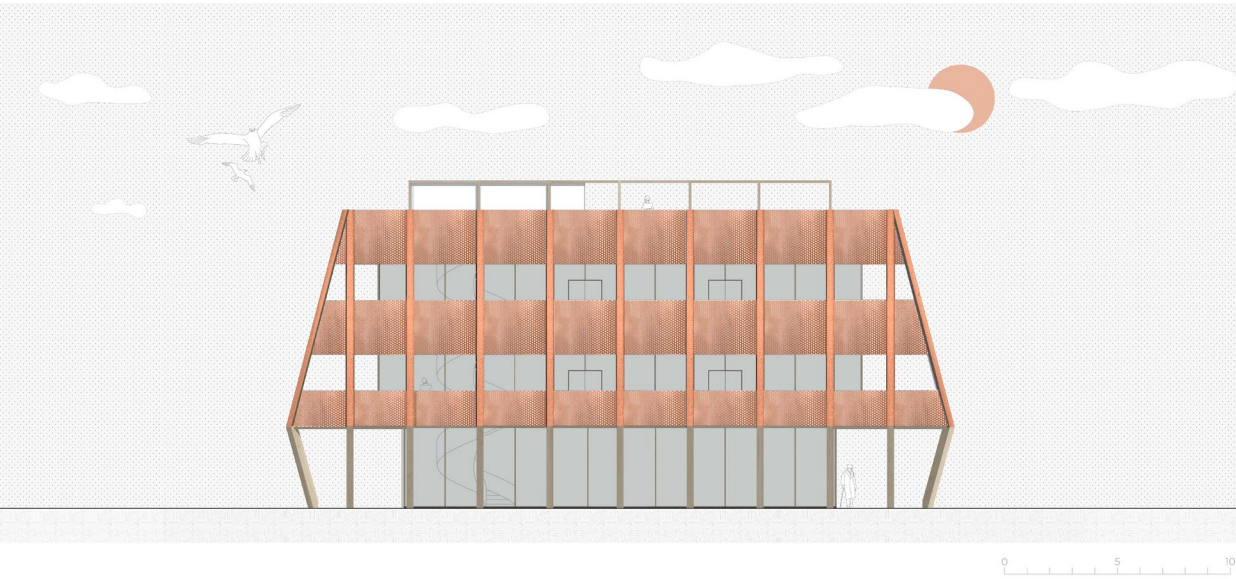
northern elevation 1:100



southern elevation 1:100



eastern elevation 1:100



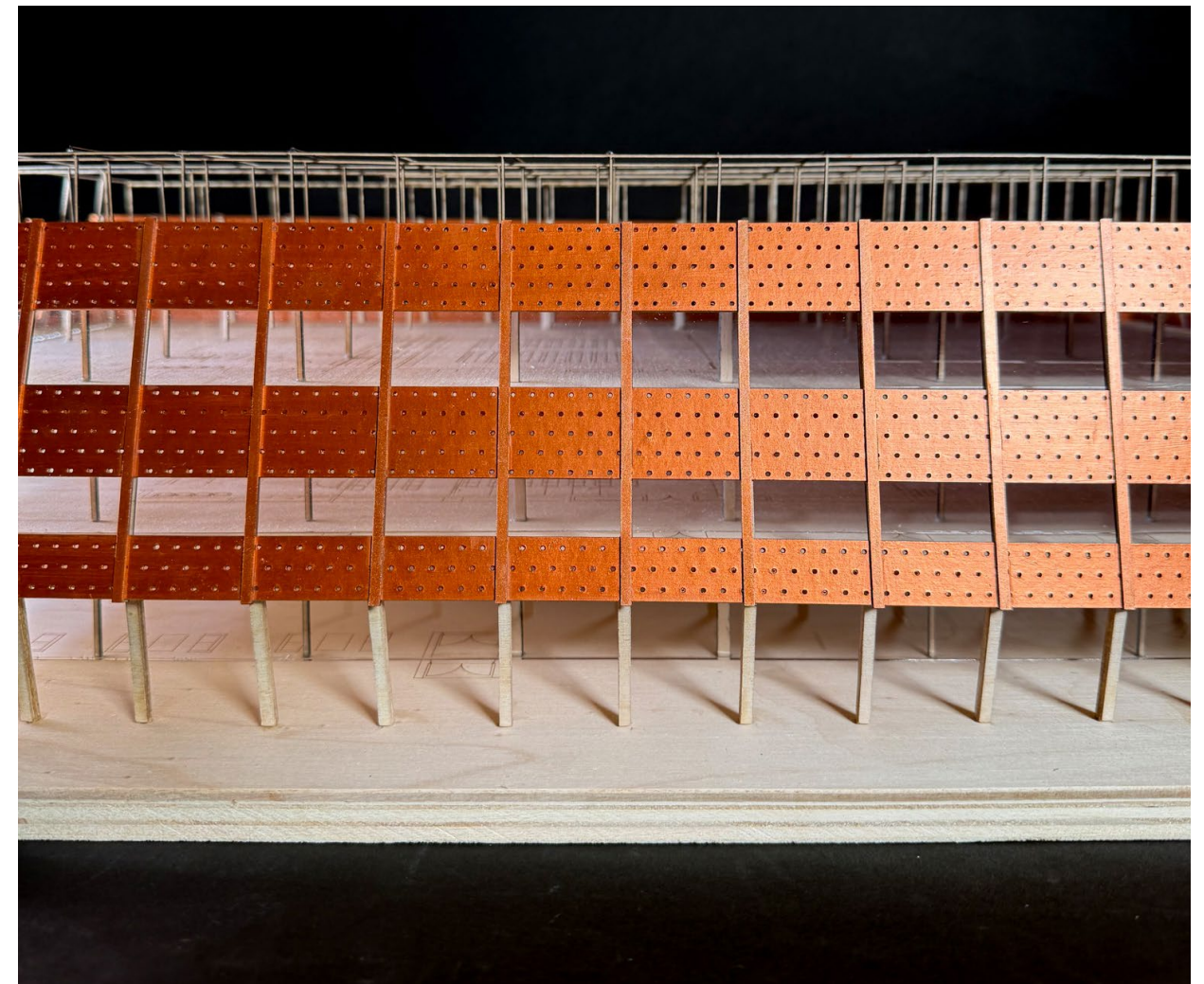
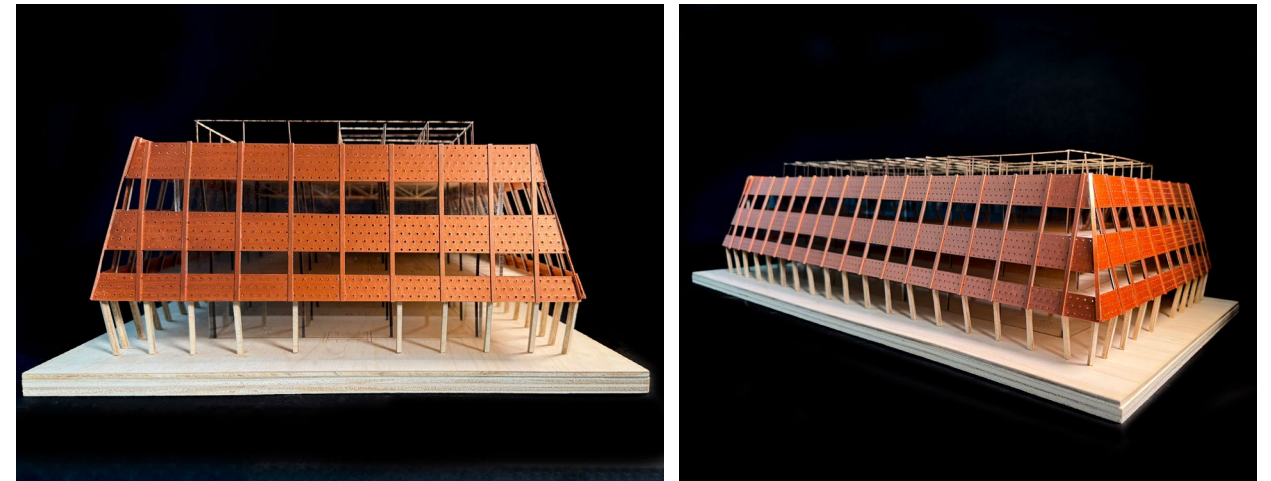
western elevation 1:100



Project / Design / Site model photos



Project / Design / Building model photos



Conlusion

Discussion

Bibliography

Discussion

This master's thesis aims to investigate how the selected common qualities of two domains of the arts, architecture and movement, can be expressed in a public purpose building. I chose the following shared features: rhythm, dynamics, and gravity, and I implemented them in the proposal for the Observatory of Performing Arts.

The project of the Observatory of Performing Arts does not reflect the art of movement itself but constitutes a foundation for different types of movements. This way, it aims to offer a space for the movement genres so it can coexist and do not compete with the architecture. The function of the building is to observe three tangible kinds of movement. Moving from a small picture to a zoomed-out perspective: the movement of artists, especially in the central theater; audience flow in the building on the open-plan ground floor, foyers, and balconies; vertical movement on open spiral staircases; and city flow is visible throughout the building with 360-degree views (glazed ground floor, foyers, balconies, roof terrace).

The prominent neighbouring buildings influenced the design decisions. I had to face the following dilemma: to propose a third standalone landmark building that is notably different than the surrounding ones so that it does not compete with them, but on the other hand, a building that complements the space. To articulate an artistic identity expressed through the three chosen features of both forms of art, I attempt to create a building with a sculptural character. However, some of the intended features of my proposal had to be limited due to the location context, eg. The steep roof was excluded because of too strong a reference to the Feskakorka or sloped façade, not to compete with the volume of Boplats.

The rhythm, which is visible both inside and outside, mainly by the columns and some spatial arrangements of rooms and areas, is not free but even. It is a consequence of relating to the symmetrical and repetitive rhythm of the buildings from the closest context, but also the needs of construction. The dynamics interact with the challenging gravity of vertical, horizontal, and slanted elements, as a play of forces in the physical balance of expressive character. The expression is dynamic tension of compression. It emphasizes the uplifted weight in contrast to the expected gravity forces.

The main construction material is wood. After consultations, the project concluded with glulam columns, CLT slabs, and spider connectors, marking an interesting test of a new technology with numerous advantages. Wood is mixed with materials of different textures as copper, plaster, or textiles, to emphasize the feeling of smoothness or roughness and thus relate to the perception of dynamics as a feature of the art of movement.

Discussion

Overall, the key aspect of the process was to search for a public character of the building and views that create meaningful surroundings, while keeping the artistic features in mind. Eventually, the focus was not the resemblance of movement or dance but the features that are common to both architecture and movement and their architectural interpretation. By dealing with that question, I learned both the universal features of both domains better and realized that they are not fully compatible. While movement is much freer, architecture also has a lot to do with the condition of a site and neighboring buildings. I also learned how to investigate in an architectural context on how to display the intended features of a building in its construction, bearing in mind the contextual constraints.

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Figure 4. Historical photo of Vallgraven [photograph], Retrieved from: <https://stadshem.se/omrade/inomvallgraven/>

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