Hello Again, Palace of Youth

Rethinking a Late Modernist Monument in the Heart of Prishtina

Thesis Book
Spring/Summer Semester 2025
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Abstract

What becomes of architecture when its purpose fades but its presence endures? This thesis confronts that question through the Youth Palace in Prishtina, a monumental structure built during late Yugoslav socialism, now suspended in a state of spatial and symbolic uncertainty. Once a central site for collective gathering and cultural production, the building has gradually been neglected, fragmented, and partially privatized, reflecting broader patterns of institutional silence and unresolved memory across post-socialist cities.

Rather than proposing preservation or erasure, the project embraces the building's incompleteness as both method and message. Through a series of targeted architectural gestures such as removing the glazed façade to open the structure toward the Grand Hotel, Arbëria, and Rilindja the intervention transforms the Palace into a contemporary urban agora: open, porous, and continuously reinterpretable. A bridge replaces separation, and circulation becomes civic infrastructure.

Rooted in the lived memory of a city where "meet me at Boro Ramiz" still echoes in conversation, the thesis positions the Youth Palace not as an isolated case, but as part of a broader typology of socialist-era buildings burdened by ambiguity. It challenges architecture's tendency to romanticize decay or retreat into neutrality, and instead proposes a design practice grounded in reactivation, subtraction, and public responsibility.

By refusing closure, the project reframes incompleteness as a tool of resilience redefining architecture not as a static solution, but as an evolving platform for memory, encounter, and transformation.

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Fig. 1.   3D Printed Youth Palace, 1:500. Credits: Lindon Bytyqi

1   Introduction

A city is defined not only by what it builds, but also by what it chooses to forget.

In the heart of Prishtina, the Youth Palace stands as an unresolved question an architectural relic of ambition and neglect, too significant to erase, yet too uncertain to reclaim. Once a vibrant center of cultural and public life, its vast interiors now exist in limbo, echoing broader societal ambivalence toward the material remains of the socialist period.

Built during Yugoslavia's late socialist modernization in the 1970s, the Palace embodied collective optimism and futurity. Today, its sculptural presence persists, but its civic function has faded. A building once conceived for dynamic cultural exchange now partly functions as a parking lot a striking metaphor for the erosion of shared space and public meaning.

This condition is not unique. Across Kosovo and other post-socialist regions, similar buildings face ambiguous futures: stripped of public purpose, drifting toward commercial use, or left in decay. But such structures are more than historical leftovers they are spatial mirrors of unresolved narratives. The Youth Palace, in particular, invites a deeper question: can architecture reconnect us with collective memory without freezing it in place? Can a building become a cultural agent again not through nostalgia, but through adaptation?

Growing up, the Youth Palace was always a point of reference. "Meet me at Boro Ramiz" was a familiar phrase yet even then, it felt like two disconnected layers of the city: the monumental and the mundane, coexisting without dialogue. This disconnection is spatial and symbolic, and it demands architectural rethinking.

This thesis proposes that reactivation must go beyond function or formal preservation. It begins with the building's unresolved condition and works with it not to erase, but to expose, adapt, and reframe. The intervention treats the Palace not as a frozen monument but as a flexible cultural commons, where public life, contemporary art, and collective reflection coexist. Its contradictions are not obstacles they are generative.

Neglect in architecture is not just physical decay; it is also conceptual silence. The Youth Palace embodies this silence and with it, the opportunity to speak again. Through spatial subtraction, reconnection, and reinterpretation, this thesis imagines a future where the Palace becomes a porous structure open to the city, its people, and its changing rhythms.

Kosovo lacks not only cultural infrastructure, but spaces for conceptual rehearsal spaces to process and construct collective identity. Events like Manifesta 14 revealed the potential of architecture to facilitate cultural dialogue and spatial transformation. This project builds on that spirit, proposing the Youth Palace as a dynamic site of engagement not a finished institution, but an unfinished platform for memory, participation, and artistic production.

This thesis begins with three questions:

When does a ruin stop being a ruin?
Does preservation mean freezing a structure in time, or allowing it to evolve?
Can a monument exist without an audience?

The Youth Palace's transformation seeks not to resolve its contradictions but to inhabit them to let the building remain dynamically incomplete. In doing so, it becomes not only a monument to what was, but a stage for what could still emerge.

Fig. 2.   Orthophoto Prishtina 2024. Geoportal Kosovo

1.1 Ambitions Lost, Spaces Found

Architectural discussions often focus on buildings that are visible, complete, and in use. But in many cities especially those shaped by war, political shifts, or economic transition, there are buildings that don't fit this picture. These are structures that were once important, but today feel between past and future. They are not fully active, but also not forgotten. They are simply… still there.

This kind of in-between state isn't just a matter of physical neglect. It's something deeper. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls it the condition of being "undead".[1] What has been excluded or left behind hasn't disappeared, it continues to exist, just in a different form. These buildings still shape how people move, remember, and think, even when they're no longer used as they were originally intended.

Architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales described such places as terrain vague, spaces in the city that don't have a clear function anymore, but still carry meaning and potential.[2] They're not simply ruins or failures. They are open, unresolved, and waiting. They can challenge how cities grow and what stories they tell.

Monuments, too, fall into this strange space. They were once built to show stability or shared identity. But over time, they can lose that message. When the history they represent becomes uncomfortable or forgotten, these buildings can become hard to place. As Henri Lefebvre reminds us, space is never neutral or empty it's always shaped by people, politics, and time.[3]

These buildings may seem stuck or unfinished, but they still matter. They remind us that not all architecture is about solving problems. Some buildings hold onto old questions. They push us to reflect, to look again, and to ask: What happens when a building outlives its original purpose?

1   Agamben, Homo Sacer, 1998
2   Solà-Morales, Anyplace, 1995
3   Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 1974

This chapter is about those spaces. Not as failures, but as places full of complexity. Places that challenge us to rethink what architecture is for and what it means to let things remain open.

1.2 Weird Memories

Cities are made of more than buildings. They are shaped by how people remember, forget, and relate to space over time. These memories shift between generations, social groups, and political moments. Some become embedded in monuments, while others survive only in conversation or in the way certain places are used or avoided.

Memory in architecture is rarely neutral. Philosopher Andreas Huyssen writes of "present pasts" fragments of unresolved history that surface in everyday life.[4] These are not just remnants; they shape how people interact with space today. In post-conflict or transitional cities, this tension is especially present. A place may be publicly accessible but feel closed off. It may still function, but its meaning has shifted.

I think of this when I listen to my parents talk about the city they knew. Prishtina, to them, was full of spaces that felt open, civic, shared even if briefly. Their memories are not only about buildings, but about how time shaped those buildings: a cinema remembered not just for its design, but for its atmosphere; a public plaza that once drew people together, now passed by without pause. Their recollections often describe a different logic of the city, one I never fully experienced, but one that subtly informs how I see it.

Buildings, especially those built for public use, often persist beyond the political systems that produced them. Richard Sennett callse them "slow institutions" they do not change easily, and in that slowness, they gather contradictions.[5] A structure that once symbolized progress may now feel lifelesss. One designed to be open may now appear unclear. But the

4   Huyssen, Present Pasts, 2003.
5   Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, 1977

material remains, and with it, a complex history of intentions, disruptions, and silences.

What makes these buildings difficult is not that they are broken or abandoned, but that they are unresolved. They no longer fully belong to the past, yet they are not entirely part of the present. Their meanings are suspended. For some, they are reminders of a former order; for others, they are simply there, a background, not a destination. But in either case, they shape how the city is lived.

Take, for instance, the Dom Sindikata in Belgrade, a trade union building that once hosted political gatherings and public events. Its massive form still stands at the city's center, but its role has shifted. It is now part shopping space, part cultural venue. What it represents depends on who remembers it and when. Its architectural language remains clear, but its social language has fragmented and "evolved".

This kind of transformation is common, especially in post-socialist cities. Some buildings are repurposed pragmatically. Others are left or stuck not because no one cares, but because no consensus exists on what they mean. These buildings do not simply reflect memory, they distribute it. They influence who feels comfortable, who feels out of place, and whose history is still legible in the landscape.

This chapter does not aim to explain all the layers at once. It begins with the idea that memory is not just about the past, it's about how the past is made visible, or invisible, through space. As the thesis moves forward, we will return to specific buildings, specific contexts. For now, we stay with the broader idea: that architecture can hold memory unevenly, and that this unevenness matters.

Fig. 3. Bororamizians, Prishtinë Mon Amour, 2012

2 The Making of Prishtina

2.1 Ottoman Prishtina 1455-1912

Fig. 4. Old Photographs of Prishtina city center showing the destroyed structures during the mid-1940s and mid-1950s Source: Jerliu & Navakazi, 2018, p. 64. (Dasara Pula)

Prishtina lies on a plateau between regional centers, neither a traditional stronghold nor a colonial capital, but something quieter. Its historical urban core emerged gradually; its form shaped by commerce more than central planning. Before the 20th century, it was a modest Ottoman town organized around its bazaar, mosque courtyards, and scattered mahallas. There was no formal center, no architectural grid. The spatial logic was completely organic.[6 7 8]

Between 1455 and 1912, under Ottoman rule, Prishtina grew as a provincial trade town. Its built environment reflected a layered, mixed population: Albanians, Turks, Slavs, Roma, and Jews. The fabric was loose and porous; timber houses, small shops,

6   Karin. Shifting experiences of places in Prishtina,
     2014, pp. 1–2, 4–5
7   Gjinolli & Kabashi. Modernizmi Kosovar 2015, pp.
     28–31
8   Spahiu. Urban Transformation in Pristina after the
     war 1999 till 2022, 2022, pp. 2–3

hammams, and sacred spaces. Roads curved to topography. Privacy and permeability coexisted. These settlements prioritized "accommodation over assertion," in contrast to the monumental visions that would later arrive.[9 10]

Fig. 5. Modernist housing typology inside traditional quarters, Prishtina, mid-1950s
Source: Jerliu & Navakazi, 2018, p. 64

The Old Bazaar "Çarshia e Vjetër" was the city's spatial and economic heart. It was here that public life unfolded: not on a plaza, but in circulation, in negotiation, in proximity. The mosque courtyards functioned as informal spaces. Architectural thresholds such as: shaded arcades, narrow alleys, interior courtyards, filtered movement and created moments of pause, not display. It was a city defined by encounters, not axes.[11]

Transitions and Ambiguities

The Balkan Wars (1912–13) and the dissolution of Ottoman rule introduced a new political authority. Under Serbian-Yugoslav administration, the first state interventions into Prishtina's fabric were strategic and symbolic. Ottoman structures: courts, religious schools, even hammams, were allowed to be demolished or were actively replaced. New state buildings: military barracks, administrative offices began to appear, often disconnected from the city's inherited spatial logic.[9]

This moment marked not only a political break, but a spatial re-orientation. As Spahiu notes in his study of Prishtina's urban development, the new interventions aimed to project order and

9   EC Ma Ndryshe., 2014, pp. 7–13
10   Karin, 2014, pp. 1–2, 4–5
11   Spahiu, 2022

Fig. 6.   Prishtina Map 1937.
Source: Unkown

Fig. 7.   Dragutin Partonić,
General Urban Plan of
Prishtina, 1953 (Source:
Prishtina City
Archive, Fund SO-KK, Box
1/1-21, No.587-589). (Dasara
Pula)

Fig. 8.   Map of Prishtina,
1964. Source: City Archive

СИТУАЦИОНИ ПЛАН ГРАДА ПРИШТИНЕ
РАЗМЕРА 1:5000

СИТУАЦИОНИ
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Fig.9. Photograph of early Ulpiana housing blocks, showing standardized façade and spatial repetition.

Fig.10. Miodrag Pecić, Brotherhood and Unity Square, Prishtina, 1959 Source: Sadiki,

Fig.11. 2020, p. 43). (Dasara Pula)

modernity but lacked coherence with existing rhythms of life. Roads were straightened, parcels consolidated. The old bazaar began to shrink, both materially and symbolically. Throughout the interwar period and into the 1940s, the city remained fragmented, caught between its Ottoman past and its uncertain national future.[12]

This ambiguity is not absence, but a condition, a latent form of spatial politics that resisted monumentalization. What followed would transform the city profoundly, but the traces of its informal memory, its hesitations, densities, and rhythms, never fully disappeared. They continued to survive even beneath the most assertive interventions of the decades to come.

2.2 From Ottoman to Yugoslav City 1912–1945

When the Ottomans left Prishtina, they didn't take the city with them. The bazaar stayed. The mosques stayed. The winding streets and the inward-facing houses stayed. What disappeared was a worldview, one that built cities from the inside out, through shared rhythms, informal networks, and overlapping lives.

In 1912, after the Balkan Wars, Kosovo was annexed by the Kingdom of Serbia. Prishtina was no longer a modest market town within a dissolving empire, but a city waiting to be redefined. A new state had arrived, yet it had no intention of continuing the city's inherited urban form. It didn't demolish it outright it simply built beside it, around it, across it.[13]

The first wave of Serbian administrative interventions included a new courthouse, military barracks, and government offices, constructed along newly drawn axes that didn't connect meaningfully to the city's existing logic. These changes lacked coherence. They were intended less to serve a growing city than to assert presence.[14]

Ottoman architecture - hammams, mosques, caravanserais, was allowed to fade. The Great Hamam, once a communal anchor, was no longer maintained. The Sahat Kulla (clock tower), once a symbol of public time, lost its prominence in the reorganized cityscape. Even the bazaar, Prishtina's commercial and social core, was gradually diminished. These erasures were not only practical but symbolic - a soft rewriting of space by letting older forms fall into neglect.[15]

The state's idea of the city was different. It was axial, monu-

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12 Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, 1998, pp. 89–95

13 EC Ma Ndryshe. 2014, pp. 7–13
14 Malcolm, Kosovo. 1998, pp. 238–242.
15 Malcolm, Kosovo. 1998, pp. 238–242.

mental, bureaucratic. Space was no longer shaped by exchange or proximity, but by zoning and central control. In contrast to the Ottoman model of negotiated density, this new logic favored clarity over complexity. But the transition wasn't total.
In the interwar years, agrarian reforms led to a redistribution of land from Albanian landowners to Serbian and Montenegrin settlers. These demographic shifts weren't only social, they were spatial. New neighborhoods appeared on the city's edges, and institutional structures were introduced with minimal regard for local rhythm or integration.[16]

Prishtina became a city of disjointed rhythms. In one part, life continued as before: prayers, markets, shaded passages. In another, a modern administrative layer was forming, attempting to organize what had never asked to be reorganized. Yet neither side fully won. There was no clear rupture just parallel existences, rarely speaking.[17]

This moment becomes clearer through the lens of Prishtina is Everywhere, which describes the city not as a unified organism, but as a collage of urban ideologies, each laying claim to space without fully displacing the others.[18]
This was not yet the era of socialist planning or modernist transformation. It was an intro, a time of symbolic insertions, unfinished projects, and overlapping systems. But it matters, because many of the architectural tensions that would later define Prishtina, the rupture between public and institutional, between memory and image that were planted here, in this layered space of near-absence.

What was left behind wasn't only infrastructure or architecture. It was a kind of urban uncertainty, a hesitation in form that still echoes in the folds of the present city.

Fig. 12. Photography of the Unity and Brotherhood Monument, Prishtina 1982. Credits:Unkown

16 Jashari-Kajtazi, Behind the National Identity, 2016 pp. 44-48
17 Gjinolli & Kabashi, Modernizimi Kosovar, 2015 pp. 28-31
18 Vöckler, Prishtina is Everywhere, 2008 pp. 15-18

2.3   Socialist Prishtina 1945–1981

The city begins to speak the language of planning. But its voice is uneven.

After World War II, Prishtina remained a peripheral town, more a historical echo than a spatial statement. Its Ottoman framework still shaped daily movement. The Yugoslav interventions of the interwar period had left marks, but not direction. By 1945, the city stood at the edge of a new political and ideological project: socialist modernization.[19]

In socialist Yugoslavia, planning was not neutral. It was a tool of governance, a language of control, a method for drawing the future. Prishtina, newly designated as the administrative center of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, became the body of that ambition.[20]

The early post-war years saw fragmented development. Ministries, schools, and public housing appeared, mostly modest in scale and often adapted from Yugoslav typologies. These were not yet cohesive urban strategies. They were architectural declarations.[21]

That changed with the preparation of the General Urban Plan (GUP) of 1967, directed by Liljana Babić. For the first time, Prishtina was imagined as a socialist capital in spatial terms. The plan proposed a clear civic axis connecting major institutions, a modern street grid, and rigid zoning that divided the city into administrative, residential, and industrial zones. It also formalized the removal of the remaining Ottoman bazaar, previously described as "non-functional" and "unfit for modern life".[22]

The second was the Youth and Sports Center, BoroRamiz. Conceived through a national design competition and won by

Fig. 13. Photography of the Palace of Youth, 1981. Credits:Unkown

19   EC Ma Ndryshe. 2014, pp. 7–13
20   Spahiu. Urban Transformation in Pristina, 2022, pp.
      2–3
21   Pula, D. (2019)pp. 170
22   Pula, D. (2019) pp. 173

DOM Studio from Sarajevo, the centre was to serve as a multi-functional socialist hub: sports halls, cultural venues, youth programming all unified under a single brutalist envelope. Its size and sculptural form stood in stark contrast to Prishtina's earlier architectural modesty.[23]

Together, these interventions attempted to assert a new image for Prishtina. It was no longer just a city of administration. it was meant to be a site of identity-making. The socialist capital was finally being staged.

But this staging was imperfect. Infrastructure development lagged. Informal settlements continued on the city's periphery. Many buildings were left unfinished or delayed. The symbolic language of order was layered over a city still shaped by contradiction.[24]

What emerged was not a clean break from the past, but a hybrid condition: planned but porous, ideological but unresolved. The modern city promised equality and visibility. Yet, as Sadiki writes, many of its forms were "experienced as difficult or uninhabitable".[25]

Fig. 17. Photography of the Rilindja Printing House, 1982. Credits:Unknown

Fig. 14. Photography of RTK Building 1980s. Credits: Unknown

Fig. 15. Photography of KEK Building, 1980s. Credits: Unknown

Fig. 16. Photography of Grand Hotel, 1979. Credits:Unkown

23 Sadiki, Dissertation, 2019 pp. 60-62
24 Sadiki, 2019 pp. 62-64
25 Sadiki, 2019 pp. 67

2.4 Parallel System and Spatial Tensions 1981–1999

When political unity fractured, so did urban space.
In the early 1980s, Prishtina appeared unified by the socialist vision articulated by Liljana Babić's 1967 masterplan. Residential zones like Ulpiana and Dardania showcased socialist housing ideals, public institutions reinforced ideological visibility, and modernist monuments symbolized state authority. Yet beneath this seeming coherence, political tensions continued, soon rewriting urban reality.

In March 1981, student-led protests erupted at the University of Prishtina, initially demanding improved living conditions, but soon expanding to broader political calls for Kosovo's full recognition as a republic within Yugoslavia.[26][27][28] The brutal suppression of these demonstrations left deep marks, fundamentally shifting Kosovo's relationship with federal authorities.[29] Throughout the 1980s, Prishtina experienced a tense calm. But this was shattered in March 1989, when Serbia formally revoked Kosovo's autonomous status. Thousands of Albanian public employees, teachers, doctors, professors, were dismissed or expelled from official institutions. Public buildings, originally symbols of socialist unity and openness, became spaces of exclusion. Educational and cultural life rapidly retreated from public view.[30]

In response, Kosovo Albanians created an extraordinary parallel system: a network of informal schools, health centers, and cultural institutions established in private houses, basements, garages, and cafés. By 1991, approximately 300,000 students attended parallel schools and thousands relied on informal medical centers operating quietly within Prishtina's residential neighborhoods.[31]

26 Syla, S. (2021). Demonstratat e vitit 1981 sipas dokumenteve britanike.
27 Bislimi, B. (2021). Për shënimin e 40-vjetorit të demonstratave të vitit 1981.
28 Gashi, Sh. (2022). Kush përfitoi nga demonstratat e vitit 1981?
29 Zëri. (2018). Demonstratat e 1981, ngjarje që ndryshuan rrjedhën e historisë
30 Pula, D. (2019)
31 Sadiki, A. (2019)

Fig. 18. Students studying inside private homes during the paralel system, 1991. Credits: Unknown

Fig. 19. Students demonstrations in 1981. Credits: Unkown

Urban space became physically and symbolically fragmented. Official buildings like the BoroRamiz Youth Palace, originally intended for collective cultural engagement, became inaccessible, symbols of lost promise and political exclusion. The once-celebrated Grand Hotel, opened in 1978 as a testament to socialist hospitality, turned into a charged site of political surveillance and exclusion, a place unwelcoming to local Albanians.[32] Informal urbanism flourished besides political and economic hardship. As institutional support withdrew, informal neighborhoods expanded significantly around the city's periphery. Neighborhoods like Kolovica and Kodra e Trimave saw rapid growth, their houses built incrementally without formal authorization, embodying quiet spatial resistance. Informality was not only spontaneous urbanism, it was a powerful act of collective defiance against imposed spatial orders.[33]

By the late 1990s, the city was effectively split into parallel realities. One city remained official, public, institutional, and controlled. The other existed invisibly, distributed across private and informal spaces, vibrant yet hidden. The parallel systems, carefully organized but intentionally hidden, defied conventional mapping, becoming a spatial representation of political resistance and social resilience.[34]

The tensions of this dual city culminated tragically in the armed conflict of 1998–1999. Informal settlements expanded dramatically as thousands fled violence, leaving homes empty or destroyed. Spatial tensions escalated into physical devastation. Yet even in crisis, the informal city endured, quietly providing spaces for survival, solidarity, and hope.[35]

Today, the urban fragmentation of the 1990s remains embedded in Prishtina's fabric. Institutional buildings like the Youth Palace, RTK headquarters, and the Grand Hotel still reflect their layered past: planned but never fully occupied, open yet inaccessible. Informal settlements remain, not as temporary solutions, but as permanent, visible claims of urban existence.

Fig. 20. Protests of March 1998. Credits: Gjylshen Doko-Berisha

Fig. 21. March 1998: Kosovo-Albanian protests against Serbian ethnic cleansing and genocide. Source: Unkown

32 Sadiki, A. (2019) pp. 67-73

33 Pula, D. (2019) pp. 66–71.

34 Sadiki, A. (2019) pp. 67-73

35 Biseniq, D. (2021). Demonstratat e shqiptarëve në Kosovë 1981: Fillimi i një drame të vazhdueshme.

What was once fragmentation now defines Prishtina's urban identity. It is a city profoundly shaped by parallel narratives, invisible infrastructures, and resilient informalities. Spaces designed to unify became sites of division, yet also persistence. These layered contradictions are not historical remnants, they are active and lived.

2.5   Spaces of Memory and Neglect

Urban memory is not only shaped by monuments and official narratives. It is equally shaped by absences, by buildings, much about what remains unfinished as about what was built.

After the 1999 conflict, Prishtina entered a period of accelerated physical expansion and political transformation. Some of the socialist buildings were abandoned into ambiguity. Their meanings became suspended, their futures unresolved. Across Kosovo, modernist architecture has become a "grey area"-no longer celebrated as progress, but not yet fully claimed as heritage, and thus left vulnerable to neglect and piecemeal transformation.[36]

Abandonment here was not just a consequence of war or economic crisis, it was a political gesture. Post war urbanization and land management shows, the process of privatization after 1999 systematically targeted public spaces, erasing collective memory while promoting fragmented ownership and speculative redevelopment.What could not be sold easily, like monumental socialist, era architecture, was left : visible, massive, but disconnected from new cycles of life .[37]

The Youth Palace exemplifies this suspended condition. Designed as a house for socialist youth culture, its transparent façade and generous public spaces once symbolized inclusivity. Today, it stands partially accessible, partially empty. Its massive

interior spaces-auditoriums, sport halls, galleries-have lost their programmatic clarity. It has become "an architecture of half-memory, where spatial openness and political opacity coexist".[38] The building's uncertain status mirrors the city's own unresolved relationship with its socialist past.

The Grand Hotel, once the glamorous hospitality flagship of socialist Kosovo, now tells a different story. While privatized post-1999, its ownership remains contested. The building is suffering from "neglect disguised as transition": damaged interiors, dysfunctional management, and fragmented property rights have prevented any coherent reactivation.[39] Its monumental mass persists, but its function as a site of openness has

38   Sadiki, A. (2020) pp. 152-153
39   Sadiki, A. (2020) pp. 152-153

Fig. 22. Photography of the Youth Palace burning in 2001. Credits: KFOR

36 Pula, D. (2019) pp. 66–71.
37 Institute for Spatial Planning, Urbanization and Land Management Issues in Kosova (Prishtina, 2006), pp. 6–7.

collapsed inward, echoing the fate of many modernist landmarks in post-socialist cities.

These buildings are not ruins in the traditional sense. They are incomplete memories. Their survival was not orchestrated but accidental-products of political uncertainty, legal confusion, and economic volatility. They are spatial witnesses to a time when architecture believed it could project certainty into the future. The rapid pace of urban development after 1999 often outstripped planning and regulation, leaving many spaces in a state of legal and functional limbo.

Yet neglect has given them a strange vitality. Their unfinishedness allows new readings. Collective memory persists not through the pristine maintenance of monuments, but through the everyday interaction. Informal uses-concerts in abandoned halls, cafés in unfinished foyers, graffiti exhibitions in closed courtyards-reactivate these structures without fully redefining them. In this sense, Prishtina's neglected socialist architecture does not merely symbolize loss. It symbolizes contested continuity. These spaces resist clean narratives of transition. They remain physically unresolved-and thus remain politically and socially charged.

Memory, here, is not frozen in stone. It lives in disrepair, in partial occupations, in spontaneous reuses. These "incomplete memories" are not simply relics of a failed utopia, but active sites where the city's past and future remain in negotiation. Prishtina's architecture of neglect speaks-not loudly, but persistently of a city that has never fully abandoned its past, even as it struggles to redefine its future.

These architectural ghosts do not ask for preservation. They demand reinterpretation.

They insist that forgetting is never complete-and that the city, like its citizens, continues to remember even in abandonment.
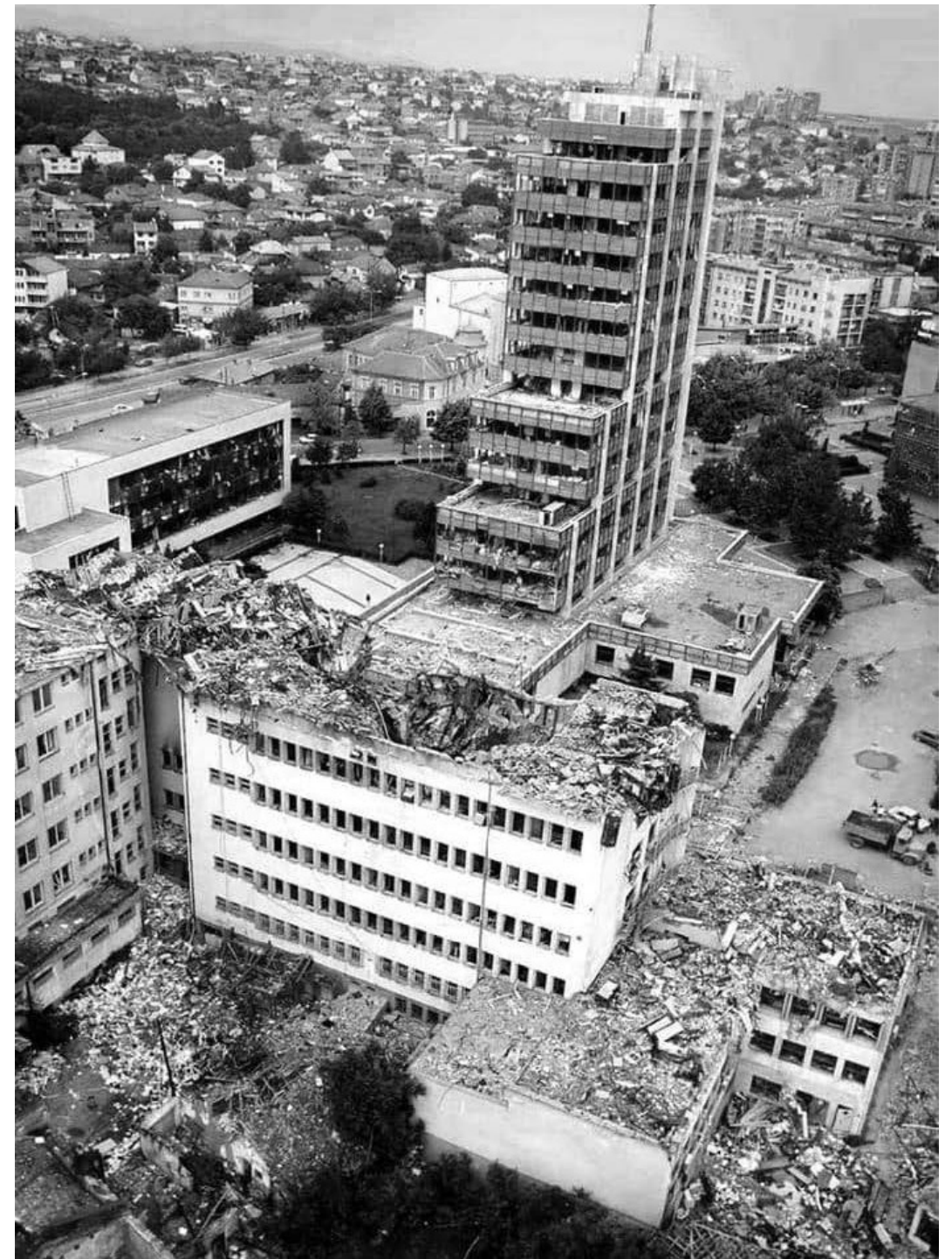
Fig. 23. Aerial photograph of the National People`s Bank destroyed during 1999. Credits:Unokwn
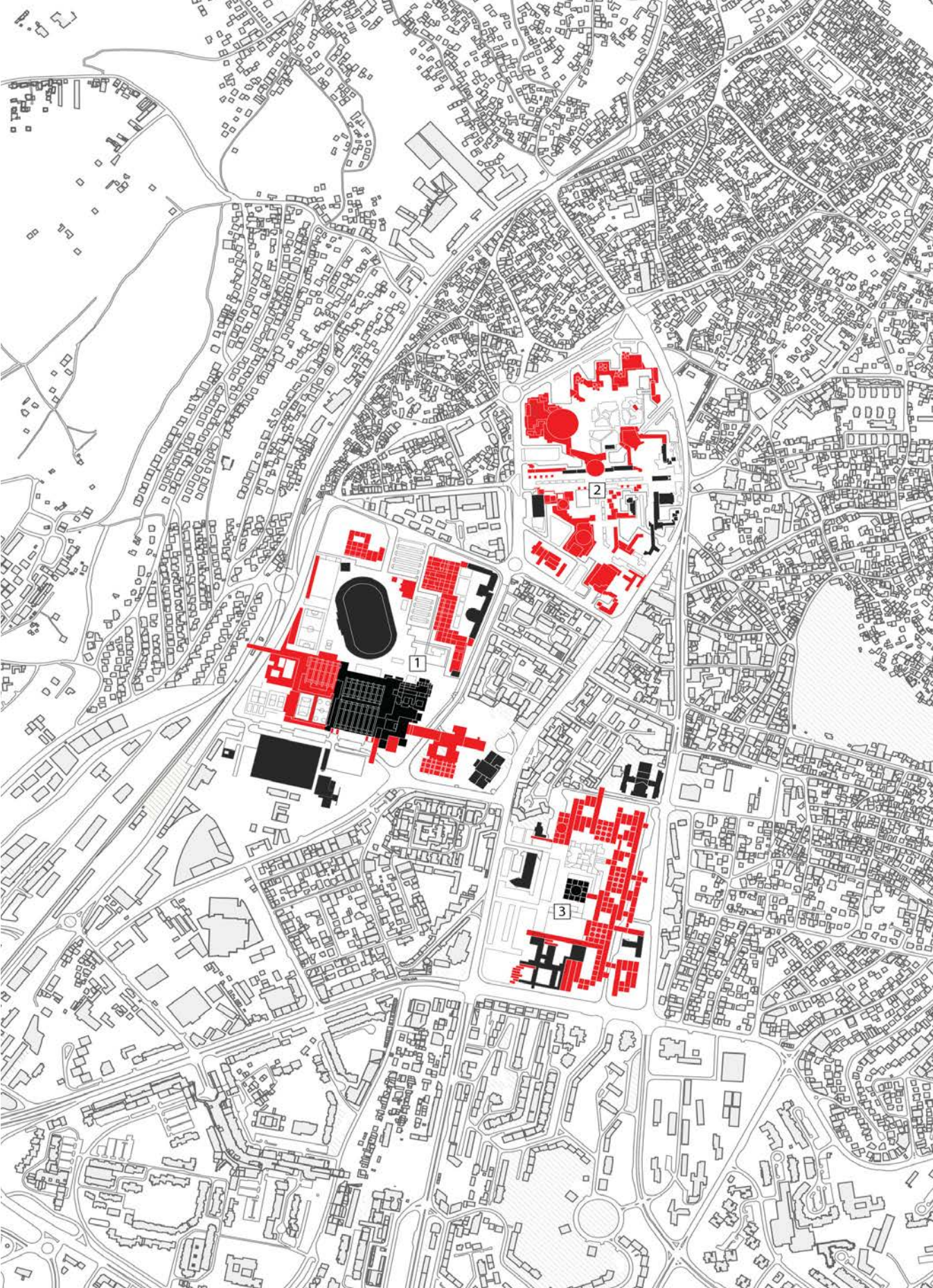
Fig. 24. Diagram of the three Grand Master Plans (Youth Palace, University Campus and Civic Center) showing realized and unrealized buildings. Credits: Gezim Rushiti

2.6   The Three Masterplans of Socialist Prishtina

Cities are rarely shaped by buildings alone. They are first drawn by plans, fragments of future logic, and what is drawn does not always get built. Prishtina's transformation into the symbolic capital of Kosovo was imagined in three such efforts: a structural grid, an intellectual campus, and a civic monument. The masterplans of Liljana Babić, Bashkim Fehmiu, and the design team behind the Youth and Sports Center did not share a formal language, but they were aligned in intention. They sought to project institutional clarity, cultural ambition, and a federated urban identity. Today, all three remain partially implemented, leaving behind not failures, but spatial contradictions, a city suspended between visions.[40]

In 1967, Prishtina adopted its first General Urban Plan, authored by Liljana Babić, an urban planner from Belgrade working under the Yugoslav Institute of Urbanism. The plan reflected mid-century socialist planning principles: clearly defined functional zones (administrative, residential, industrial), an orthogonal grid extended through Dardania and Ulpiana, a ring-road to rationalize expansion, and a linear civic axis meant to connect new institutions to the historic center. Crucially, the Ottoman bazaar, still standing at the time, was targeted for clearance.[41]

Though many infrastructural components were implemented, including the road system and housing typologies, several of the plan's intended civic projects, cultural centers, planned parks, and spatial buffers, were either deprioritized or lost in bureaucratic delay. Incomplete segments of green corridors and open land pockets around the city still bear the outline of these ambitions.[42]

By the early 1970s, planning shifted toward institution-building. Bashkim Fehmiu, a leading Kosovo Albanian architect, proposed a dispersed campus for the University of Prishtina, formalized

40   Sadiki, A. Doctoral dissertation (2019) pp. 53-55
41   Gjinolli, I., & Kabashi, L. (2018). Kosovo Modern: An Architectural Primer, pp. 102–105
42   Sadiki, A. (2019), pp. 56–58
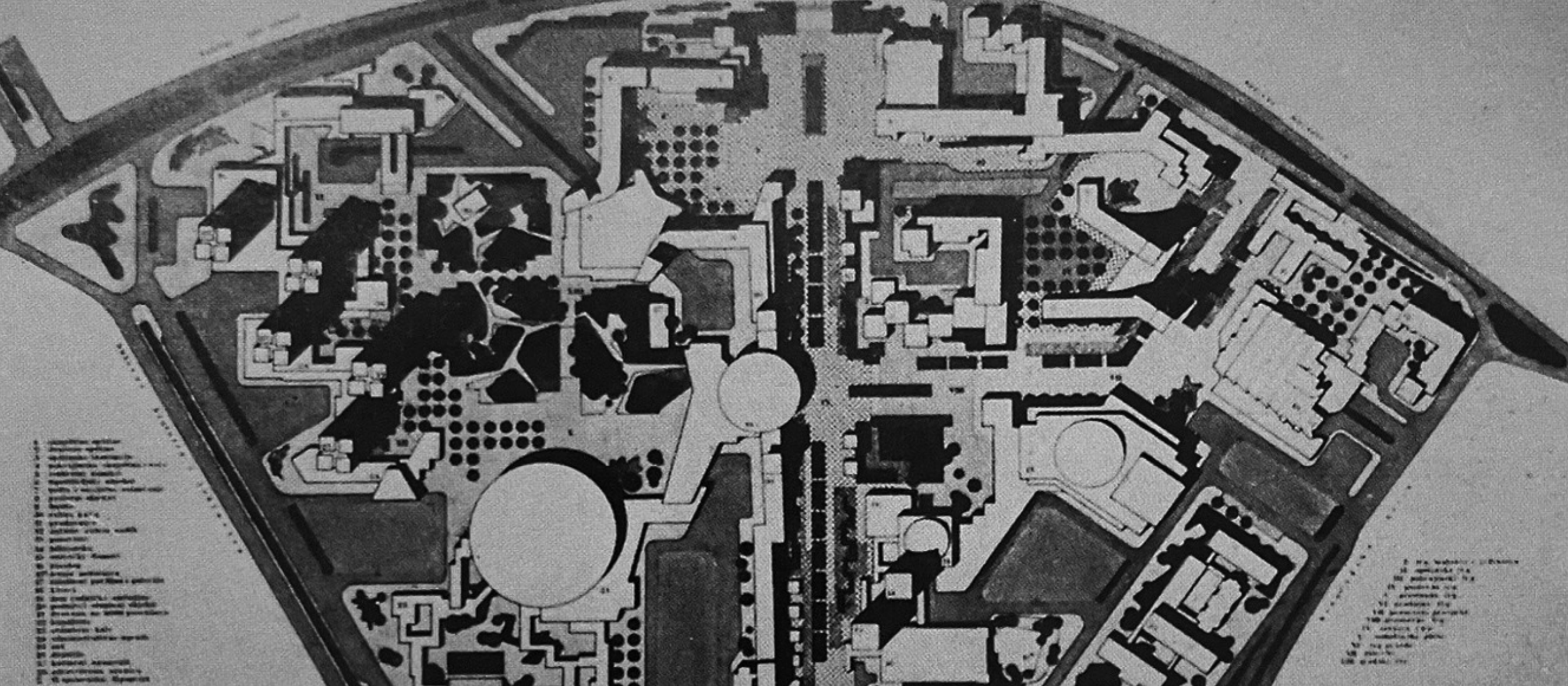
Fig. 25. Original Master Plan by Liljana Babic , 1964
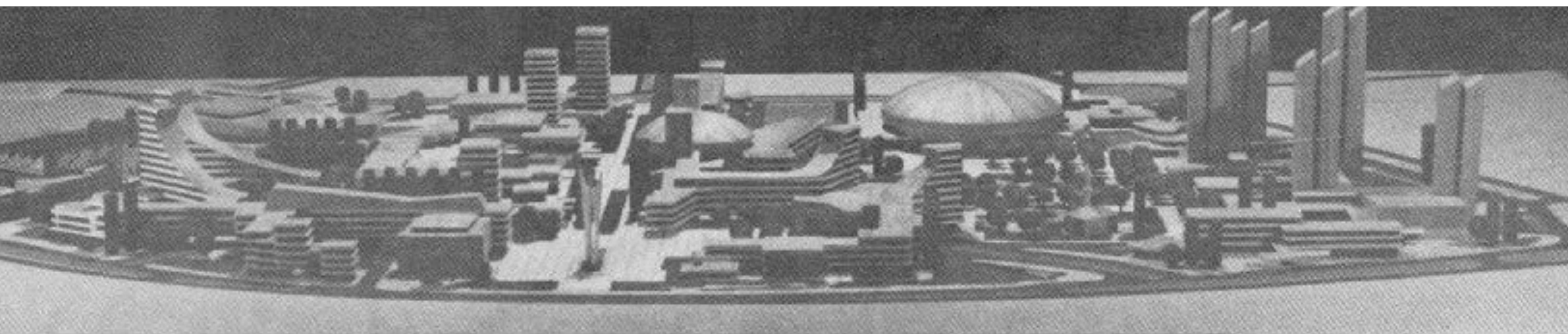
Fig. 26. Areal photography of the model of the Master Plan by Liljana Babic , 1964

through a campus masterplan in 1974. His layout moved away from centralist forms and instead embraced spatial decentralization: low-rise faculty pavilions organized around a planted commons, with wide pedestrian connectors and transitional plazas. It was an ideological campus, architecture as autonomy.[43]

The campus was partly built between 1975 and the late 1980s, with just the national library. But Fehmiu's full plan remained unfinished. Later ministries claimed nearby land, and budget constraints slowed expansion. Today, the campus holds its form, but not its fullness.[44]

In parallel, the city launched a third major urban effort: the Youth and Sports Center. In 1975, the first open architectural competition in Kosovo's history was held, calling for a multifunctional cultural center. It was an ambitious brief, designed to consolidate youth programming, public events, sports, and ideological

43   Sadiki, A. (2019), pp. 56–65
44   Sadiki, A. (2019), pp. 58–65
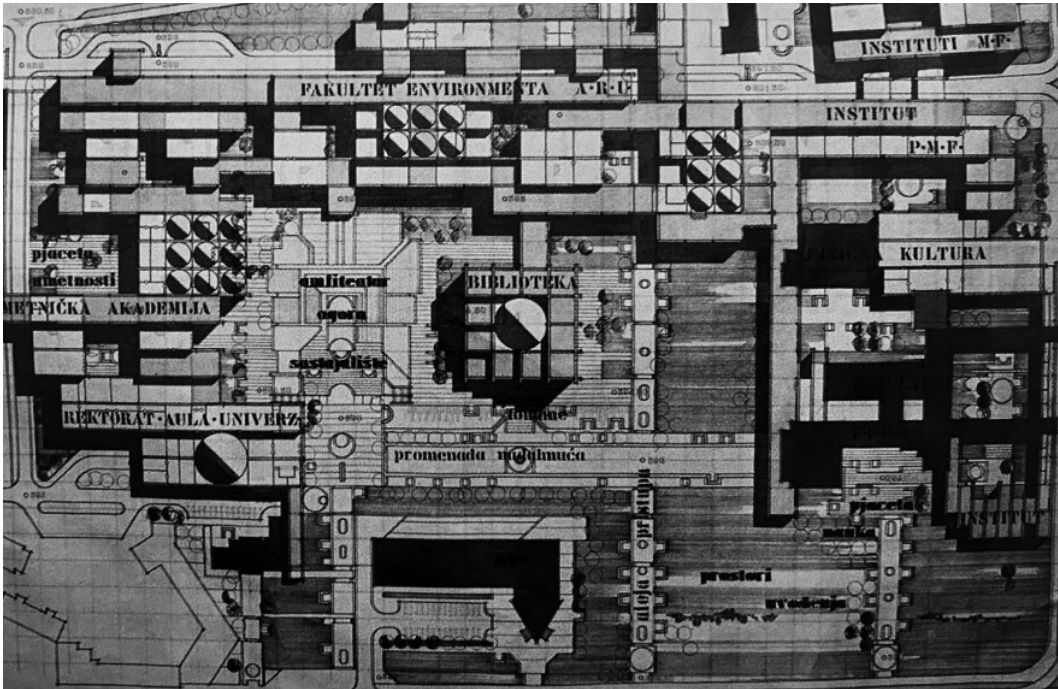
Fig. 28. University Campus Master Plan, Bashkim Fehmiu, 1974.

Fig. 27. Aerial photograph of the fewest realized buildings such as the National Library according to the Bashkim Fehmiu`s University Master Plan clashing with the Orthodox Church which was built in contradiction to the University masterplan, 2023. Credits:Uknown

Fig. 29. Photography of the Model from the Bashkim Fehmiu`s University Master Plan, 1974. Credits:Unkown

rituals into a single architectural complex. Proposals ranged
from glazed pavilions to terraced stage-platforms, often featu-
ring stadium-scale elements.[45]

The project stalled by 1976. Political instability and funding
friction led the city to cancel the open process and reframe it. A
closed competition was announced in 1977, and DOM Studio
from Sarajevo was selected. Their brutalist proposal massive,
sculptural, and multi-zoned, was approved in 1978, with const-
ruction starting shortly after.[46]

The resulting building, known today as BoroRamiz, included
exhibition foyers, an underground cinema, a performance hall,
sport facilities, and a partially executed rooftop assembly space.
However, surrounding elements from the masterplan, public
squares, civic gardens, and axial visual links, remained unrea-
lized, leaving the building visually and spatially adrift.

These three masterplans were not meant to compete, but to
coordinate. Each spoke to a different register of urban life:
administrative order, intellectual independence, and cultural
unity. But none of them reached completion, not due to architec-
tural failure, but because Prishtina's political scaffolding was
shifting faster than its physical one.[47]

Today, these absences are visible. Babić's green corridors
appear as traffic islands. Fehmiu's campus edges are encroa-
ched by ministries. The Youth Palace is surrounded not by
public gardens, but parking lots and fences. What remains is not
just a map of incomplete construction, but a city of interruptions.

These masterplans were, and still are, Prishtina's unfulfilled
frameworks. Their persistence, visible in alignments, edges, and
voids, means they continue to shape how the city is used,
remembered, and misunderstood. They are blueprints not only
of a spatial past, but of architectural time held open.

45   Sadiki, A. (2019), pp. 58–65
46   Sadiki, A. (2019), pp. 58–65
47   Pula, D. (2019) pp. 53–55
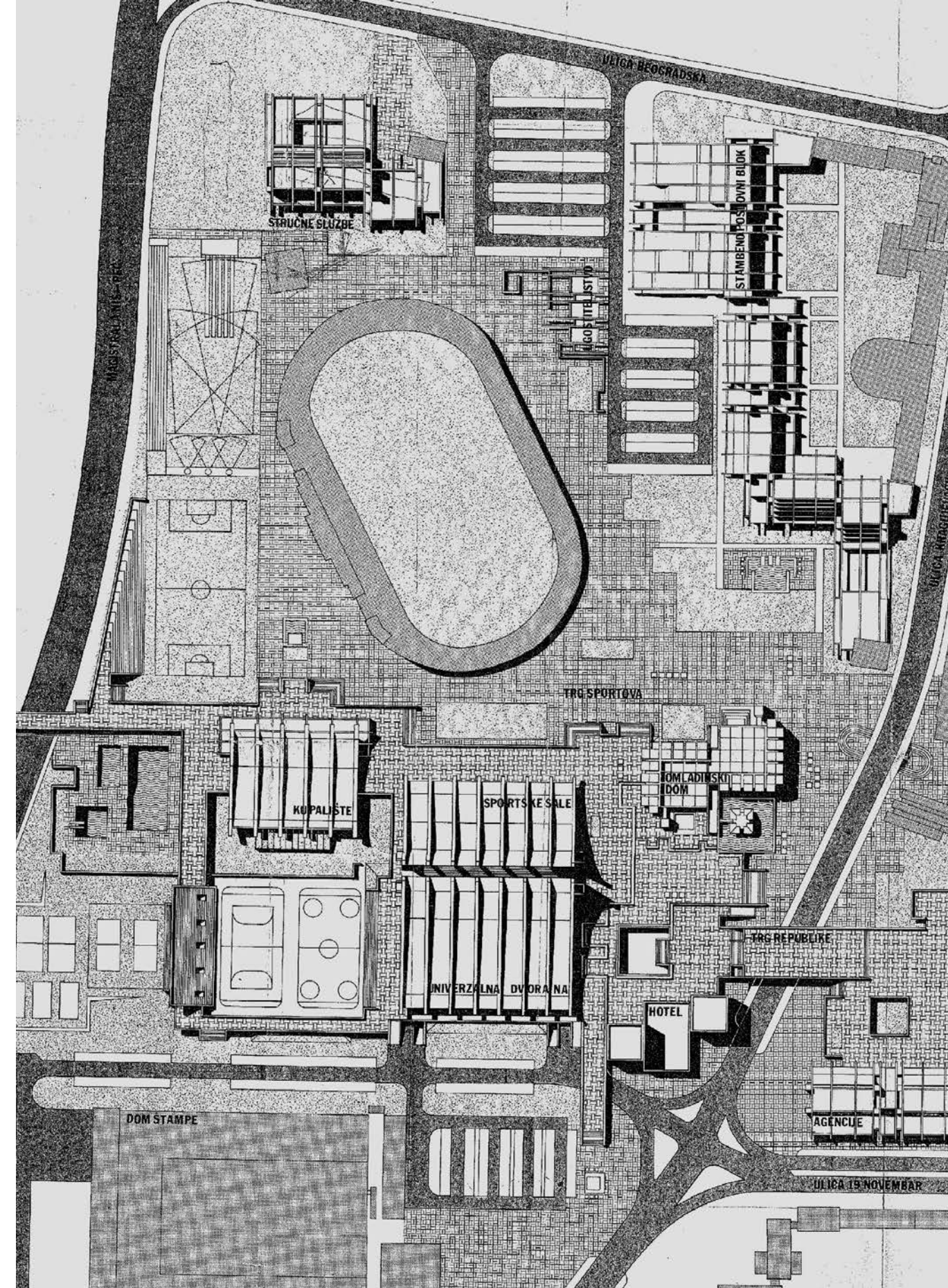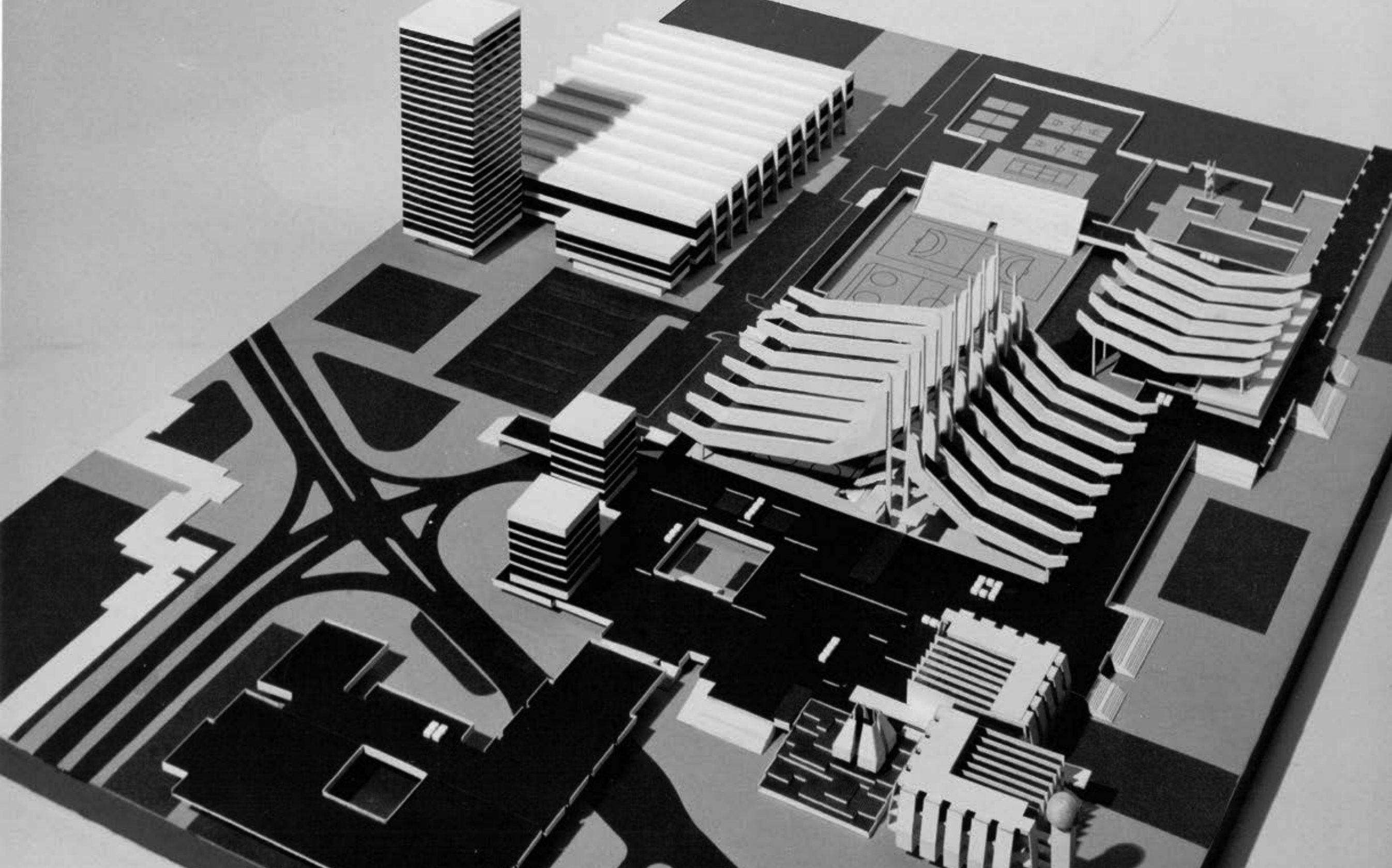
Fig. 31. Youth and Sports Center, 1974. Credits: Studio DOM

3   Palace of Youth

Before it was partially abandoned, and before its program was forgotten, the Youth and Sports Center in Prishtina was imagined as the cultural engine of a rising capital. In the mid-1970s, Kosovo stood at a political and symbolic crossroads. Following the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, which granted the province unprecedented autonomy, Prishtina entered a period of accelerated institutional ambition. It needed a city that looked like a capital and buildings that felt like statements. [48]

The Youth and Sports Center was meant to be one of those statements. A structure that could house the physical energy and ideological clarity of Yugoslav youth. It would be a place to gather, to perform, to train, to learn. Its core function was political, but its tools were spatial.

48   Sadiki, A. Doctoral dissertation (2019) pp. 58-65

3.1   Retrospective

The First Competition 1975

In 1975, the Municipality of Prishtina launched what became Kosovo's first open architectural competition of national scale. The task: design a youth and sports center that would serve as a multifunctional platform for cultural events, athletic programs, and civic gatherings.[49]

This competition was not just about architecture, it was about positioning Kosovo within the visual language of Yugoslav modernity. Submissions arrived from across the federation. Many of them proposed vast amphitheaters, glazed exhibition zones, integrated sports halls, and rooftop event terraces. There was excitement, optimism, and momentum.

But by early 1976, the project stalled. Conflicting visions within the municipal and provincial governments, limited financial coordination, and uncertainty about scope delayed the selection. No winner was implemented. The first architectural imagination of the Youth Center remained on paper, tucked away in archives.[50]

Fig. 32. Section of the Origianl first open Competition for the Sports and Youth Center,

49   Sadiki, A. Doctoral dissertation (2019) pp. 58-65
50   Sadiki, A. Doctoral dissertation (2019) pp. 58-65

VONAGRAĐENI RAD S NATJEČAJA ZA SPOMEN DOM U PRIŠTINI, ŠIFRA »08900«. GORE: NIVO 12, I
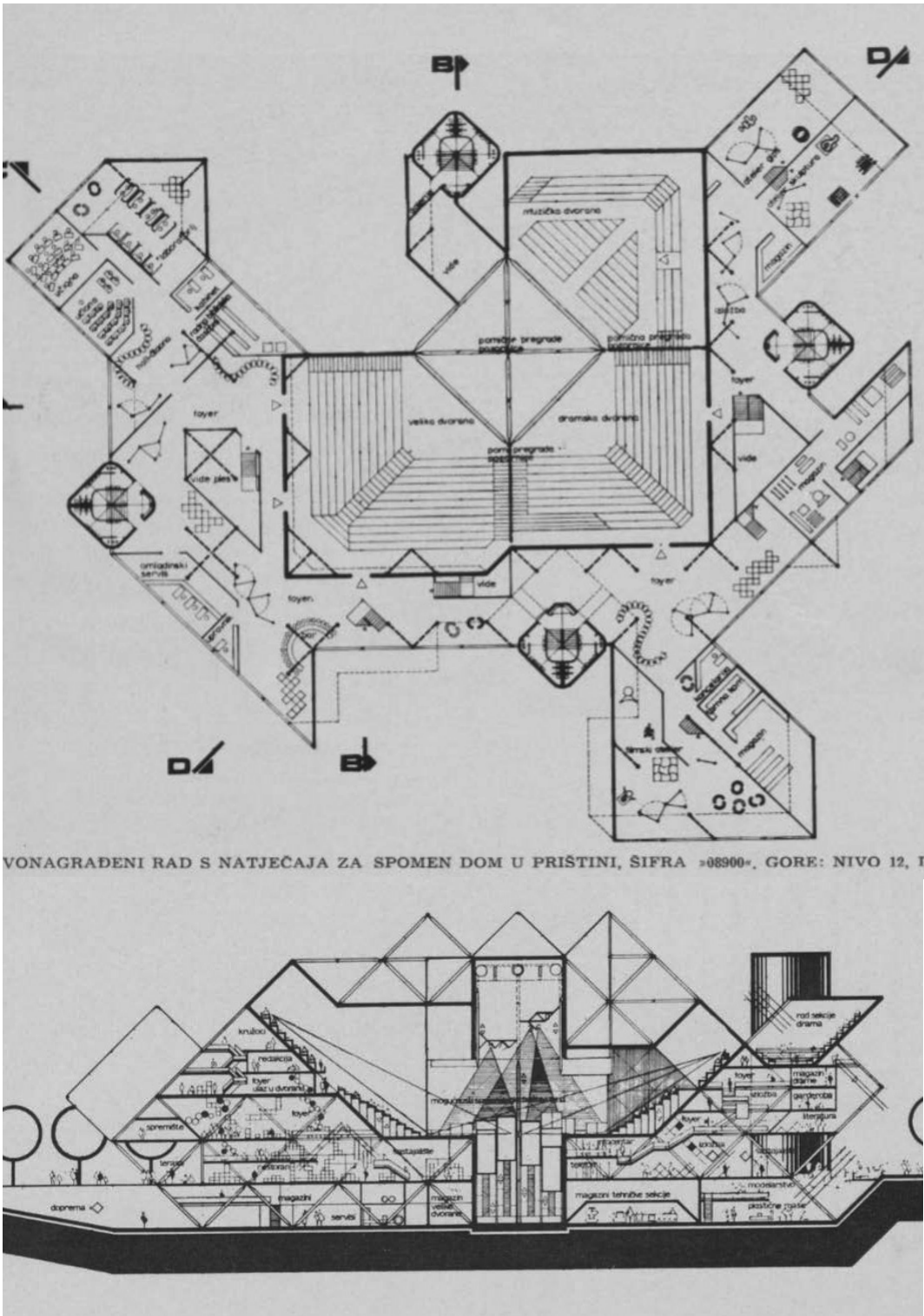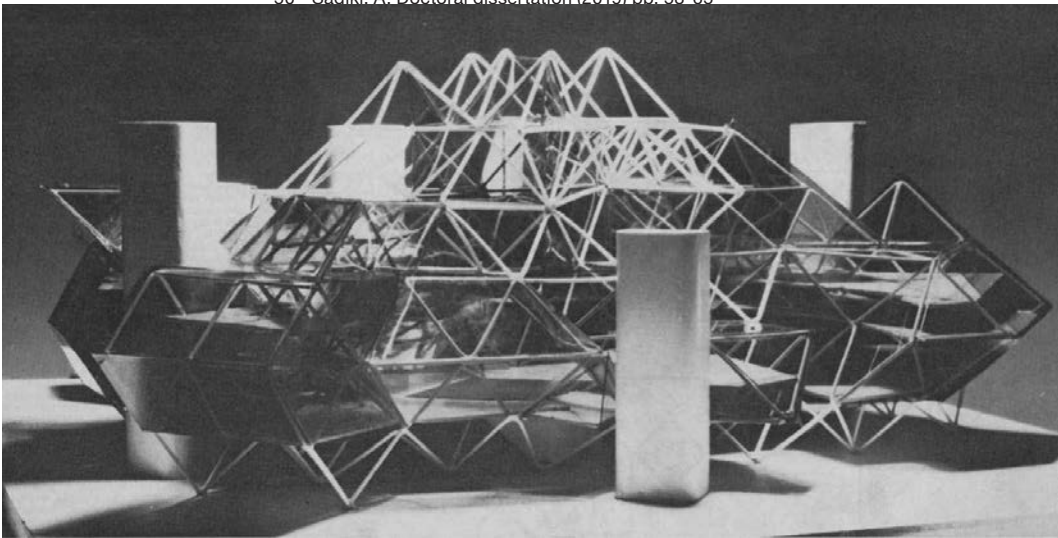
Fig. 33. Aerial photograph of the campus showing realized and unrealized pavilions. Shadow plans outline intended structures.

The Closed Competition

In 1977, with pressure to deliver on public expectations, it was launched a closed architectural competition, inviting a select group of experienced firms. Among them was DOM Studio from Sarajevo, a firm with technical sophistication and credibility.[51]

DOM's proposal was a turning point. Where earlier submissions had gestured toward openness and transparency, DOM designed a structure with monumentality and control. Brutalist on the exterior, flexible on the interior. The center would include:

A large sports hall
Multipurpose auditoriums
Foyers for exhibitions and gatherings
A rooftop terrace
Underground cinema and services

The layout was not a single clear corridor, but a network of programmed zones, connected by wide thresholds, open stairwells, and interior voids. It was a building made to choreograph movement, not direct it.[52]

51 Sadiki, A. Doctoral dissertation (2019) pp. 58-65
52 Sadiki, A. Doctoral dissertation (2019) pp. 58-65

Fig. 34. Aerial photograph of the Stadium and the empty plot before Sports and Youth Center by Sudio DOM, circa 1960s. Credits: Unkown

Fig. 35. Original Master Plan of the Sports and Youth Center, 1974. Credits: Studio DOM
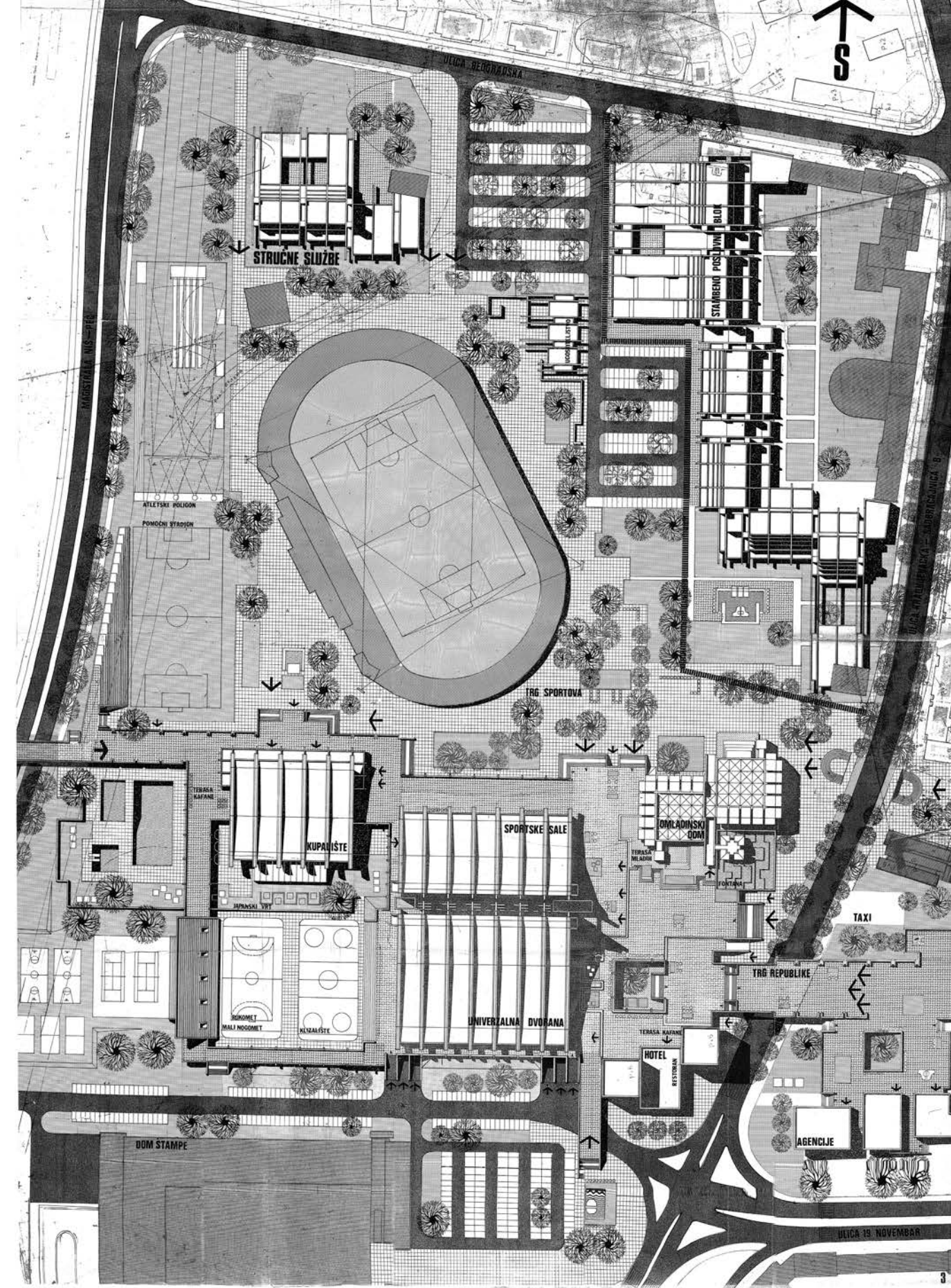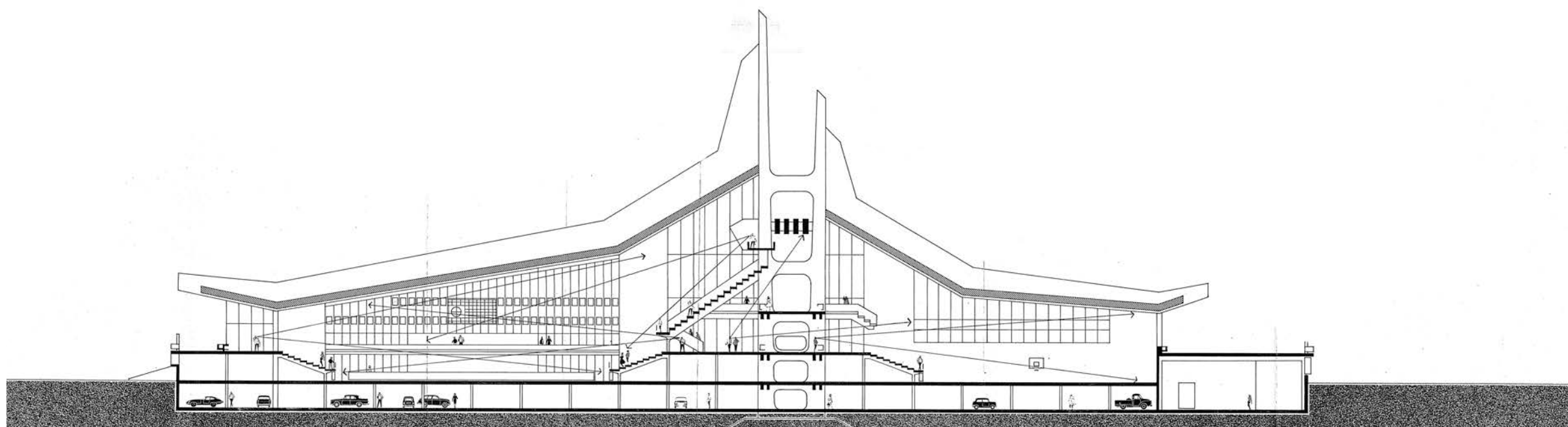
Construction began in 1978. By the early 1980s, the core structure was complete and operational. The building opened its doors as the BoroRamiz Youth and Sports Center.

The name "BoroRamiz" was chosen carefully. Boro Vukmirović and Ramiz Sadiku were WWII Partisan heroes, one Serb, one Albanian, who were executed together by fascist forces in 1943. Their joint martyrdom had long been a central myth of Yugoslav "brotherhood and unity." In the 1980s, naming the Youth Center after them was more than symbolic. It was strategic. It inscribed the building within a national narrative of shared sacrifice.[53]

The architecture, too, reflected this desire: large central foyers, shared halls, overlapping spaces, a physical expression of collectivity. The building was not meant to separate or divide. It was built to gather.

But unity was already eroding. By 1989, Kosovo's autonomy was revoked. Public institutions were purged. Youth organizations splintered. The building, once open to all, became inaccessible to many. The vast halls echoed differently. Albanian youth were often excluded from its programming. A building once meant to unite began to isolate.[54]

After the war of 1998–1999, BoroRamiz survived physically. It wasn't bombed or looted. But its purpose had vanished. It was too big to demolish, too public to forget, too complex to repurpose. Some parts were reoccupied by private firms. Others remained closed, inaccessible, or simply frozen.

Today, it stands in the city center like a monument to something undefined. Neither fully active nor abandoned. Its stairs are used. Its windows reflect. Its halls remain mostly silent.

But silence, too, is a kind of memory.

53 Pula, D. (2019). Architecture of Transitional Memory
    pp.58-63
54 Pula, D. (2019). Architecture of Transitional Memory
    pp.58-63

Fig. 37. Aerial photograph of the Youth and Sports Center while building 1977. Credits: Archipelagopr

Fig. 38. Man sitting in front of the Youth Palace while building 1977. Credits: Unknown

Fig. 39. Exterior photography of the Youth Palace from the east platform. Credits: Roberto Conti

Fig. 40. Exterior photography of the Youth Palace from the west parking. Credits: Roberto Conti

Fig. 41. Exterior photography of the Youth Palace from the north facade. Credits: Roberto Conti

Fig. 42. Interior photography of the Universall Hall from the Tribunes. Credits: Roberto Conti

Fig. 43. Interior photography of the Universall Hall from the parking level, 2025. Credits: Benjamin Stätli

Fig. 44. Interior photography of the Universall Hall showing the West facadel, 2025. Credits: Benjamin Stätli

3.2 Spatial Diagnosis

Approached from the city, the Youth and Sports Center appears monumental but detached. It stands just south of the Grand Hotel and east of the University complex, on a site intended to integrate the civic and institutional cores of Prishtina. According to the original site strategy, the building was not designed to function as a standalone volume. It was part of a larger system of elevated and landscaped connections meant to link the new socialist city with Rilindja Park, the Grand Hotel plaza, and the hillside neighborhoods of Arberia.

These bridges and transitions were never built. The absence of these links leaves the building surrounded by a disconnected platform that neither invites approach nor supports public use. The central forecourt, raised above street level and bordered by retaining walls, has no functional continuity with surrounding pedestrian flows. Entry routes from the Grand Hotel side are indirect. On the Arberia side, the absence of the bridge prevents connection to the city center.

Fig. 45. Diagram of the Original Master Plan by Studio DOM showring the intented connections to Arberi, Rilindja Park and the Grand Hotel.
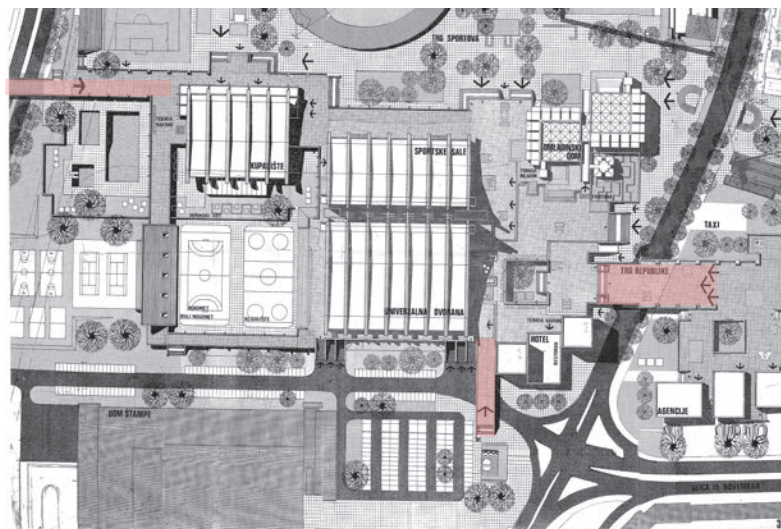
Fig. 46. Photography from the Platform towards Grand Hotel. Credits: Unkown

Fig. 47. Photography from the Platform towards Ex-Rilindja Printing House, 2025. Credits: Lindon Bytyqi

The main entrance faces southwest, accessible from the upper platform. Internally, it opens into a large foyer that once functioned as a public spine, distributing users to the Universal Hall, exhibition zones, administrative offices, and underground levels. To the north, the building faces the Grand Hotel and Mother Teresa Boulevard. But this axis lacks a spatial handshake: there is no clear entrance, square, or connective tissue. The building turns its long, windowless elevation toward one of the busiest urban corridors in the city.

The main platform, accessible from staircases from the direction of the Grand Hotel, "prevents" people from climbing to the platform, leading to a abandoned which people have no reason to go to. From the street, it appears empty; from above, it has no formal program. The few remaining benches are out of use. The platform hosts no scheduled activities, and lacks shade, access clarity, or seating orientation.

Below the platform, a semi-enclosed commercial strip operates at the ground level. While it receives high foot traffic, it is not spatially or functionally integrated with the building above. The retail layer still functions in itself and It exists in parallel, not in connection.

Fig. 48. Diagram showring entries to the platform above the shops, Youth Palace, Credits: Lindon Bytyqi
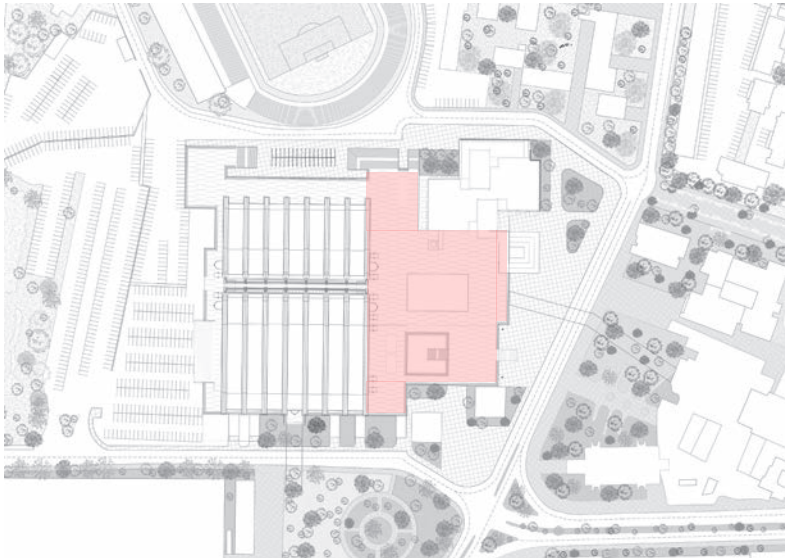
Fig. 49. Photography of the Platform above the shops, 2020. Credits: Blerta Kambo

Fig. 50. Diagram showring the platform above the shops, Youth Palace, Credits: Lindon Bytyqi

The façade system, originally composed of full-height curtain glazing, was designed to express transparency. On the west elevation, it is isolating the Universal Hall from the outside and entrances are placed on the front. Entrances are sealed. No signage indicates use. From the plaza level, the glazed elevation reflects light but offers no readable depth, creating visual opacity in place of permeability.

Inside the Universal Hall, the performance space is no longer intact. A fire destroyed the stage and its supporting platform, leaving a void through which the underground level is now visible from the upper seating tiers. What was once a concealed technical layer is now open to view, an unintended exposure that reveals the building's layered structure, but also its material failure.
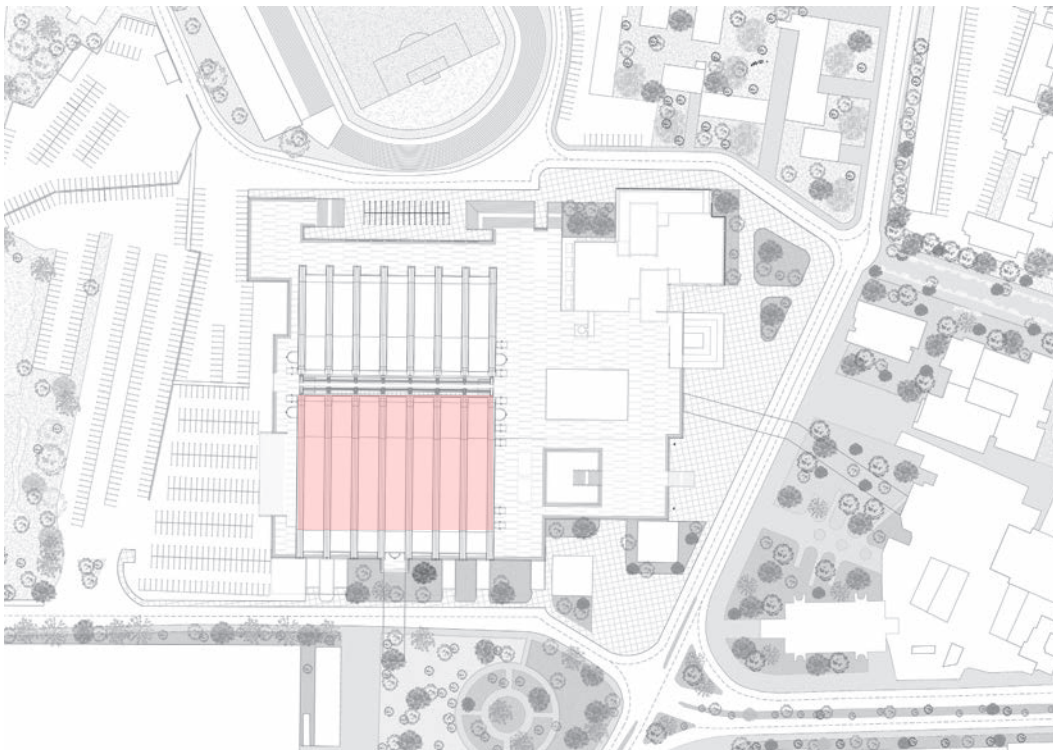
Fig. 51. Diagram showing the Universal Hall, Youth Palace, Credits: Lindon Bytyqi
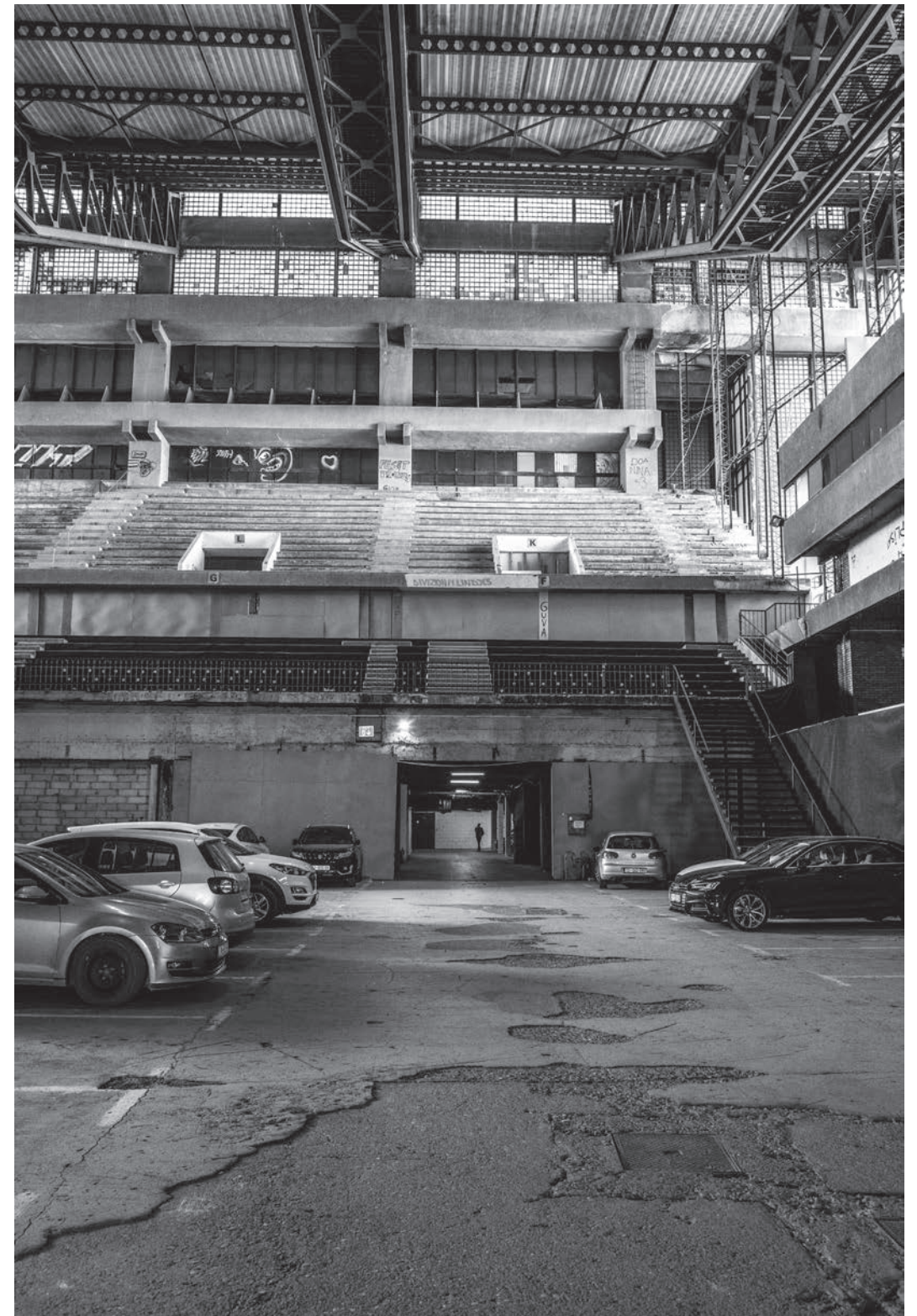
Fig. 52. Interior of Universal Hall, Youth Palace, 2025. Credits: Benjamin Stätli

On tha back it is positioned an improvised vast parking as seen on the drawing below. Two streets and the train tracks has seperated the Arberia part to the center and inbetween it is standing a massive parking and some green space which has no spatial logic underutilizing a huge potential which holdes the back part.

From the outside, it appears present. From within, it is spatially incomplete.
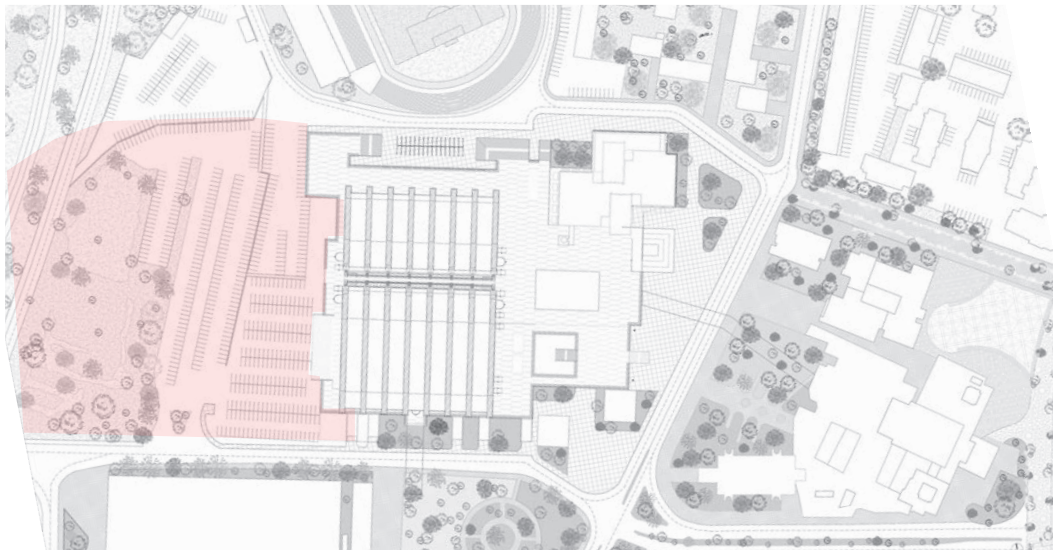
Fig. 53. Diagram showing the parking in red, Youth Palace, Credits: Lindon Bytyqi

Fig. 54. West photography from the parking of the Youth Palace, 2025, Credits: Roberto Conti

3.3   Architectural Reflection and Intention

The Youth Palace exists between clear definition and ambiguity. Neither entirely functional nor definitively abandoned, it embodies a spatial condition that resists easy categorization. Architectural intervention here must therefore begin not from form, but from a clearly defined position, one that understands ambiguity as both a condition and an asset.

This project rejects imposing fixed identities or fully predetermined programs onto the existing structure. Instead, it carefully reads and engages the Youth Palace as it is found today. The goal is not restoration nor newness for its own sake, but a careful negotiation with a building whose value partly lies in its unresolved state.

Rather than choosing between preservation or complete reinvention, the project positions itself alongside the existing structure, embracing memory and neglect as integral parts of the site's material reality. The project does not propose solutions for every contradiction, but instead makes them visible and accessible through carefully introduced spatial gestures.

Central to this strategy is the intervention at the Universal Hall. The architectural intention is to open this crucial interior space towards all three surrounding directions, creating a covered space that simultaneously acts as a functional passage and a place of gathering. By removing the façade and carefully redefining thresholds, the intervention transforms what was previously a closed-off volume into an actively connected node. This space, designed to facilitate multiple uses, embodies a compromise with the current conditions, respecting the functioning Small Hall while enhancing the overall permeability and connectivity of the building.

This gesture reflects the project's broader intention of careful and context-sensitive reconnection. Without making grand urban claims, the project nonetheless communicates clearly with its immediate surroundings. The redefinition of spatial boundaries and thresholds around the Universal Hall allows the Youth Palace to reconnect with adjacent public spaces, pedestrian flows, and visual axes.

Historically, such intentions for connectivity and openness are not new. Nearly half a century ago, the 1974 masterplan anticipated similar strategies of urban integration, yet many remained unrealized. Rather than explicitly affirming recent urban proposals, this project implicitly engages with this enduring historical ambition. By carefully opening and framing spatial conditions within the existing structure, the project sets a precise architectural dialogue with the immediate urban context, responding critically yet subtly to ongoing discussions about city connectivity.

Thus, the Youth Palace is neither fully transformed nor left unchanged. It becomes a platform for flexible programming, temporary occupation, informal gathering, and, importantly, for spatial passage and continuity. The Universal Hall, now porous and opened, serves not only as a physical connector but also as a conceptual bridge between past urban aspirations and present urban realities. The architectural intention remains deliberately provisional, ensuring the site remains adaptable and responsive over time.

In doing so, this architectural intervention does not conclude the Youth Palace's story but carefully positions it for continued dialogue with both its own layered past and the evolving city that surrounds it.
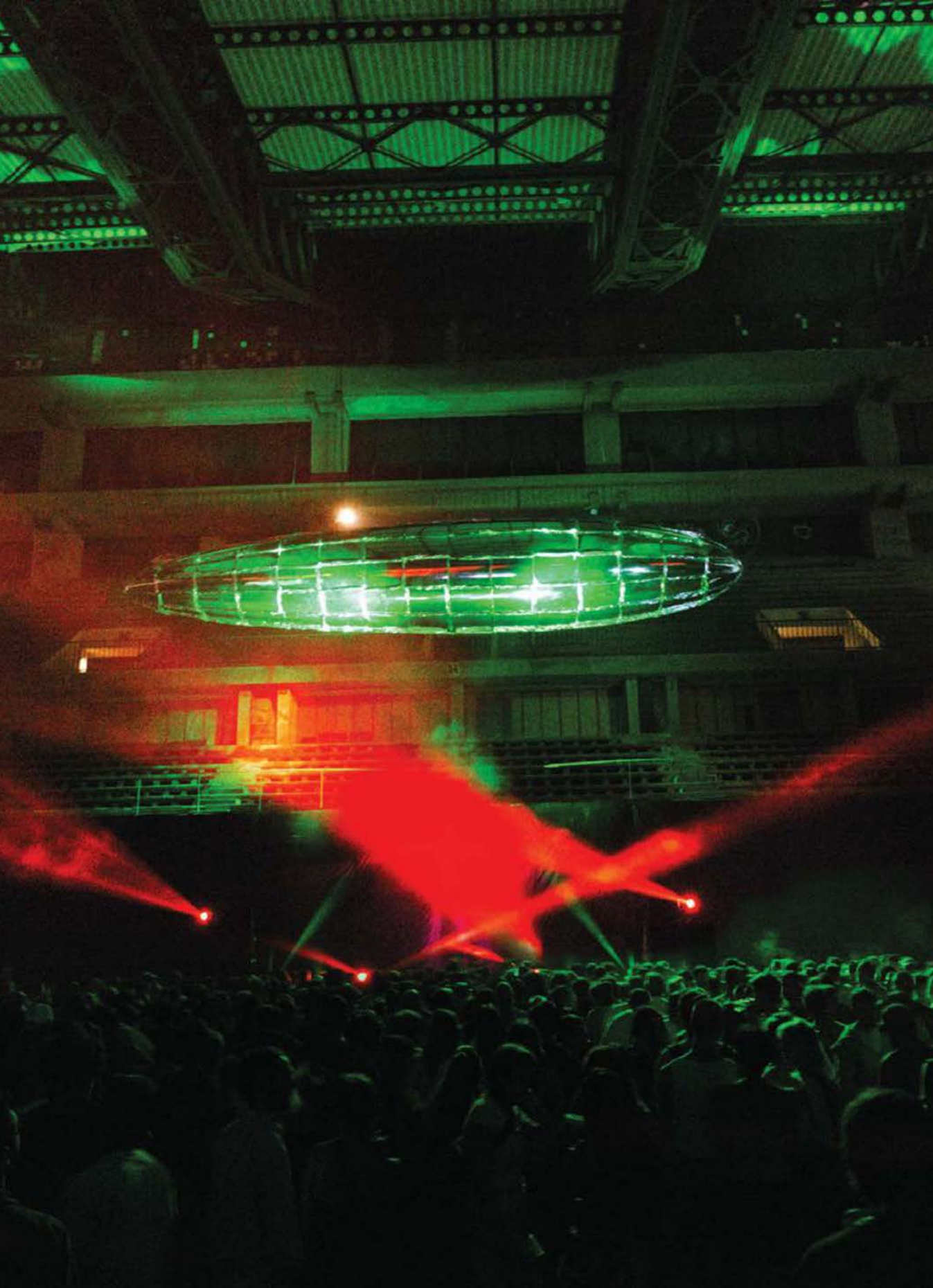
Fig. 55. Hyjenshat, Techno Night insde the Universal Hall, Youth Palace, 2022. Credits: Manifesta 14 Prishtine.

3.4 Manifesta 14

Manifesta 14 did not just bring an art biennial to Prishtina; it activated the very spaces my project seeks to engage. By occupying overlooked architectures libraries, hotels, squares, and cultural ruins it reframed public memory through temporary, yet intensely political, interventions. Manifesta exposed how architecture in post-socialist cities is not only built but also forgotten, repressed, or left unresolved. Its curatorial strategy aligns closely with the ambition of this project: to understand how re-entering monumental voids like the Youth Palace can become a means of civic and spatial transformation.[55]

There are moments when a city, for a brief time, begins to see itself differently. Not through radical transformation or large-scale construction, but through small shifts in perception through acts that reframe what already exists. In the summer of 2022, Prishtina entered such a moment. The arrival of Manifesta 14, the European Nomadic Biennial, did not simply introduce contemporary art to the city. It created a framework for re-rea-ding the city's incomplete urban fabric. For many of us who had grown accustomed to Prishtina's unfinished spaces, it became an invitation to look again.[56]

Manifesta chose Prishtina precisely because of its incompletion. A city with a post-conflict condition, lacking traditional forms of cultural infrastructure, where unresolved buildings and deferred urban visions make up a large part of the spatial experience. As director Hedwig Fijen noted, the goal of the biennial was not to insert itself as an external cultural event, but to be "a long-term collaboration with the citizens of Prishtina," with a commitment to "structural transformation" and "lasting change" rather than temporary spectacle.[57]

The transformation was not metaphorical. It began with physical spaces: the abandoned Hivzi Sylejmani Library became the Centre for Narrative Practice, a reimagined cultural institution

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55 Nichols, C. (2022). In Otherwise (pp. 35–36). Manifesta 14 Prishtina.
56 Judah, H. (2022). Public After All, p. 10]
57 Fijen, H. (2022).. In Otherwise (p. 27). Manifesta 14 Prishtina.

focusing on storytelling, memory, and public engagement. Elsewhere, the Grand Hotel, the former Brick Factory, and several interstitial public spaces were reactivated, not through renovation, but through reoccupation. These interventions were modest, but they carried significant meaning. They demonstrated how spaces that had been overlooked or forgotten could be temporarily re-centered, reframed, and made public again. [58]

For me, one of the most compelling aspects of Manifesta 14 was its refusal to "fix" the city. There was no pretense of solving Prishtina's spatial challenges. Instead, the biennial embraced them. Its strategy was not to create finished spaces, but to propose temporary constellations of use, conversation, and reflection. This approach resonated deeply with my experience of the Youth Palace. A building that stands as both a landmark and a fragment, present yet detached, full of symbolic weight but spatially underdefined. The interventions at Manifesta helped me understand that incompleteness is not a void to be filled, but a condition to be worked with. [59]

The biennial's Urban Vision, developed with Carlo Ratti Associati, advanced a methodology of participatory urbanism, engaging local communities, collecting desires, and initiating temporary uses as a form of prototyping. It provided a new vocabulary to think with: public spaces as open platforms,

Fig. 57. LYNX, Art Performance 2022
Credits: Manifesta 14 Prishtina.

58   Steverlynck, S. (2022). Lessons from Pristina. In Public After All (p. 13).
59   Nichols, C. (2022). Ibid., pp. 36–38.

unfinished buildings as sites of negotiation, and cultural production as a spatial act.[60]

Public response reflected this shift. According to the biennial's post-event survey, 88% of local respondents felt Manifesta helped them understand the city differently. More than three-quarters described feeling "proud" of their city during the event. This change was not in infrastructure, but in perception.[61]

The Youth Palace was not one of Manifesta's main venues, but its presence was felt. It became a kind of background monument, an unfinished anchor in a city learning to engage its fragments. Observing how citizens responded to the reactivation of other dormant sites helped clarify my own architectural intention. The Palace does not need to be reinvented as a museum, nor erased and rebuilt. It can be reengaged with similar care and attentiveness, respecting its ambiguity and opening it to new forms of collective use.

My project reflects this approach. The Youth Palace is not treated as a problem to be solved but as a spatial condition to be worked with. Through minimal interventions, opening the Universal Hall in three directions, creating a covered passage that is neither entirely interior nor exterior, I attempt to follow the example of Manifesta's temporary reactivations. These architectural gestures are not declarations, but invitations. They open the building to the city and suggest a slow re-entry into public life.

Manifesta 14 made it possible to imagine a different future for the Youth Palace, not as a finished product, but as an ongoing process. The biennial revealed that architecture can operate with precision even when it holds back, that intervention can be meaningful without being monumental. And in doing so, it helped me see that the most radical gesture in Prishtina today might not be to build more, but to listen, uncover, and gently reframe what is already there.

Fig. 58. Alban Muja, Above Everyone, 2022. Manifesta 14 and Ivan Erofeev

60 Public After All. (2022). Urban Vision section, pp. 124–129.
61 Public After All. (2022). Statistics & Community Feedback, p. 38.
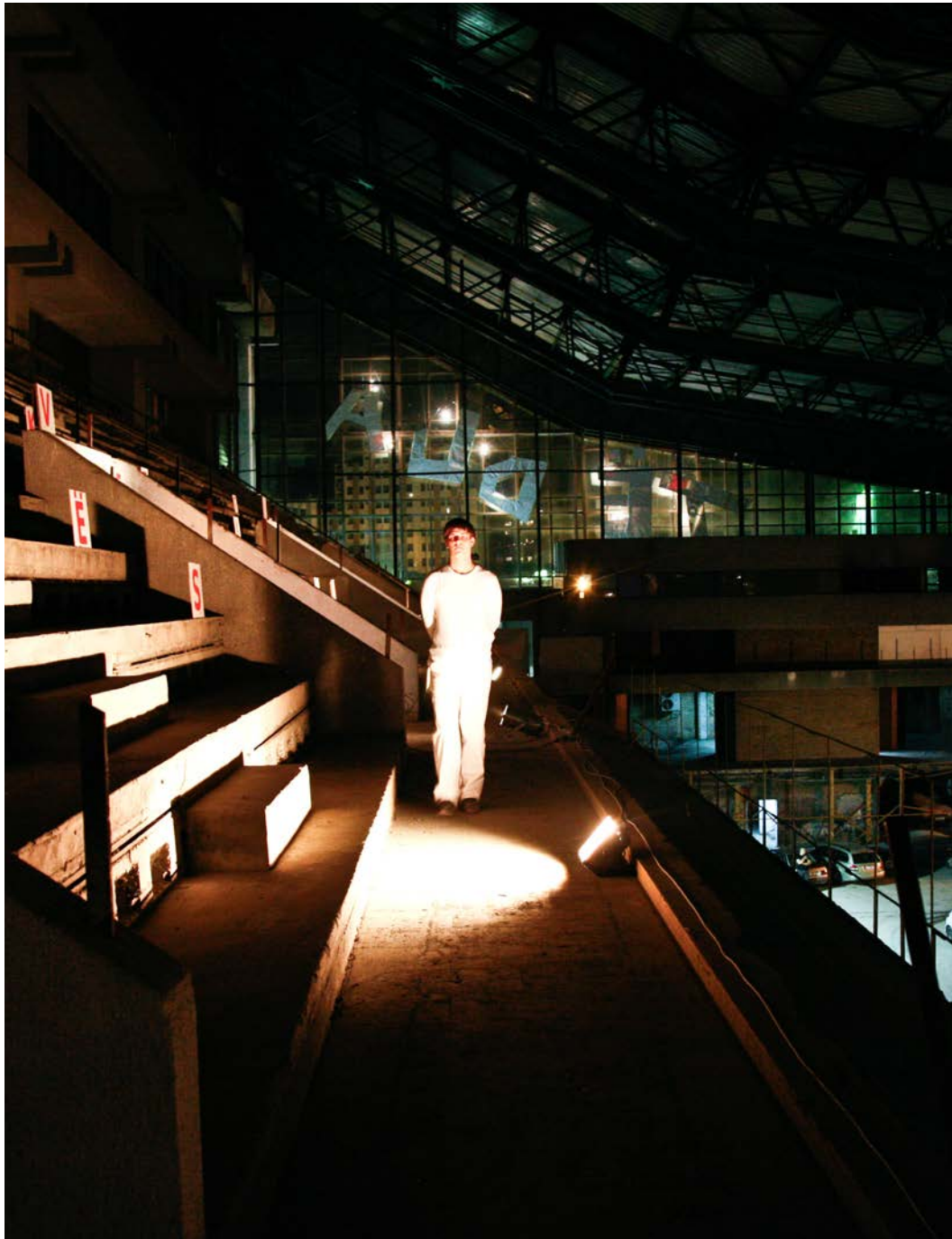
Fig. 59. Letters to BoroRamiz, Art Performance inside the Universal Hall, Youth Palace, 2012 Credits: Majlinda Hoxha

3.5 Prishtinë, Mon Amour

"Prishtinë, Mon Amour" was not a restoration project. It was an act of framing.

Initiated in 2012 by Elian Stefa and collaborators, the project responded not to a missing function, but to a missing discourse. The Youth and Sports Palace had long been present, but largely unspoken. Through a temporary exhibition, film, and a series of public events, Prishtinë, Mon Amour reintroduced the building into collective consciousness, not by proposing a solution, but by creating space for reflection.[62]

Rather than positioning the Palace as an architectural failure or a nostalgic relic, the platform treated it as a space of possibility. It unfolded slowly and without permanence. Events were held inside the Palace, documentation was exhibited, and a visual language was developed to reflect on its presence. As Elian Stefa wrote in the curatorial essay, "the act of reclaiming the building was not only about access, but about rewriting its meaning through use, however temporary that use might be.[63]

The strength of the project lay in its restraint. No final program was proposed, no fixed vision articulated. Its title, echoing Hiroshima mon amour, acknowledged that memory and affect can shape how we inhabit space, and that architectural legacy is not defined by preservation alone, but by continued engagement.[64]

62 Prishtine, Mon Amour, 2012
63 Prishtine, Mon Amour, 2012
64 Prishtine, Mon Amour, 2012

Importantly, this was not an underground or marginal initiative. The platform received national attention, prompting renewed media interest and public debate around the role of the Palace in Prishtina's contemporary life. Its documentation, photographs, film stills, and records of public events, became part of a visual archive that, for the first time in decades, cast the building in the light of civic interest.[65]

For me, encountering Prishtinë Mon Amour marked a conceptual turning point. It was the first project that showed how architectural thinking could begin with memory, presence, and attention. It demonstrated that a building does not need to be reimagined wholesale to become relevant again. It only needs to be seen differently, and shared.

Within the context of this thesis, the platform is not treated as a model to replicate, but as a moment of intellectual clarity. It defined a method, one that valued delay, ambiguity, and the potential of minimal, public presence. Most importantly, it made visible that even unbuilt gestures can reposition architecture as a tool for collective reengagement.

Fig. 61. -Noi-, Art Performance inside the Universal Hall, Youth Palace,2012 Credits: Majlinda Hoxha

65   Prishtine, Mon Amour, 2012

Fig. 60. Unconditional Heaven, Art Performance inside the Universal Hall, Youth Palace,2012 Credits: Majlinda Hoxha
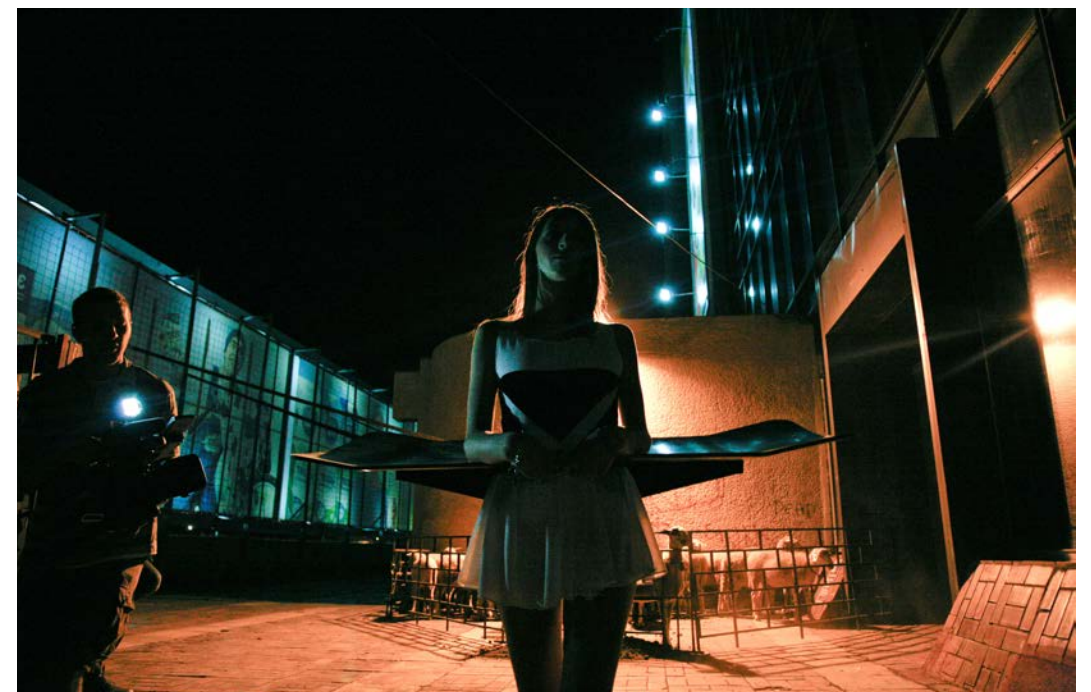
Fig. 62. Girl with Sheeps, Art Performance inside the Universal Hall, Youth Palace, 2012. Credits: Majlinda Hoxha

3.6   Spatial Legacies

Architecture often outlives the ideologies it was built to represent. Structures once conceived as embodiments of collective aspirations can become suspended in meaning obscured by time, political shifts, and changing urban realities. In the post-socialist landscape of former Yugoslavia, many such buildings remain: monumental, incomplete, and charged with unresolved potential. This chapter examines one of the most emblematic of these cases the House of Revolution in Nikšić, Montenegro designed by Slovenian architect Marko Mušič, who also authored the original plans for Prishtina's Youth Palace. Through this lens, the chapter refines a central thesis claim: that ambiguity, spatial presence, and strategic restraint can serve as architectural tools, not failures.

The House of Revolution (Dom Revolucije) was conceived in 1974 to mark the 30th anniversary of Nikšić's liberation. Envisioned as a vast cultural and memorial complex, it was designed to include a theater, music school, social halls, and a shrine to fallen soldiers symbolizing not only the structure of Yugoslav society but also its ideological unity. Construction began in 1978 but was halted in 1989, suspended by financial difficulties and the political collapse that followed Yugoslavia's dissolution. What remains is an unfinished megastructure of over 21,000 square meters at once dominating and disrupting the urban fabric of Nikšić.[66]

In 2016, an international competition was launched to address its derelict condition. The winning proposal, by HHF Architects and SADAR+VUGA, introduced a strategy titled "10/20/70": 10% of the building would be programmed with new functions, 20% renovated for flexible use, and 70% left unprogrammed but structurally secured. The intervention reframed the building not as a monument to be completed, but as a covered urban landscape, open to gradual transformation. Two intersecting promenades were introduced to reconnect it with the city cutting through its mass and turning the megastructure into a porous, civic field.[67]

This adaptive reuse shifts the narrative from monumentalism to pragmatism. By acknowledging the building's incompleteness, the architects avoided a totalizing redesign and instead activated its latent possibilities through minimal, precise gestures. The result is a hybrid space that now hosts a café, coworking studios, galleries, and workshops reintegrating it into everyday life while preserving its spatial ambiguity.[68]

The Palace of Youth in Prishtina shares a related trajectory. Also designed by Marko Mušič, it reflects the ambitions of the same era but followed a different path of deterioration and survival. Unlike Nikšić, where the structure remained largely inert for decades, Prishtina's Youth Palace continued to operate in fragmented, improvised ways. While the House of Revolution has been reimagined with a strategy of light intervention and infrastructural framing, the proposal for the Youth Palace involves more surgical subtraction and spatial reprogramming cutting open the building's sealed faces, removing barriers, and reconnecting it with the surrounding city. Yet both approaches share an ethic: they treat spatial legacies not as fixed inheritances, but as frameworks for contemporary transformation.

Fig. 63. Local children dominate the building's rooftop spaces, Nikšić House of Revolution.

68   SADAR+VUGA & HHF Architects, The House of Revolution – Nikšić, Montenegro, 2016,

66   SADAR+VUGA & HHF Architects, The House of Revolution – Nikšić, Montenegro, 2016,

67   SADAR+VUGA & HHF Architects, The House of Revolution – Nikšić, Montenegro, 2016,
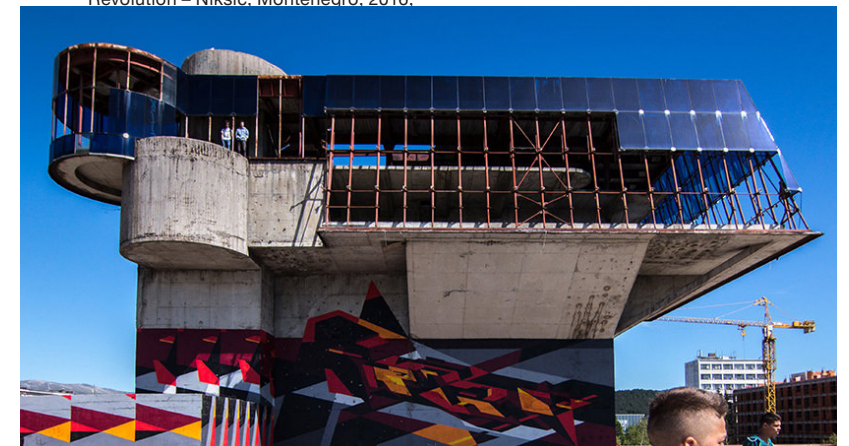
Fig. 65. Bones lay scattered across the earth floor of the basement, Nikšić House of Revolution.

Fig. 66. In some places the drifts of broken glass lie several inches deep, Nikšić House of Revolution.

Fig. 64. Inside space, Nikšić House of Revolution.

Architectural Intervention

Fig. 67. Working Model
1:200. Lindon Bytyqi
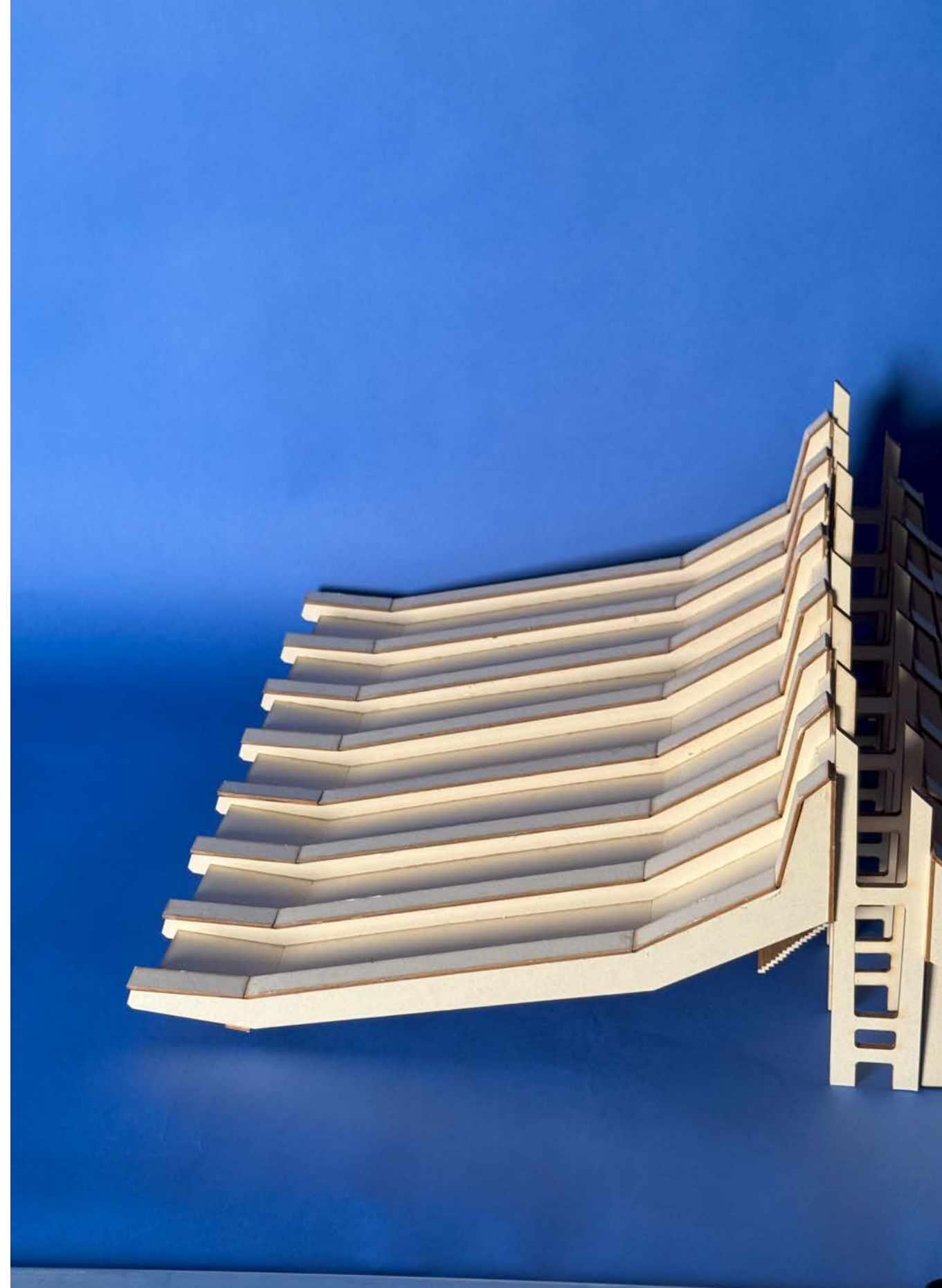
4   Architectural Intervention

This project proposes a series of targeted architectural interventions that aim to reconnect the Youth Palace with its immediate surroundings and wider urban context. Rather than a redesign, the approach is based on reading existing conditions, identifying spatial obstacles, and introducing minimal but strategic modifications to improve access, clarity, and public use.

The first action involves removing the sealed glass façades on three sides of the building facing the Grand Hotel, Rilindja Park, and Arbëria. These glazed surfaces previously reinforced the building's separation from its surroundings. Their removal creates three new entry points that allow public flow through the building. As shown in the Ground Floor Plan and First Floor Plan, these openings form a spatial triangle that reorients the building from a closed object to a connector. Movement across the building becomes possible, and its internal spaces are re-integrated into the city's circulation patterns.

This reconnection is also visible in the Site Plan, which illustrates how the intervention links the Youth Palace to key urban elements: Arbëria via a new bridge, the Grand Hotel platform, and the civic center. The building becomes part of a broader network of public movement across different elevations and terrains.

Inside the main hall, a four-story volume added during the 1990s is removed. This volume previously divided the hall, blocked light, and disrupted the original spatial proportions. Its removal restores openness, visual continuity, and flexible use. The Section A–A (spread across four pages) shows how this subtraction re-establishes the full height and depth of the hall, allowing uninterrupted flow and reintroducing natural light. The space becomes adaptable to multiple public functions, without a fixed program.

The axonometric drawing explains how each architectural action openings, subtractions, insertions works as part of an overall strategy. New stairs, accessible slopes, and redefined edges are introduced without altering the fundamental structure of the building. The intention is to improve access and usability while retaining the building's core geometry.

On the east side, toward Rilindja Park, a new stair and stepped seating are added. This element is embedded into the slope and functions as both circulation and public space. As shown in the Axonometric Detail, the previously closed edge becomes a usable interface between terrain and architecture.

A stair-tribune inside the hall connects the main floor with the upper platform. This element serves both circulation and gathering purposes. From here, users reach the reconstructed platform, originally part of the Palace before being destroyed in the 2000 fire. The reconstruction covers the exposed basement and re-establishes a flat civic surface. The Platform Reconstruction Plan shows how this surface links the interior to the surrounding levels.

Outside, the asphalt parking lot is replaced with a public park. The steps that previously isolated the interior from this exterior space are removed, creating a more gradual transition. The Site Section shows a continuous gradient that enables movement from Arbëria, through the park and interior, to the city center. The park provides space for informal activities, gatherings, and rest, improving the functional relationship between the building and its landscape.

Two new bridges are added to improve connectivity. One connects Arbëria to the site by spanning the railway and adjacent roads. The second bridge links the Grand Hotel platform to the reconstructed platform of the Youth Palace. These are designed as infrastructural elements rather than expressive forms. The Bridge System Axonometric shows how these interventions complete a circulation system that connects multiple levels of the site.

This proposal also serves as a response to ongoing development pressures. It avoids adding new large volumes and instead improves what already exists. As shown in the Comparative Overlay, alternative proposals such as a new opera house on the site of the existing parking introduce significant mass and programmatic complexity. In contrast, this project reduces obstructions and prioritizes open public access.

Renderings illustrate how the interventions change the building's relationship to the public. One shows the platform as a reactivated civic space. Another rendering captures the park entrance and visual openness into the building. A third shows the main hall in use, with space for public events. These images focus on usability, spatial flow, and the reintroduction of daily life into the building.

Physical models were used throughout the design process to study scale, massing, and topography. The 1:500 model focuses on urban integration, showing connections from Arbëria through the park and into the city. The 1:200 model tests volumetric relationships and building proportions. The 1:100 model studies detail, showing how additions like the tribune, park edge, and stair elements operate in section and material terms.

Finally, the upper platform originally conceived as a pedestrian link between the Red Hall, Youth Palace, and Grand Hotel is made accessible again. As seen in the Upper Platform Site Plan, it becomes part of a walkable network across different levels of the city. It is not assigned a fixed function, but left open for public use.

This intervention treats the Youth Palace as part of a larger civic system. It improves spatial access, simplifies circulation, and restores public visibility. Rather than replacing what exists, the project works through targeted adjustments. Its purpose is not to define a new image, but to clarify spatial relationships and support long-term public use.

Rethinking a Late Modernist Monument in the Heart of Prishtina
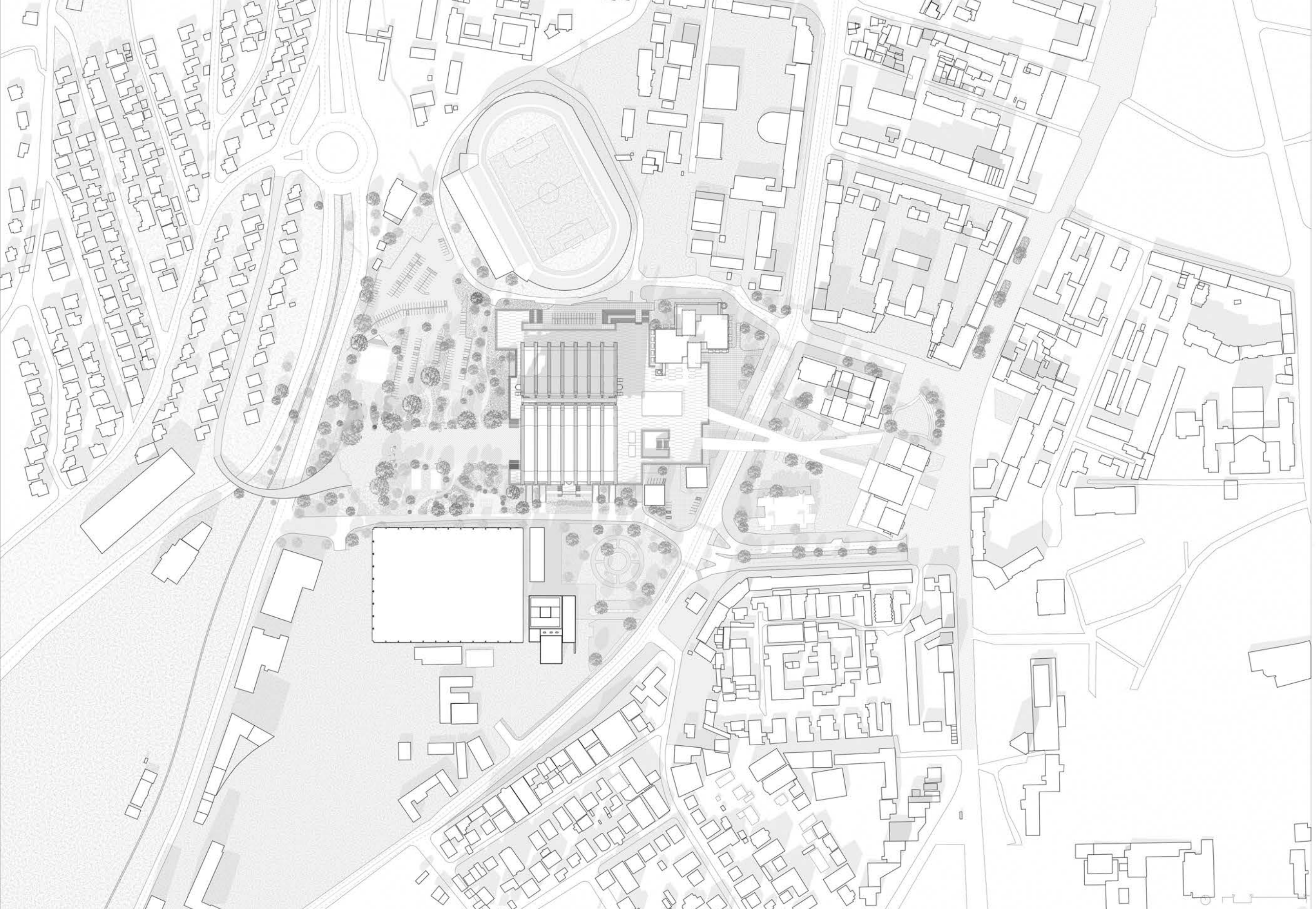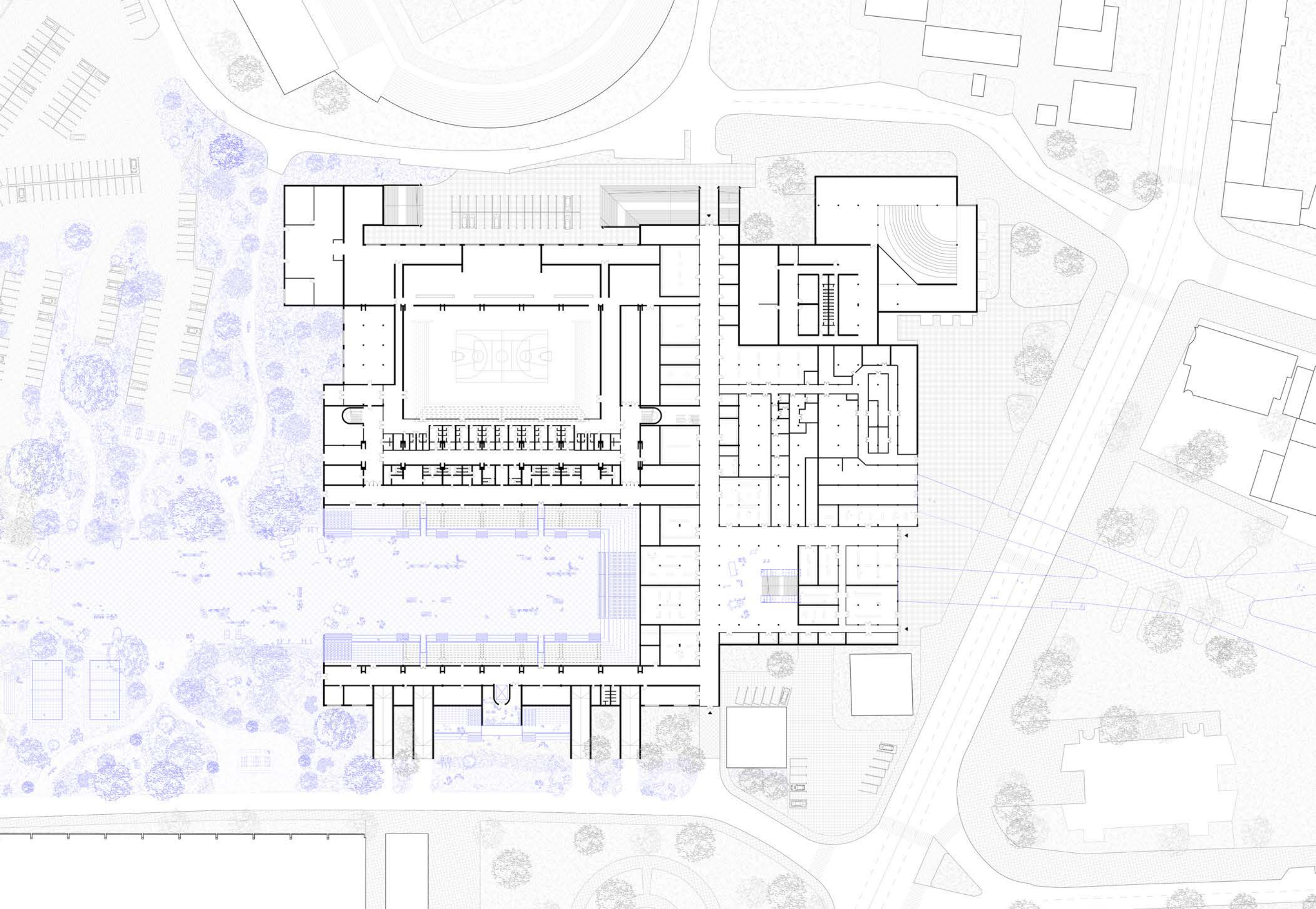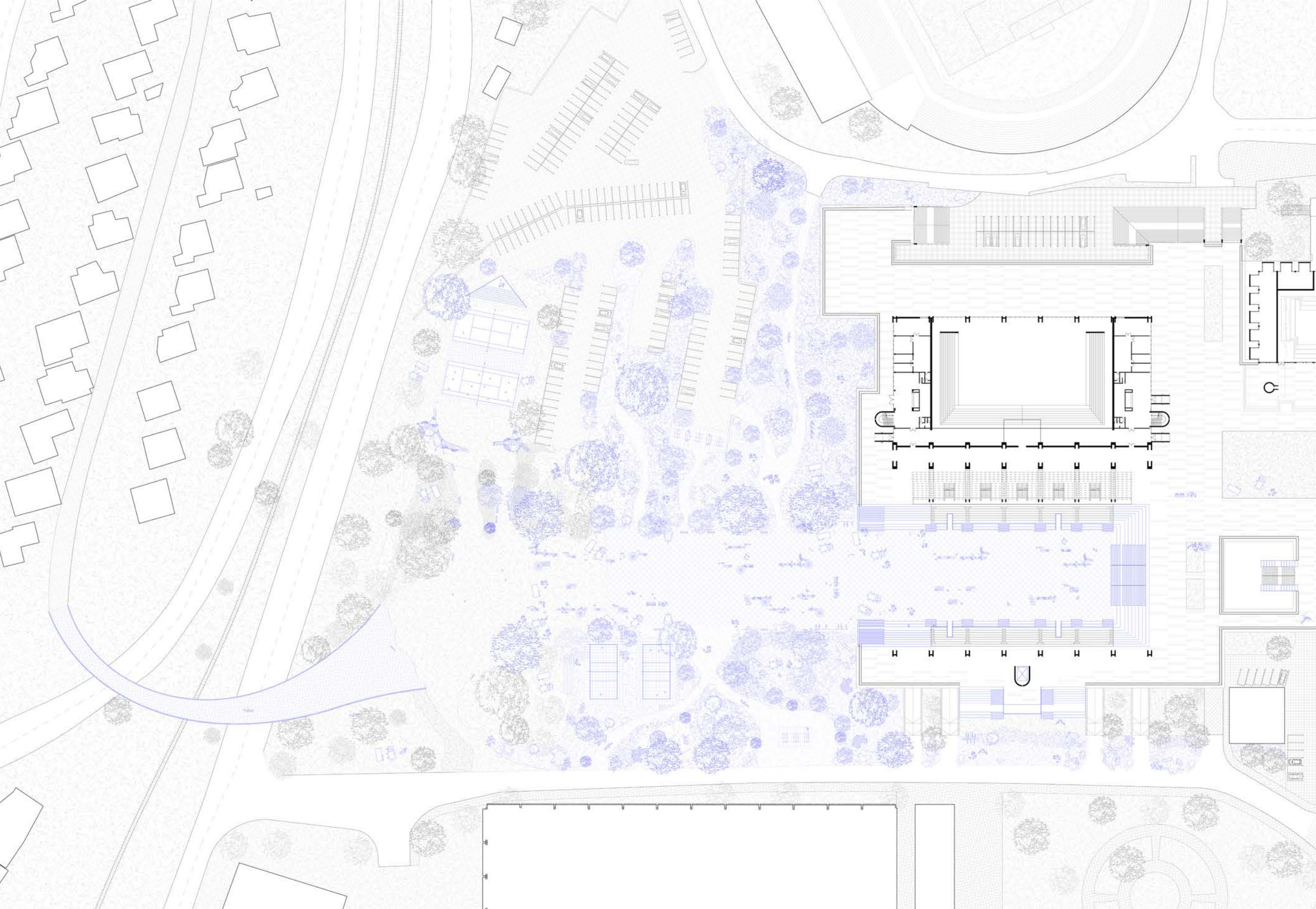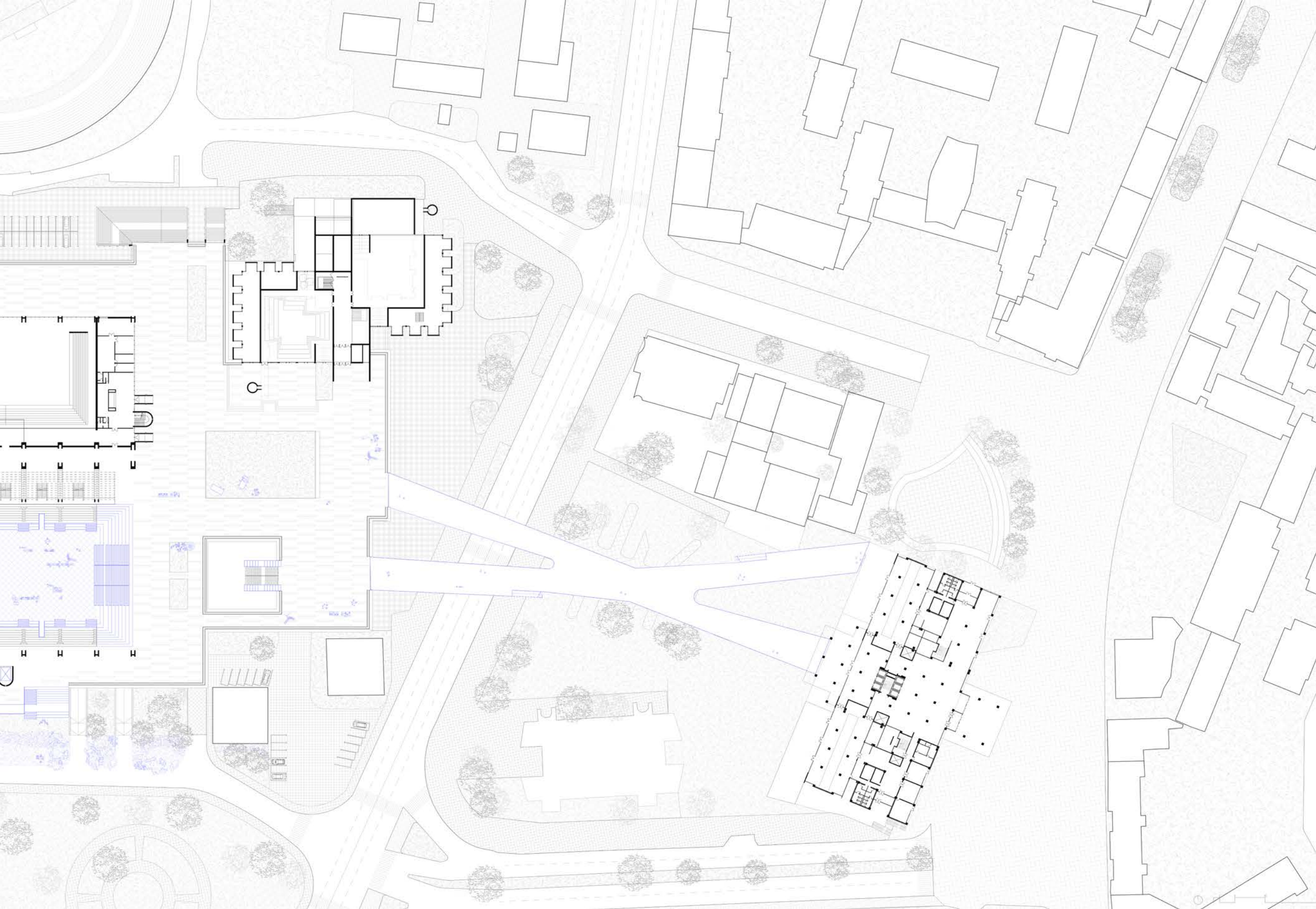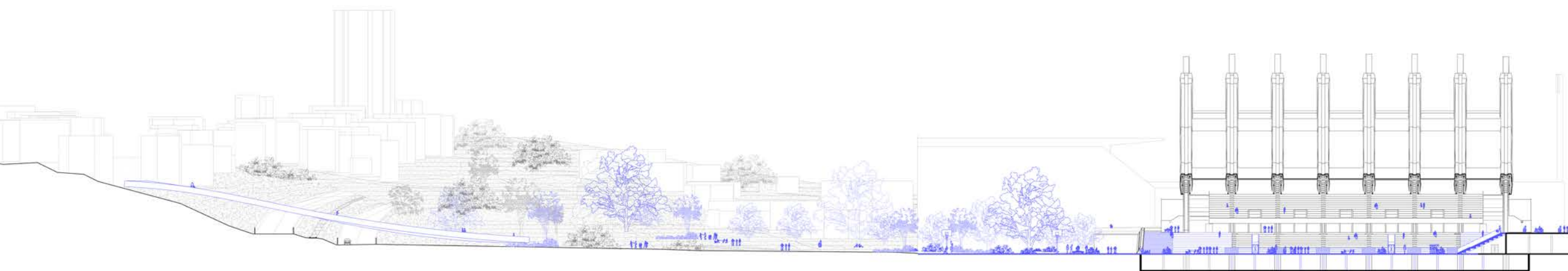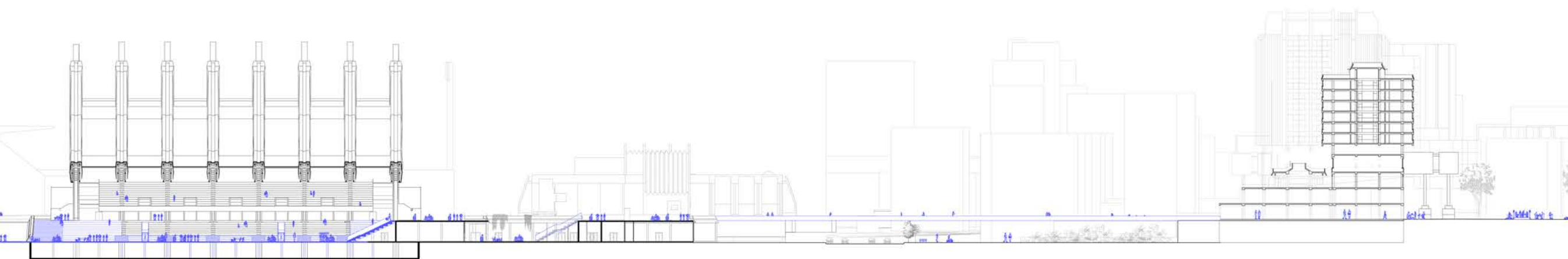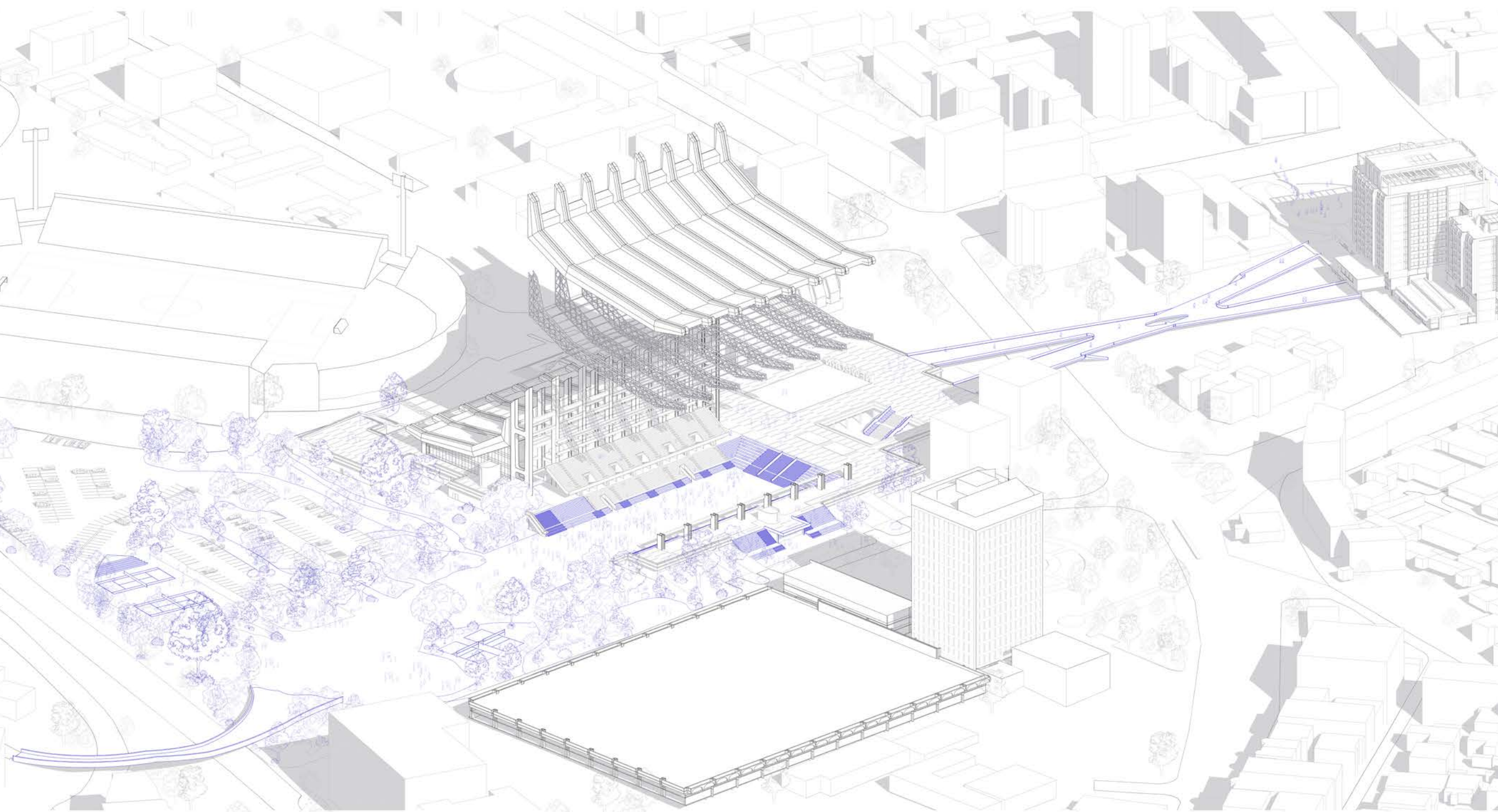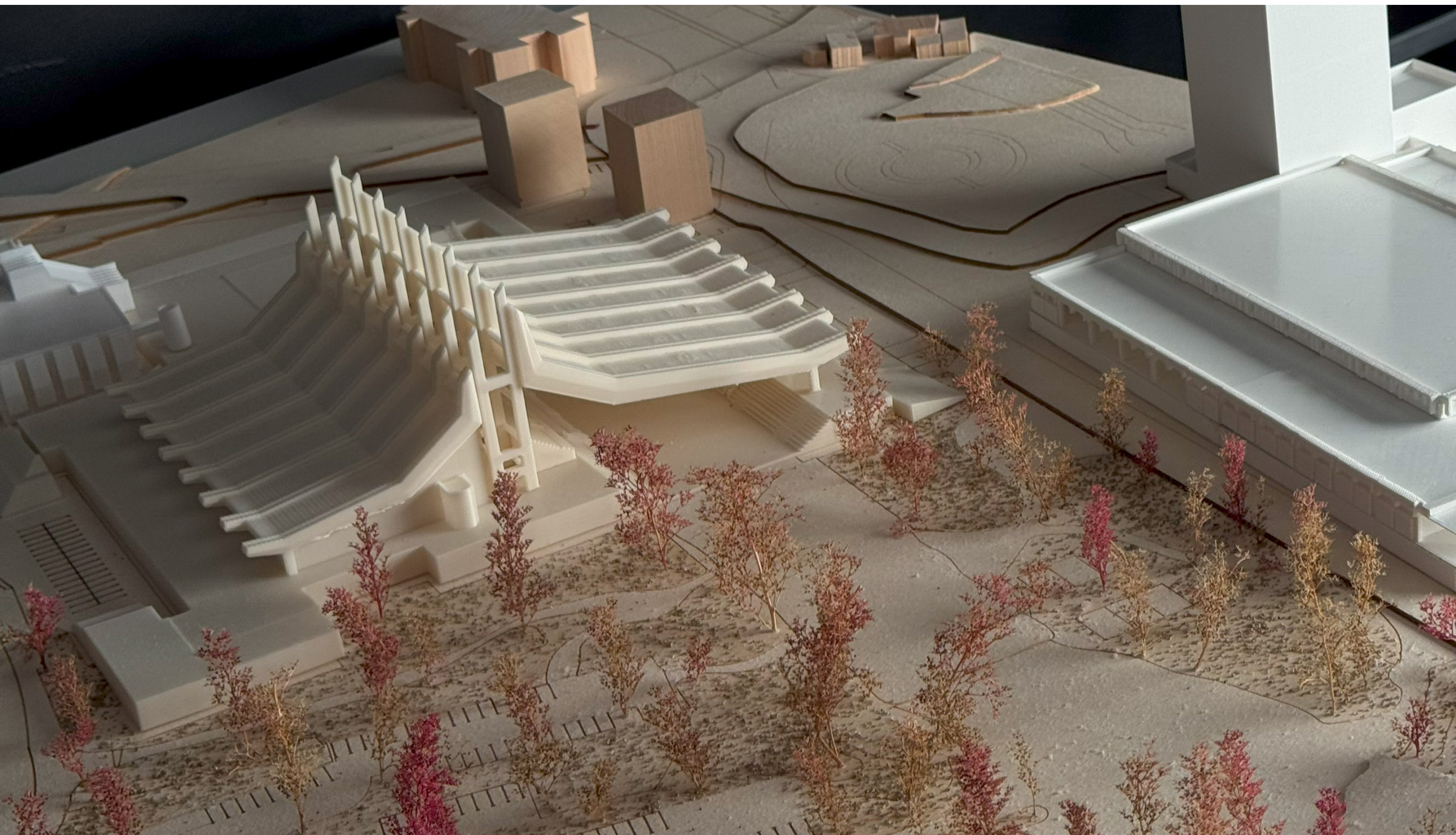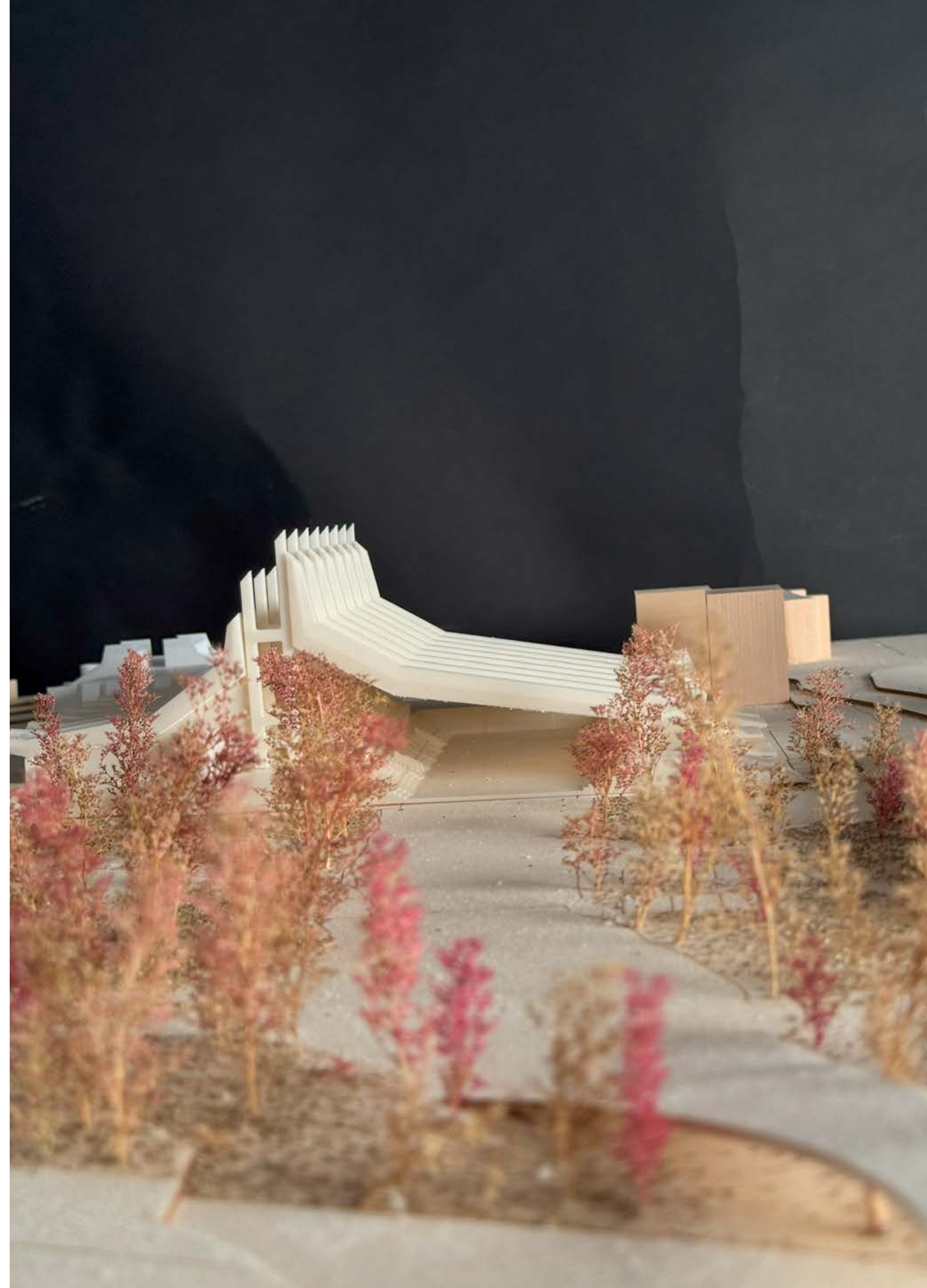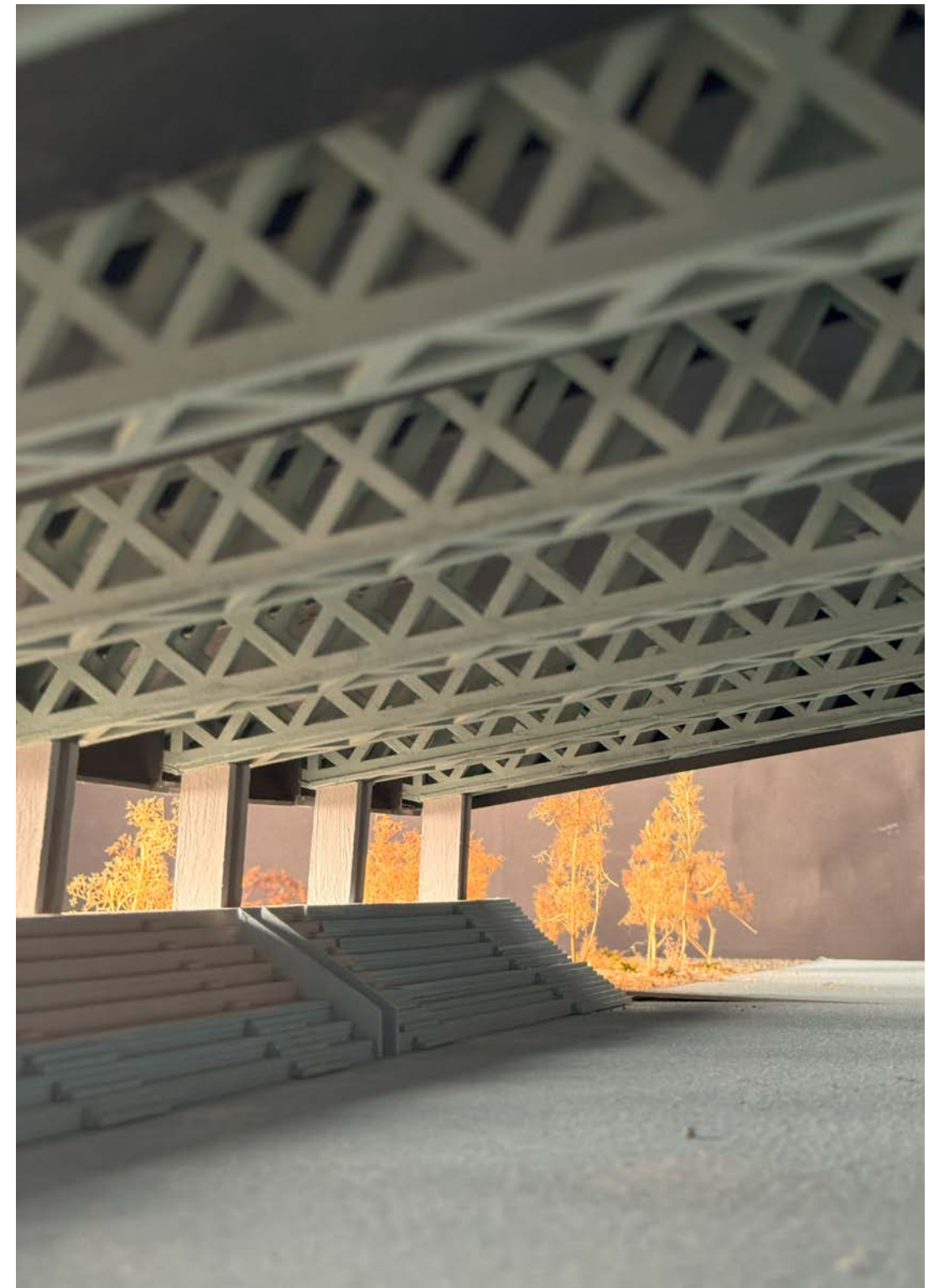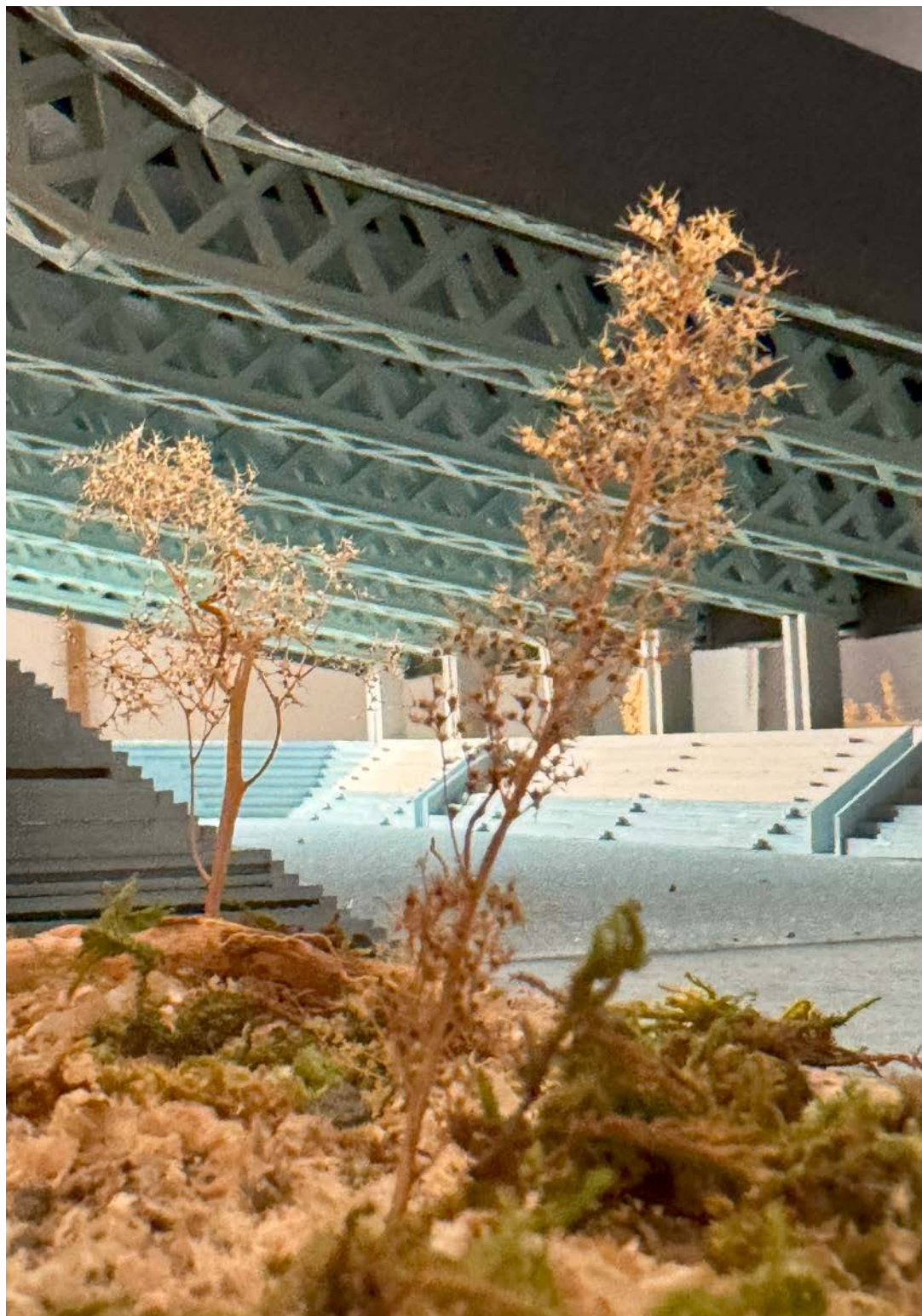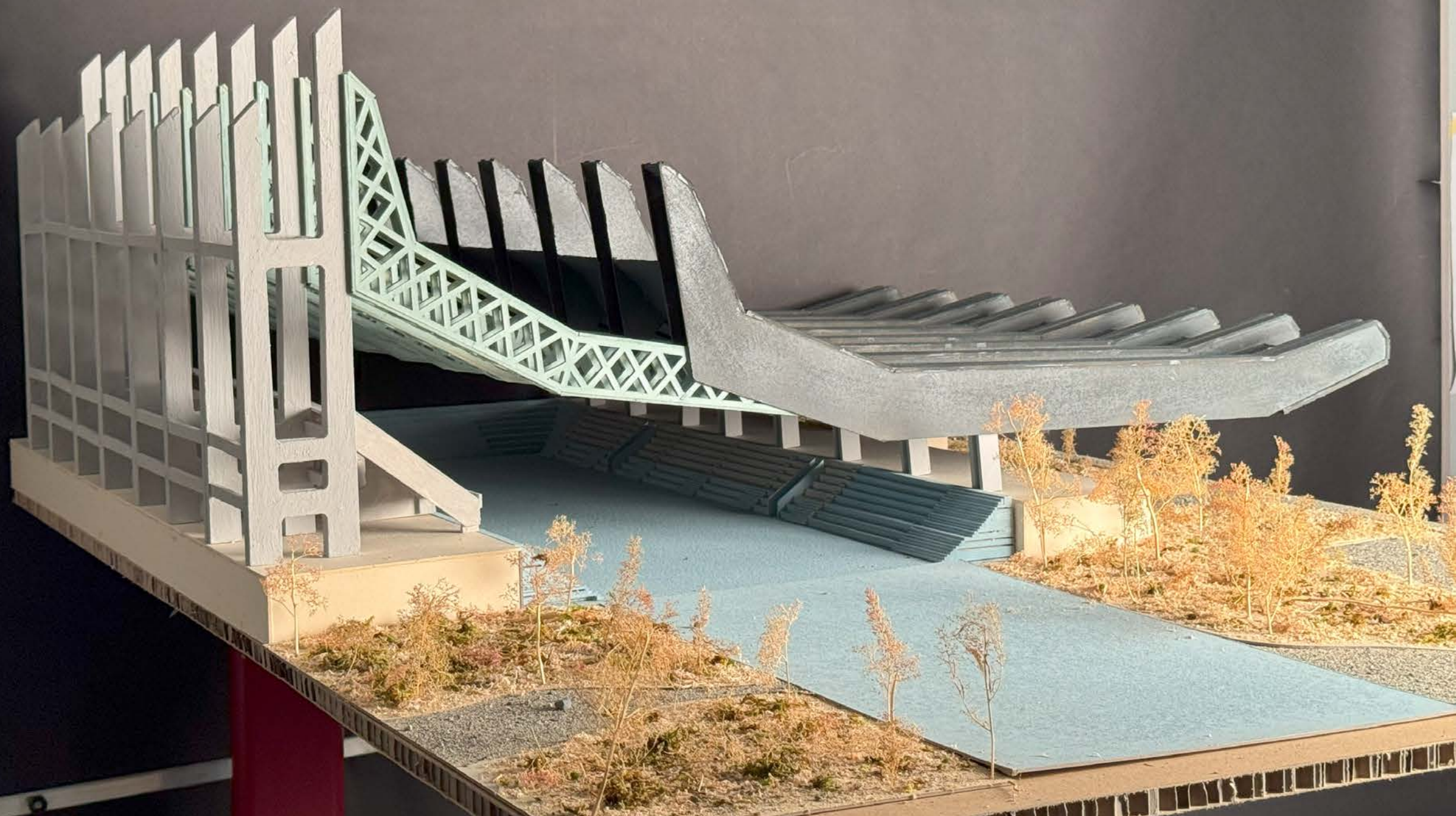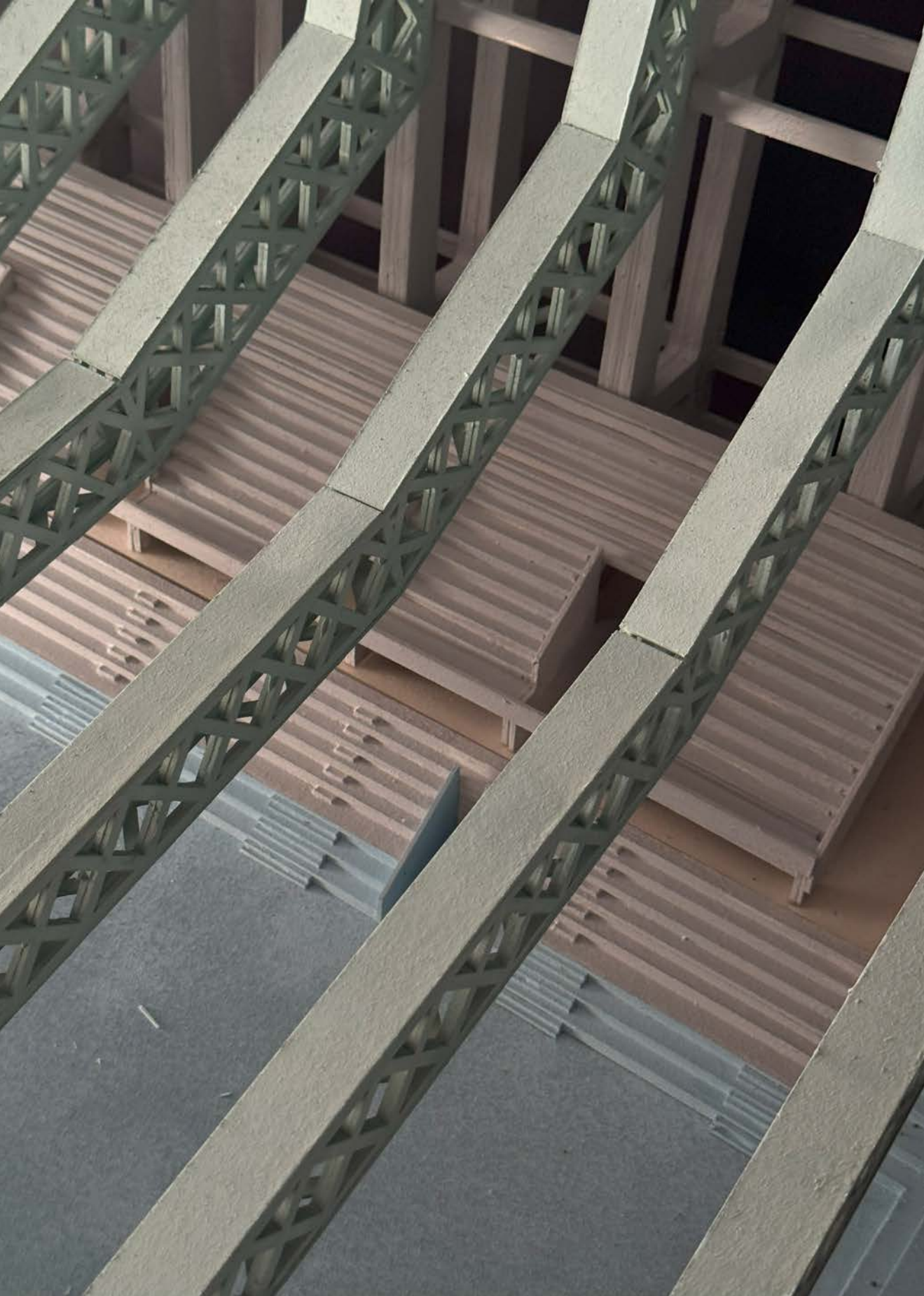
5   Epilogue

Buildings outlive the ideologies that built them. They linger after their symbols fade, after their promises collapse, after their publics disappear. In that lingering, they stop being answers and become questions. The Youth Palace is such a question. It stands not just in the middle of Prishtina, but in the middle of a collective uncertainty too symbolic to erase, too unresolved to embrace.

This thesis is not a restoration. It is a provocation. A challenge to how we respond to spaces we no longer know how to read. A challenge to the architectural discipline, which too often looks away from complexity, choosing aesthetics over accountability. The gestures proposed here subtraction, opening, reconnection are not just spatial moves. They are decisions to expose, to interfere, and to insist that what has been ignored can speak again.

The Youth Palace becomes an agora. A threshold. A bridge. No longer a sealed monument to suspended ambition, it is returned to the city as a living structure for gathering, for disagreement, for making culture public again. Its transformation is not about fixing what was broken. It is about breaking open what was closed spatially, socially, politically.

But this is not only about one building. The same logic applies to the Grand Hotel, to Rilindja, to every forgotten structure inherited from past systems. These are not relics. They are unresolved claims. And what we choose to do with them reveals not just our architectural position, but our civic one.

Architecture must stop pretending it operates outside of memory and power. There is no neutral ruin. Every neglected building reflects a decision to privatize, to forget, to wait for erasure. To intervene is to interrupt that process. To cut an opening is to challenge the status quo. To make space public again is to take a political stance.

This thesis does not offer closure. It insists on keeping things open spatially and ideologically. It proposes that incompleteness is not failure, but method. That by refusing to resolve the past, we can begin to inhabit it differently.

So the final gesture is not architectural it is civic. It is an invitation to look again, to listen harder, to act where silence has settled. Because the real question is not what we will do with the Youth Palace. The real question is: how much longer will we keep walking past buildings that are trying to speak?

6 Literature

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7   List of Figures

8   Declaration of Originality

I hereby confirm that I am the sole author of the written work:

Hello Again, Palace of Youth

Rethinking a Late Modernist Monument in the Heart of Prishtina

and that no help was provided from other sources as those allowed. All sections of the paper that use quotes or describe an argument or concept developed by another author have been referenced including all secondary literature used to show that this material has been adopted to support my thesis.

Lindon Bytyqi

Luzern, 16.06.2025