

# A THRESHOLD OF URBAN INFORMALITIES

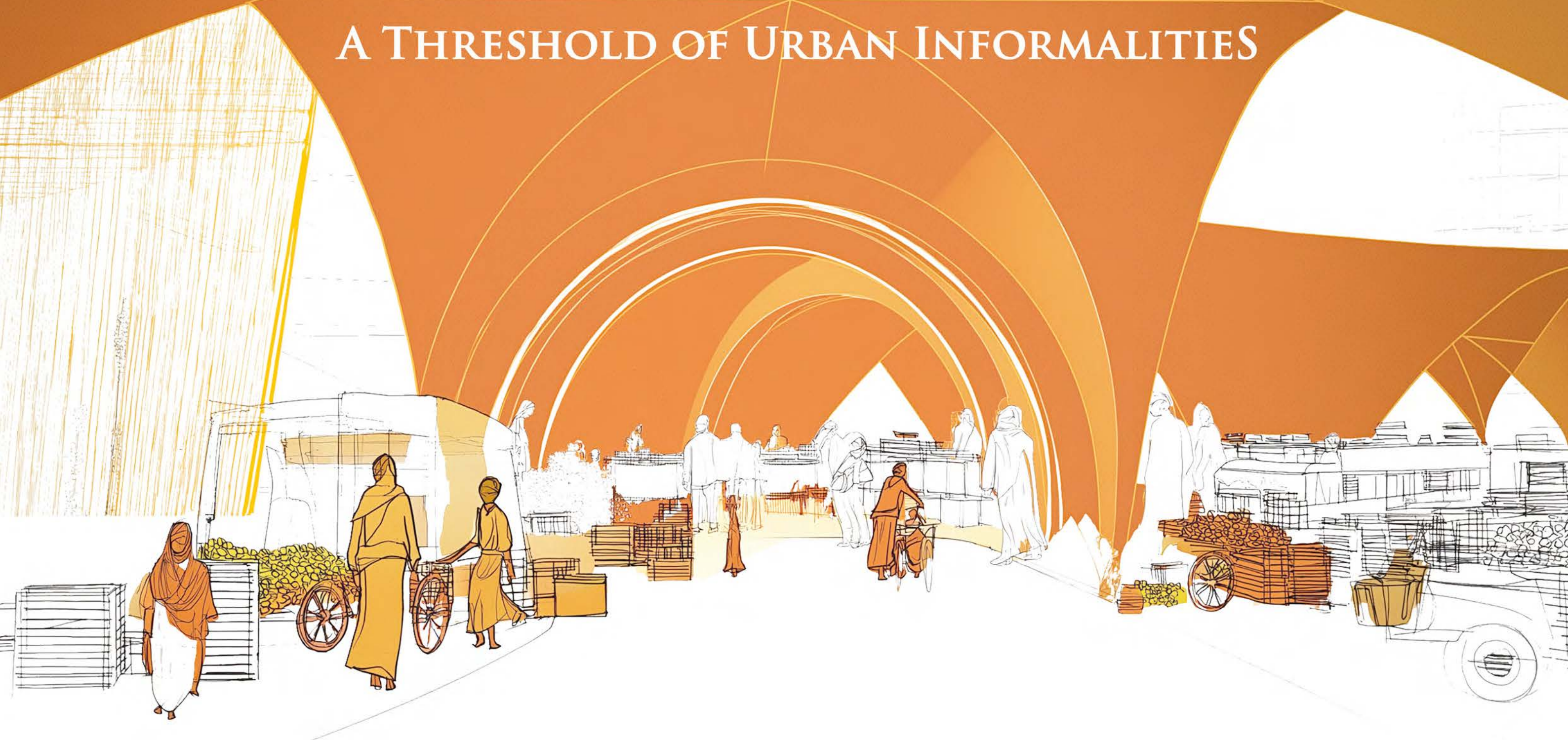


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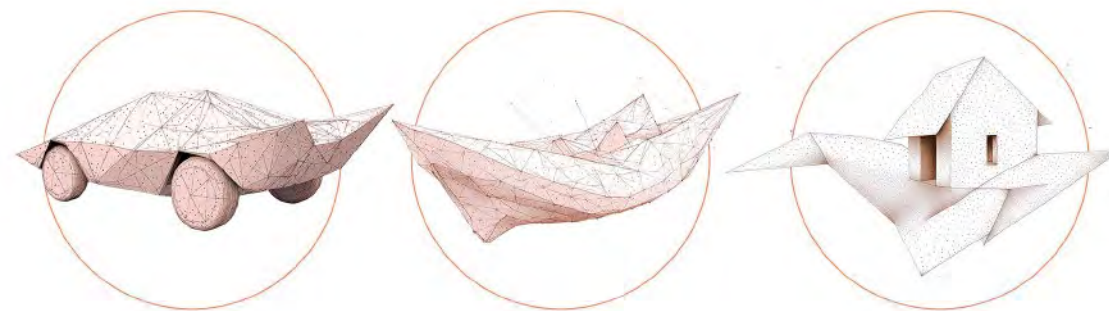
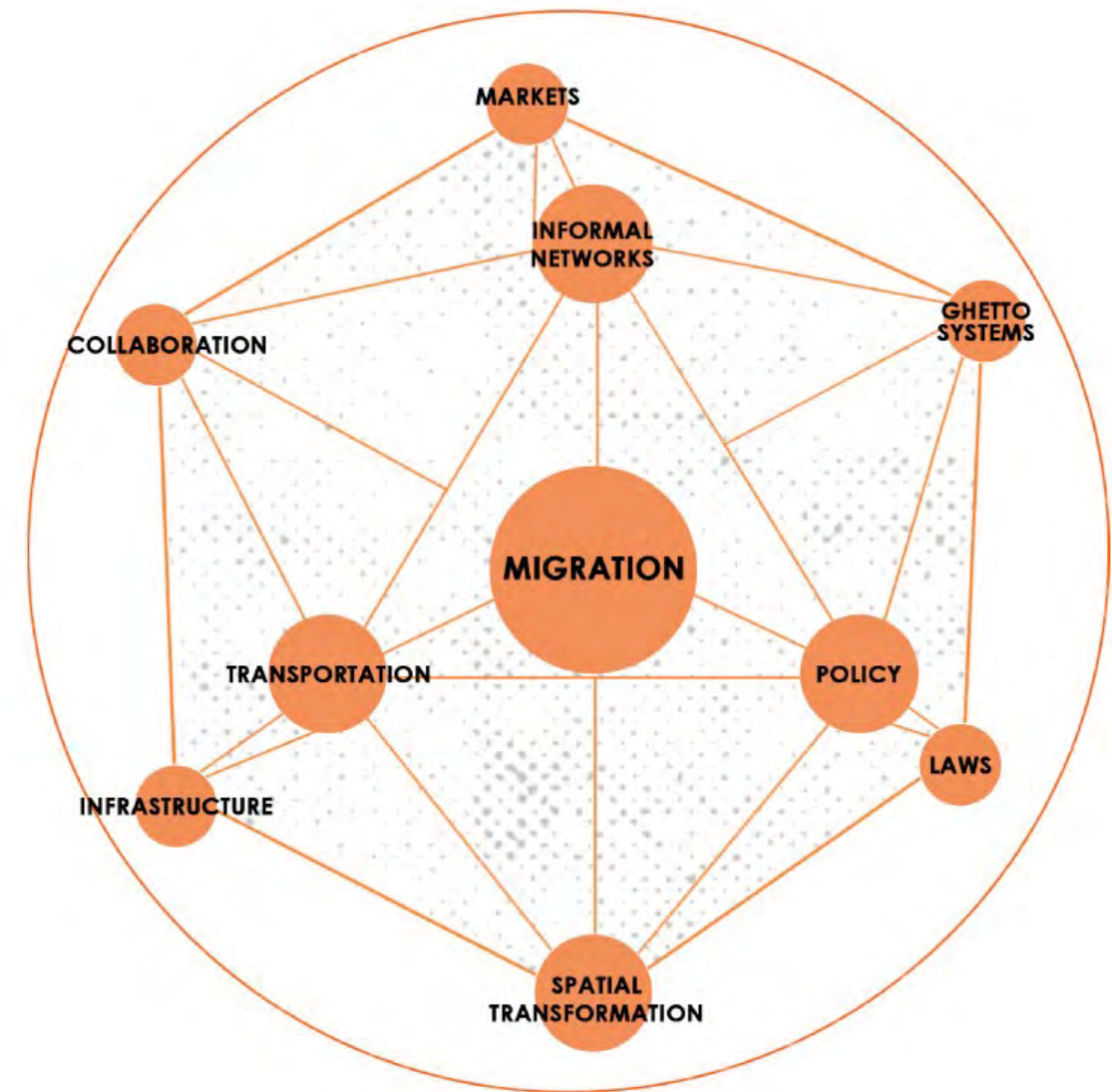
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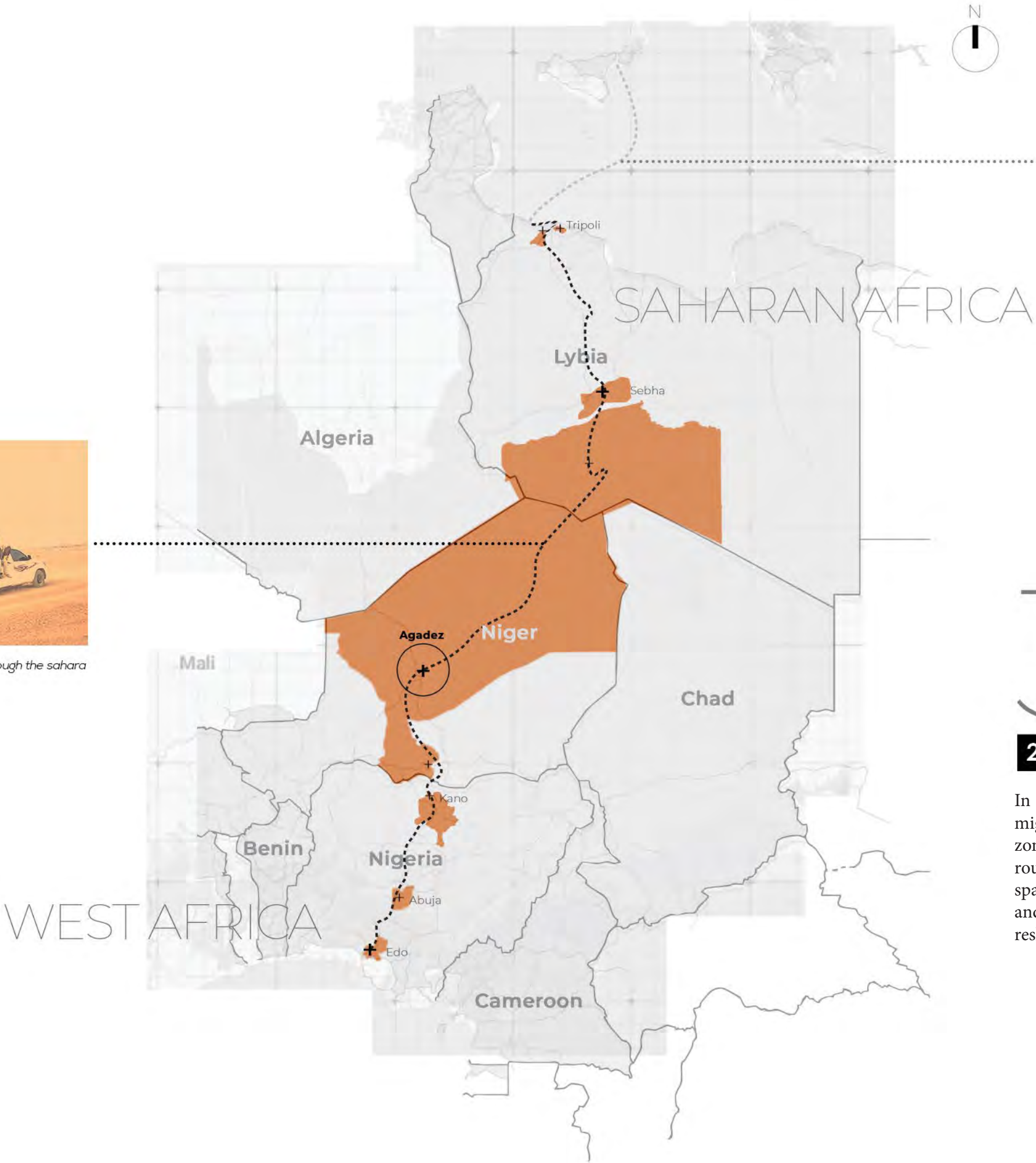
This thesis argues for the need to design more dignified and responsive urban infrastructure for people in transit. It focuses on Agadez, Niger, a critical migration hub in West Africa where trade, movement, and survival intersect in both visible and invisible ways.

The research investigates how migrants adapt to their journeys through informal systems, shared transport, temporary shelters, market economies, and social networks. These systems are not separate from the city, they are embedded in broader urban and political structures that often fail to serve those in motion.

In response, the project proposes a design intervention at the Old Bus Station of Agadez, a fragmented, yet active site within the city's migration landscape. The intervention seeks to reimagine the space as a supportive threshold, offering infrastructure for waiting, negotiation, and exchange, while embracing the informal patterns that already shape it.

Grounded in AbdouMaliq Simone's idea of "people as infrastructure," the thesis positions migrants not as passive subjects, but as urban actors who continually remake space through improvisation and use. Using architecture as a tool to reclaim the informal spaces of migration, shifting them from exploitative thresholds into dignified, informed, and adaptable platforms for movement.





Migrants passing through the sahara desert



Migrants passing through the Mediterranean sea

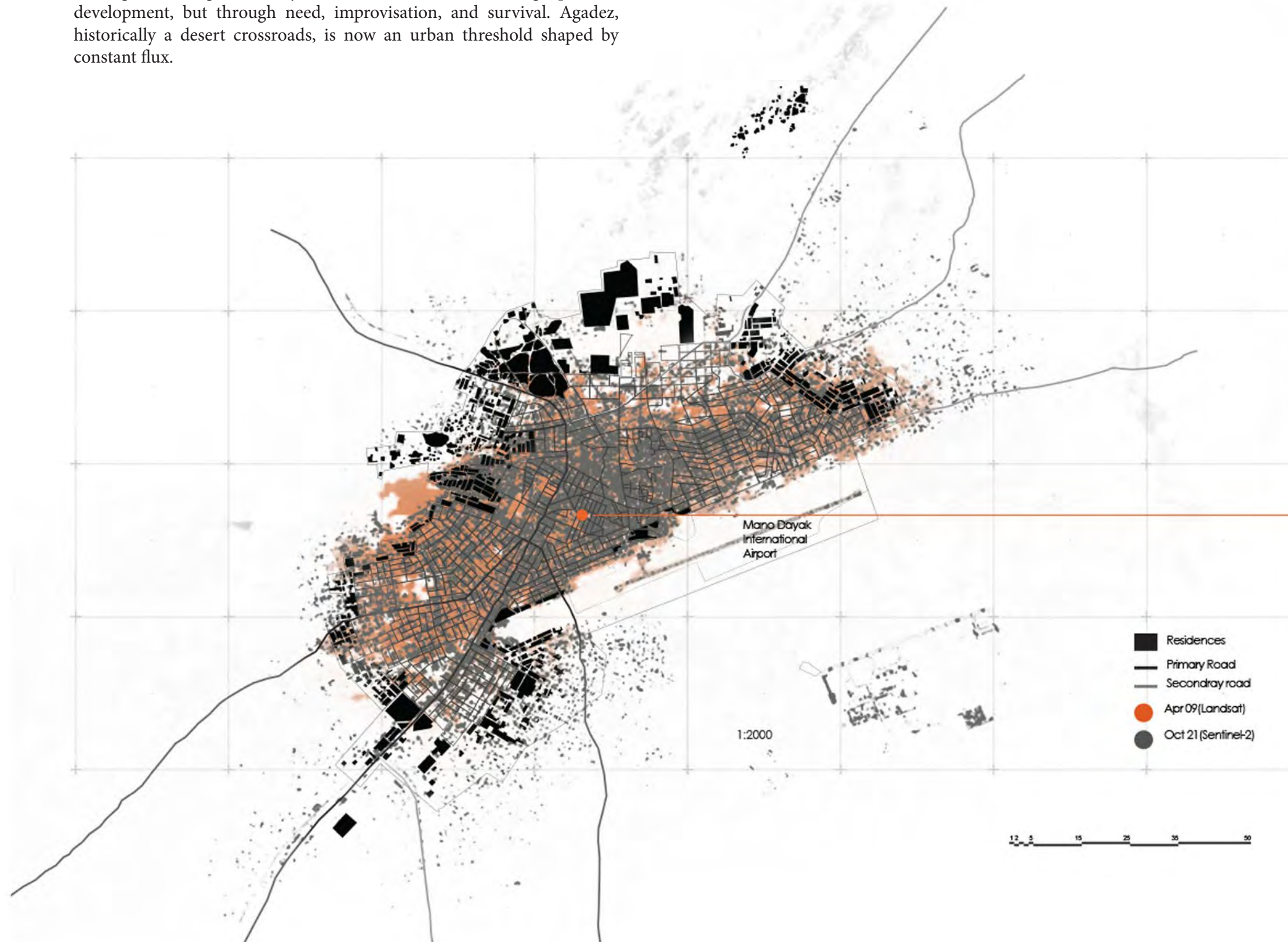
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2016, The game got bigger

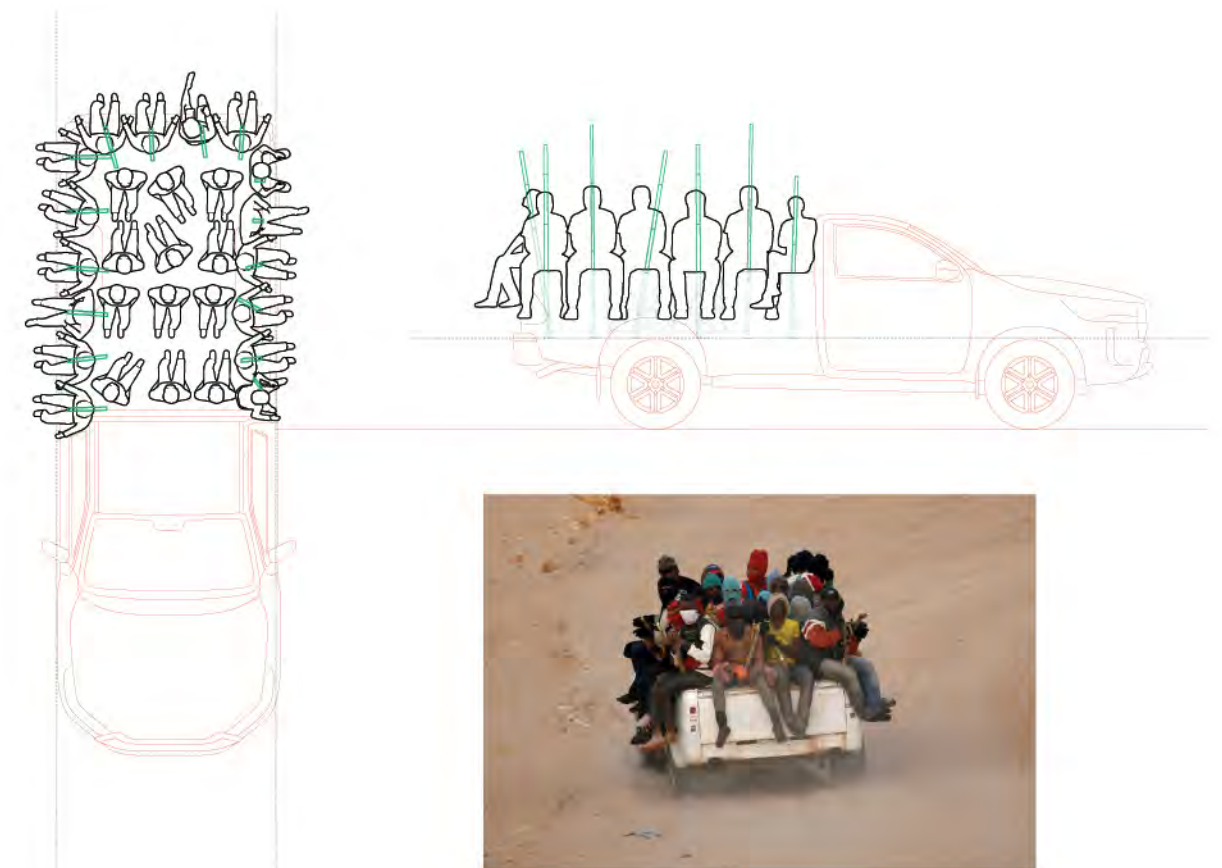
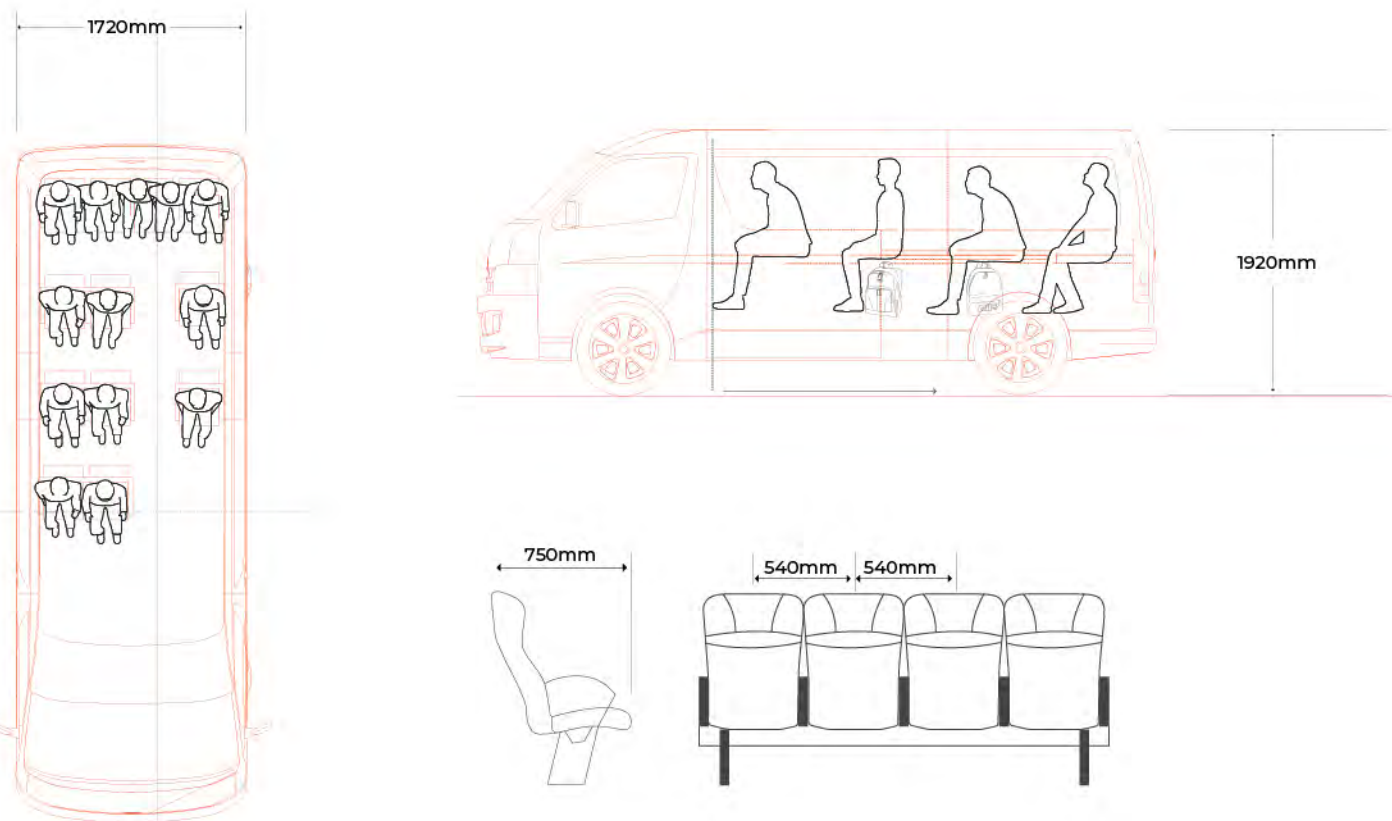
In 2016, intensified EU-backed border controls redirected migration flows and amplified the role of Agadez as a holding zone rather than a transit point. What was once a porous route transformed into a controlled bottleneck. This shift sparked the growth of informal economies around transport and accommodation, revealing how migration management reshapes urban dynamics.

## AGADEZ AS A THRESHOLD CITY

Tracing the evolving urban footprint of Agadez, showing growth between April 2009 and October 2021 through satellite data overlays. The brown and gray spreads reflect seasonal and informal expansion, often occurring at the city's peripheries, particularly in areas like Dagamanet and Toudou. These edge conditions, where official planning fades, are where transit infrastructures, temporary shelters, and informal economies emerge. As migration surges, the city stretches outward—not through planned development, but through need, improvisation, and survival. Agadez, historically a desert crossroads, is now an urban threshold shaped by constant flux.



Movement through Agadez is priced, negotiated, and packed to capacity. From vans to openbed trucks, bodies are stacked to minimize space and maximize profit. Bribes at checkpoints, fluctuating demand, and nationality all shape the cost of passage. This is not a neutral journey, it's a calculated transaction.

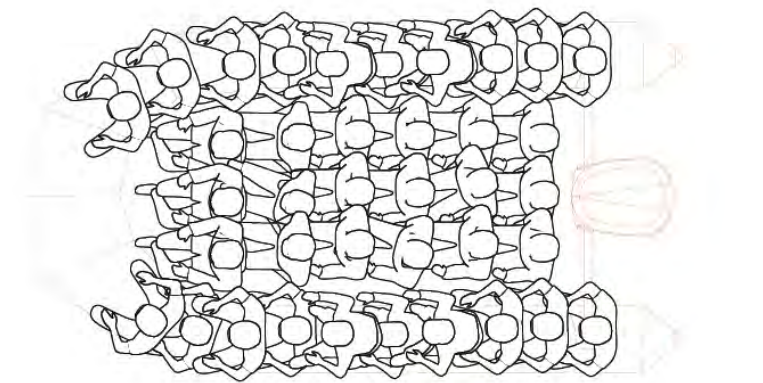
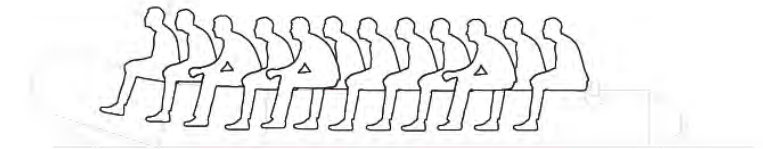
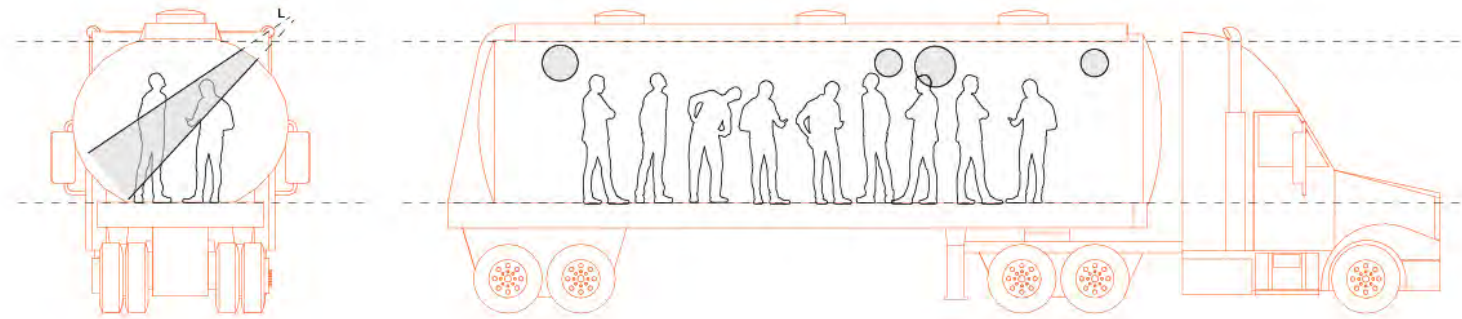


**\$200** Coming from West African countries  
**+\$2-9** At different police checkpoints for non-Nigerien

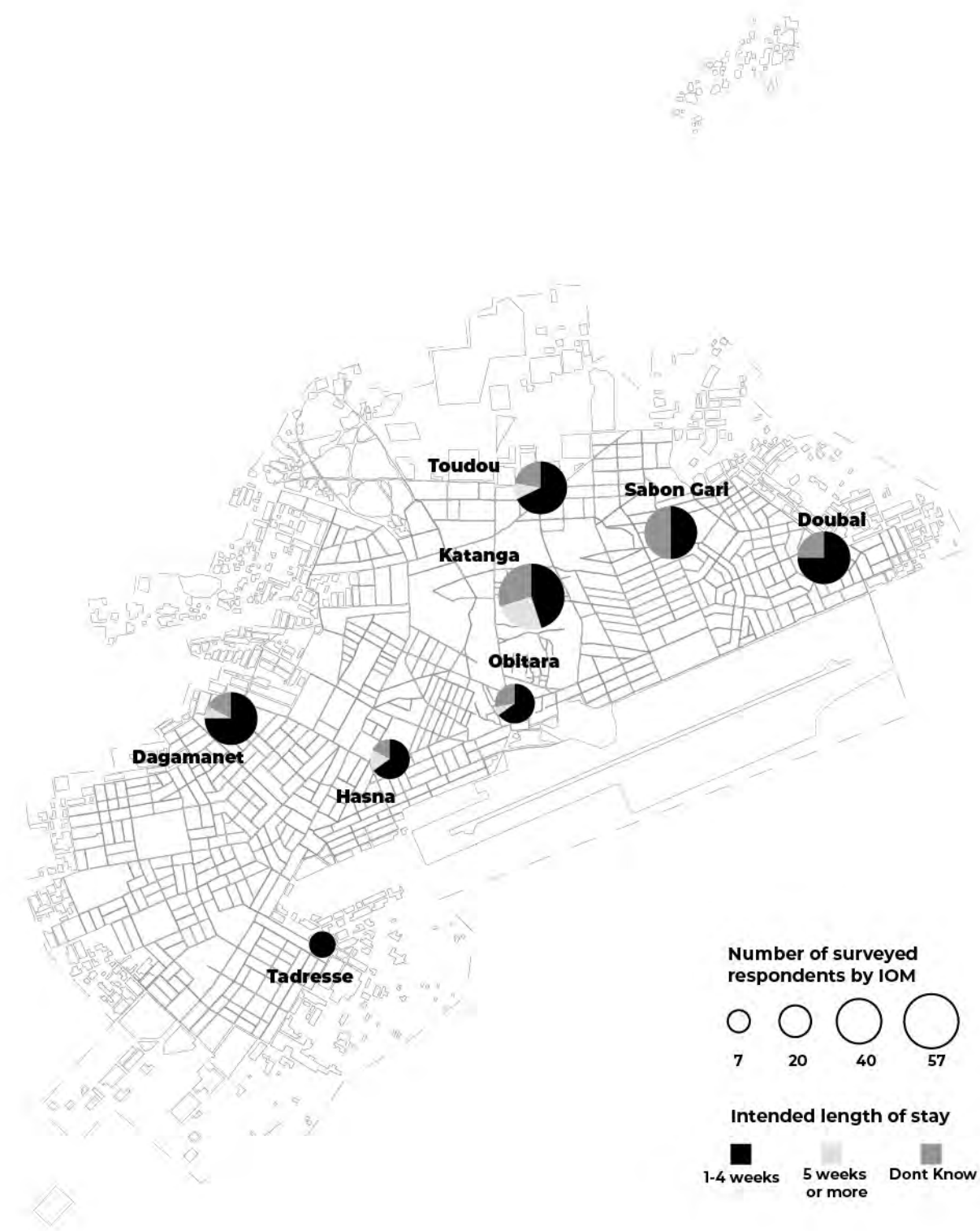
**\$250** Approximately for non-Nigerien coming from west Africa  
 price vary due to demand and other external factors

**\$500** For a single journey  
**+\$10-50** Bribes at police or military checkpoint

**\$550** Approximate  
 price vary due to demand and other external factors



The United Nations has documented 207 cases in which migrants have died or gone missing attempting to cross the English Channel since 2016, most recently on June 24. | Dan Kitwood/Getty Images



Migrant presence in Agadez concentrates around peripheral neighborhoods (Dagamanet, Toudou, and Sabon Gari zones) marked by informality and proximity to transit routes. Length of stay varies from a few weeks to months, shaped by financial readiness, smuggling schedules, and border enforcement. These spaces are not fixed camps, but urbanized waiting zones, where shelter, information, and onward logistics circulate through hidden networks.

## Southern Algeria

## Sabha, Lybia

## West Africa

### The Old Bus Station

### Agadez mosque

### Mano Dayak International Airport

Amid these hidden networks, the Old Bus Station emerges as a critical node where local transport, informal logistics, and migrant flows intersect within the city.

Spanish coastguard has rescued three men who stowed away on a tanker and arrived in the Canary Islands from Nigeria by balancing on its rudder just above the waterline.

In a photograph distributed on Twitter by the coastguard on Monday, the three stowaways are shown perched on the rudder of the oil and chemical tanker Alithini II.

West Atlantic Ocean

Canary Islands

Nigeria



In the searing heat several had died along the way. The traffickers did not want carry the corpses with them and made the migrants bury them.

"They died because they wouldn't allow us water to drink and it was so hot we couldn't breathe," said Ali Joseph, 19, from Ghana, who crossed into Libya in summer.

The final lap of Andrew's journey to Europe started in mid-September of 2016. Over 100 migrants squeezed into each of the three inflatable rafts that moved that morning but his new friends were not selected for the trip.

A successful crossing for Andrew largely depended on the Gambian migrant who had been taught to operate the raft he was in. The Gambian had been given a compass and a Thuraya satellite phone known for its superior signal strength beyond the range of local telecoms networks. Smugglers instructed him to dial an emergency number on the phone once the raft cleared Libyan waters. To avoid skirmishes with local coast guard officials, armed Libyan militants got into another raft and served as escorts for the migrants but turned back once the raft got out of Libyan waters. "Immediately they turned back [the Gambian] dialed a number and the Italian coast guard picked up the call," Andrew says.



Journey began with 22 young people: 10 men and 12 women. They had their trip organized by a different agent—the agent of the organized and collaborative effort which powers human smuggling in sub-Saharan Africa. They all crammed into a Toyota Hiace 16-seater bus and set off that Thursday.

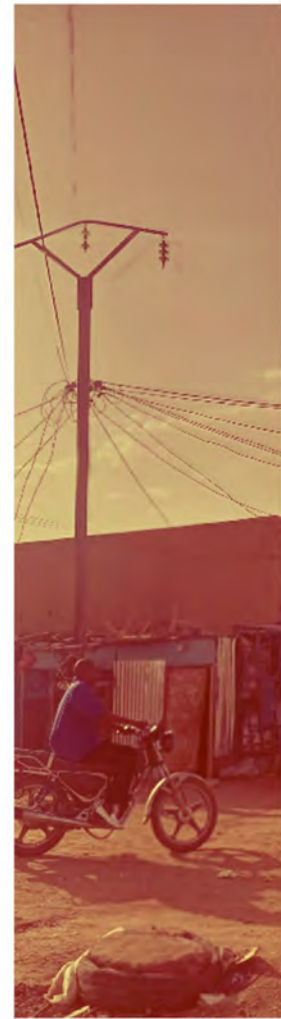


The Old Bus Station in Agadez, though no longer functioning as an official terminal, it continues to draw people, transporters, migrants, vendors, and those in waiting. It's not empty, it's in use, just not by design.

At its state, it is active, adaptive, and architecturally unresolved. Structures are makeshift, circulation is informal, and shelter is assembled out of necessity. Yet this spatial looseness is what makes it valuable: the site performs as a threshold, where movement pauses and exchanges happen.

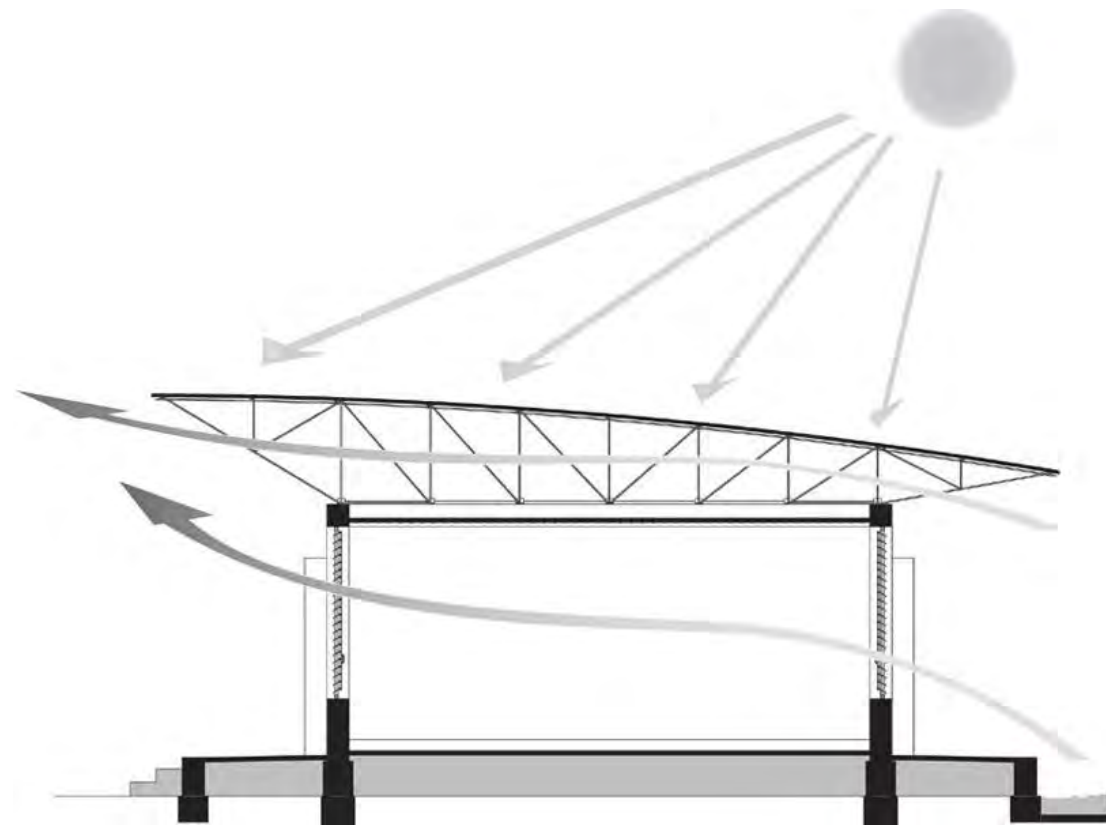
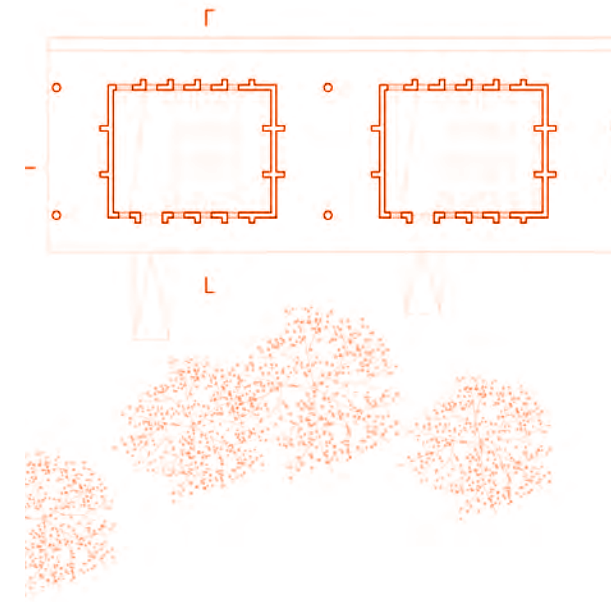
It presents a rare opportunity where a design can acknowledge what already works, and introduce what is missing: clarity, shade, infrastructure, and dignity.

By choosing this site, the project doesn't impose a new order on the informal, it asks how architecture might share authorship with existing users.



## Case Study

Francis Kéré's Gando projects are a strong reference for building in hot, dry climates using passive strategies. The ventilated double roof, deep overhangs, and shaded open spaces reduce heat gain and allow air to flow naturally. These simple elements create comfort without mechanical systems.



The generous roof overhang can create vital shaded outdoor spaces, while a raised metal roof over an earthen ceiling enables passive cooling through cross-ventilation. The use of local materials like stabilized earth blocks grounds the building in its context and improves thermal comfort. This low-tech, climate-responsive approach informs the roof design in this project — emphasizing shade, airflow, and simplicity through structure.

These conceptual studies distill the spatial strategies driving the proposal. Each drawing isolates the idea, how the architecture casts shade, defines thresholds, and guides orientation

### SHADE



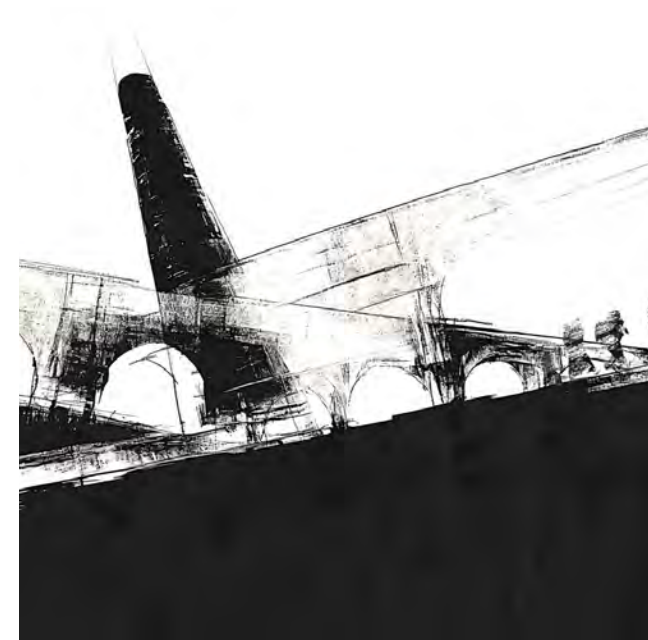
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### THRESHOLD



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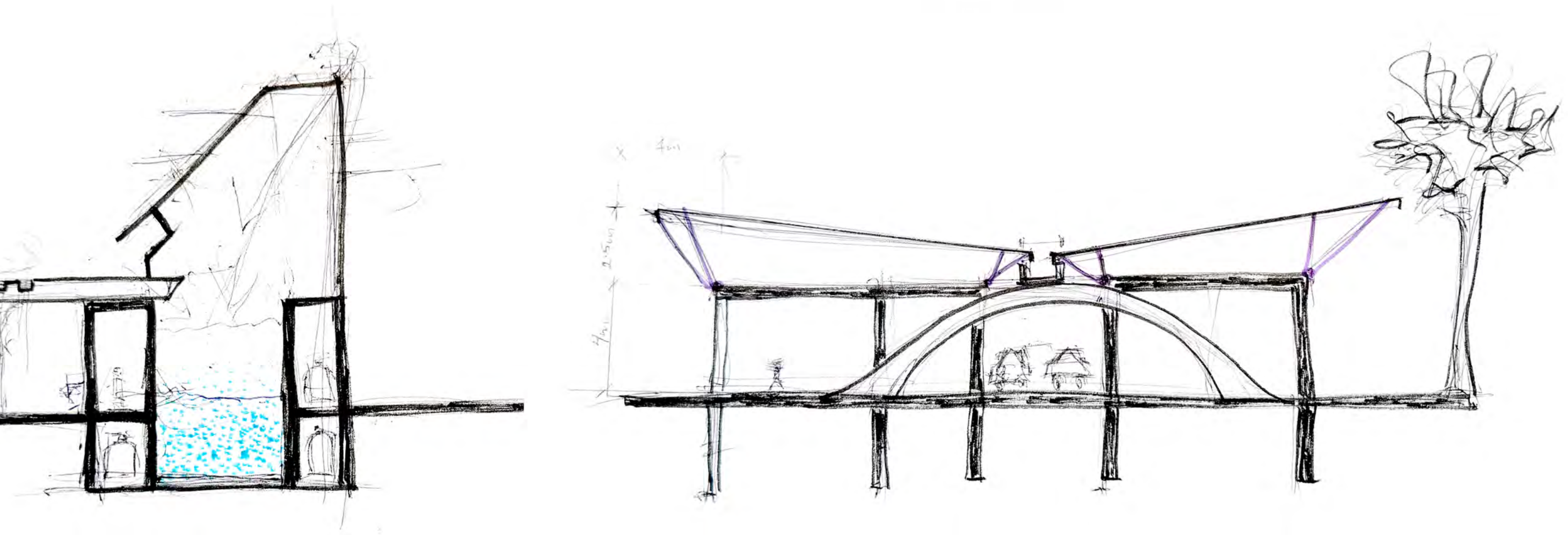
### ORIENTATION



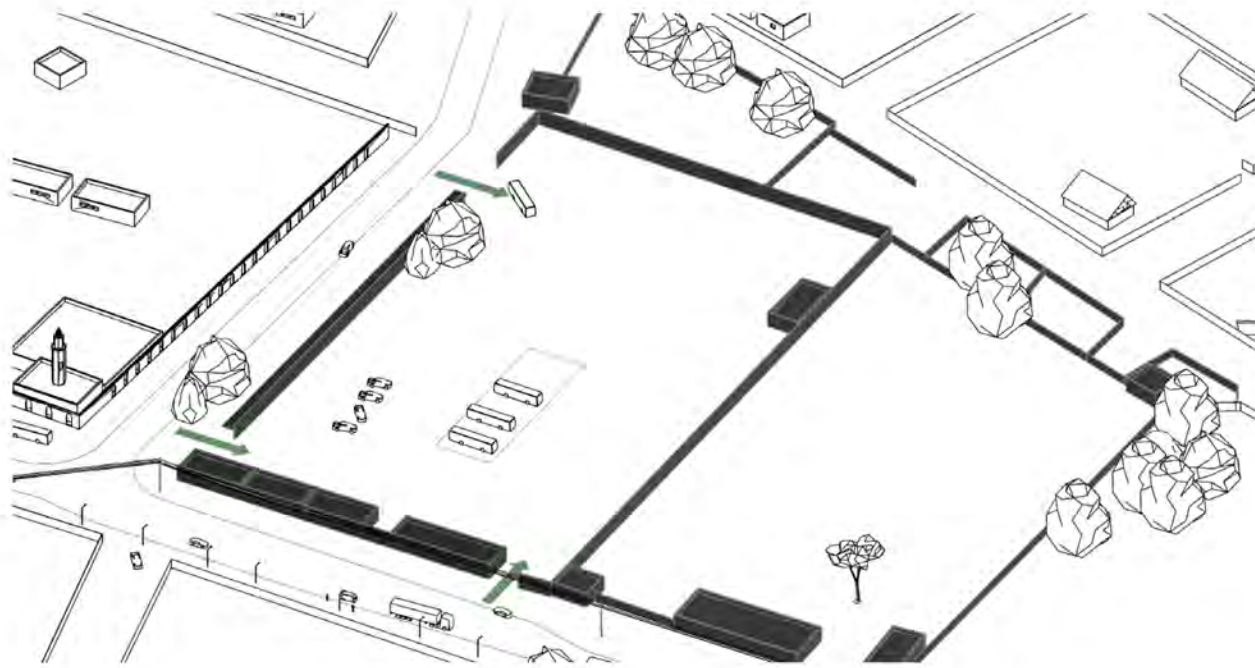
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## COCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

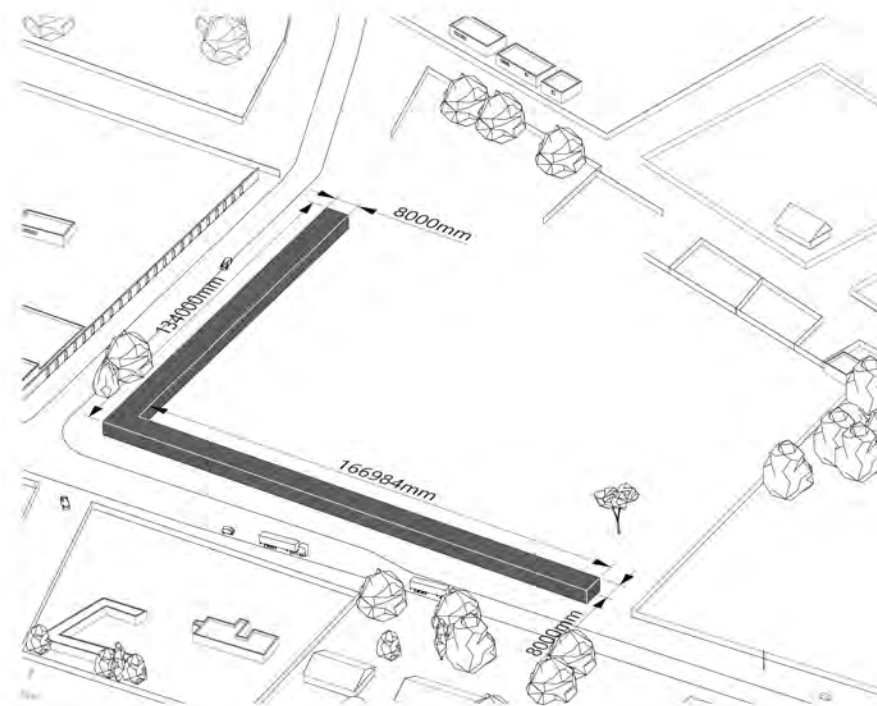
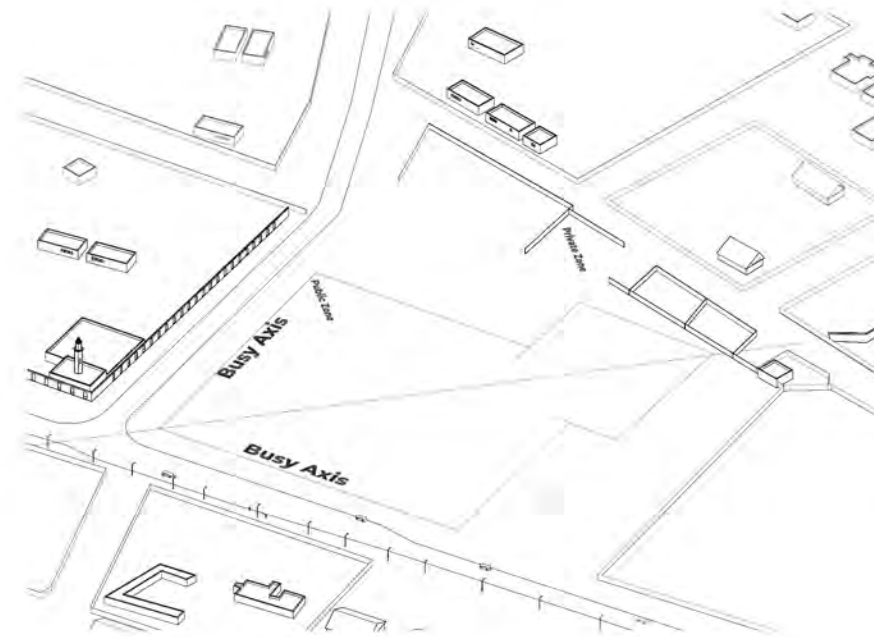
Exploring the integration of passive cooling strategies and structural expression within the transit hub. A water feature is embedded beneath a stepped profile, allowing evaporative cooling to occur as air passes over the surface. On the right, a vaulted masonry structure supports a light-weight folding roof, channeling warm air upwards and creating shaded, ventilated gathering spaces below. The combination of thermal mass, open circulation, and planted surroundings contributes to a comfortable microclimate in a region like Agadez



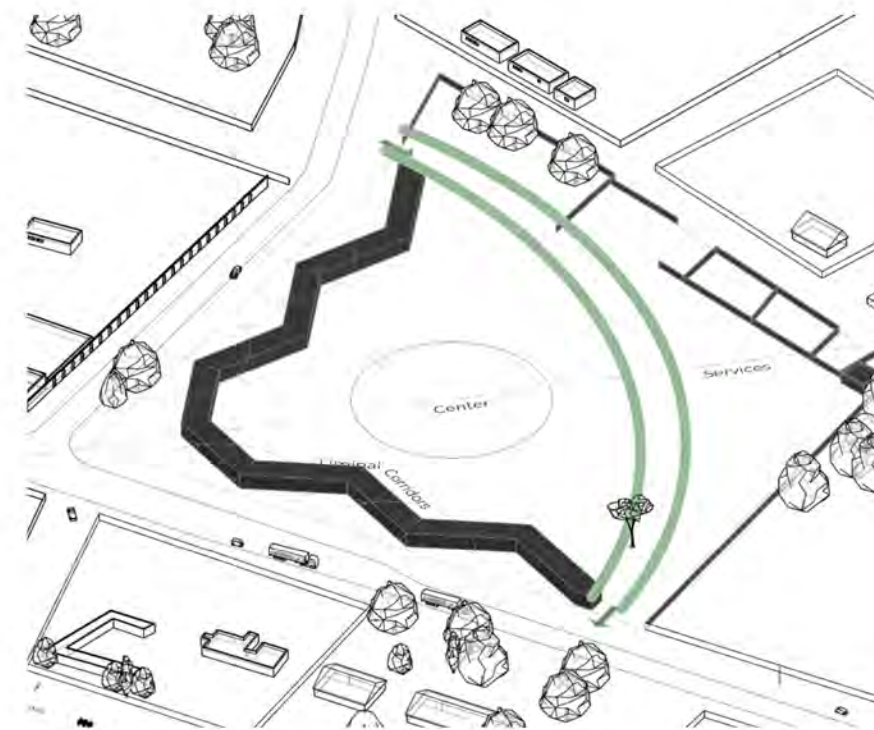
1. Existing Typology



2. Defining the busy axis



3 . Establish the existng borders along the axis



4. Stagger the borders to create a shading effect . Establish the primary entry and exit



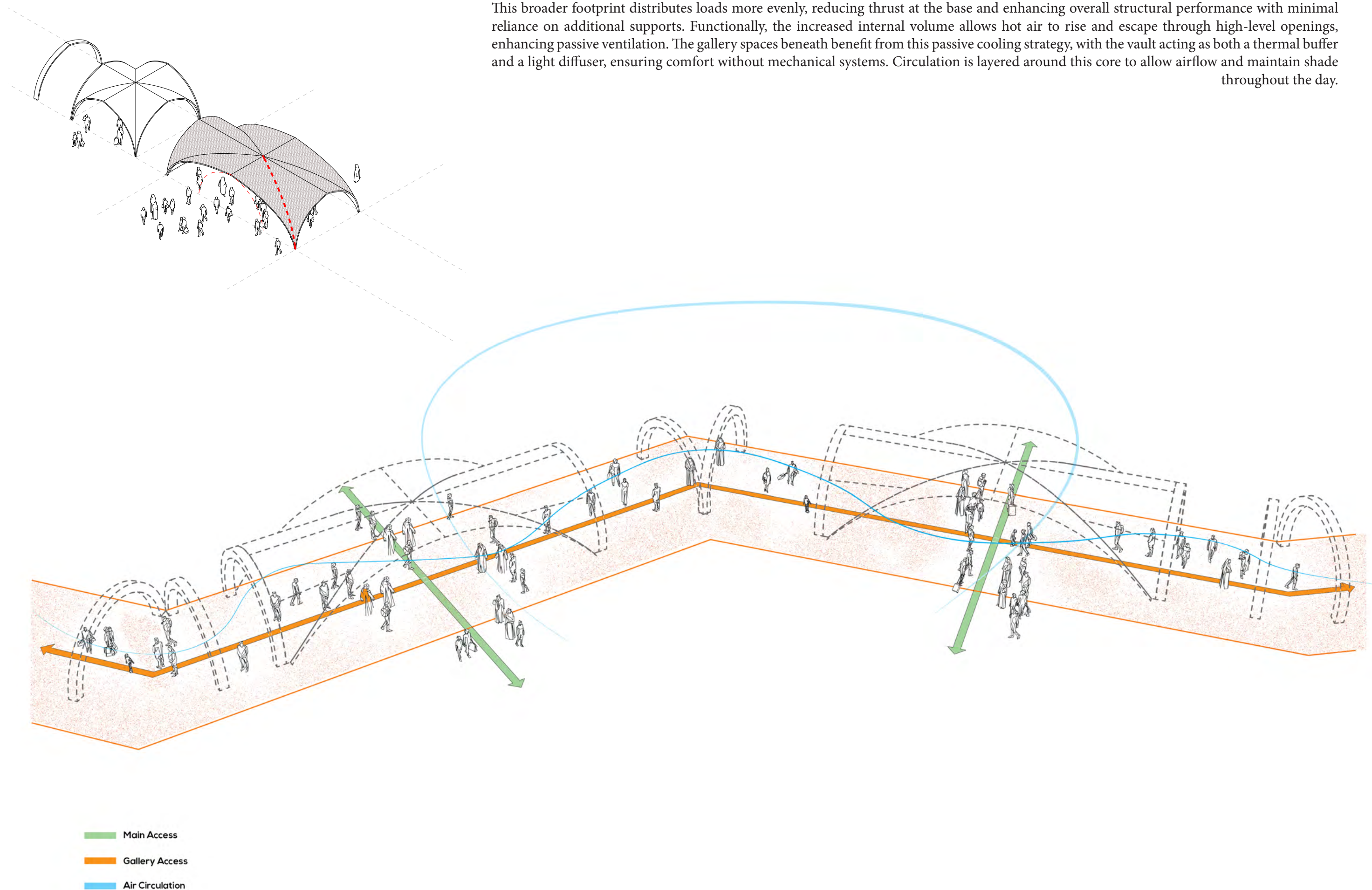
- 1 Liminal Corridors
- 2 Maami markets
- 3 Car Park
- 4 Coach Park
- 5 Info. Center
- 6 Bus Park
- 7 Support Institutions
- 8 The Minaret



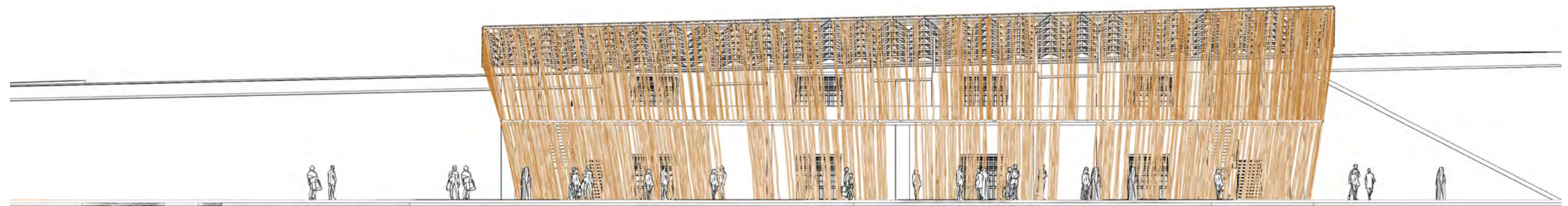
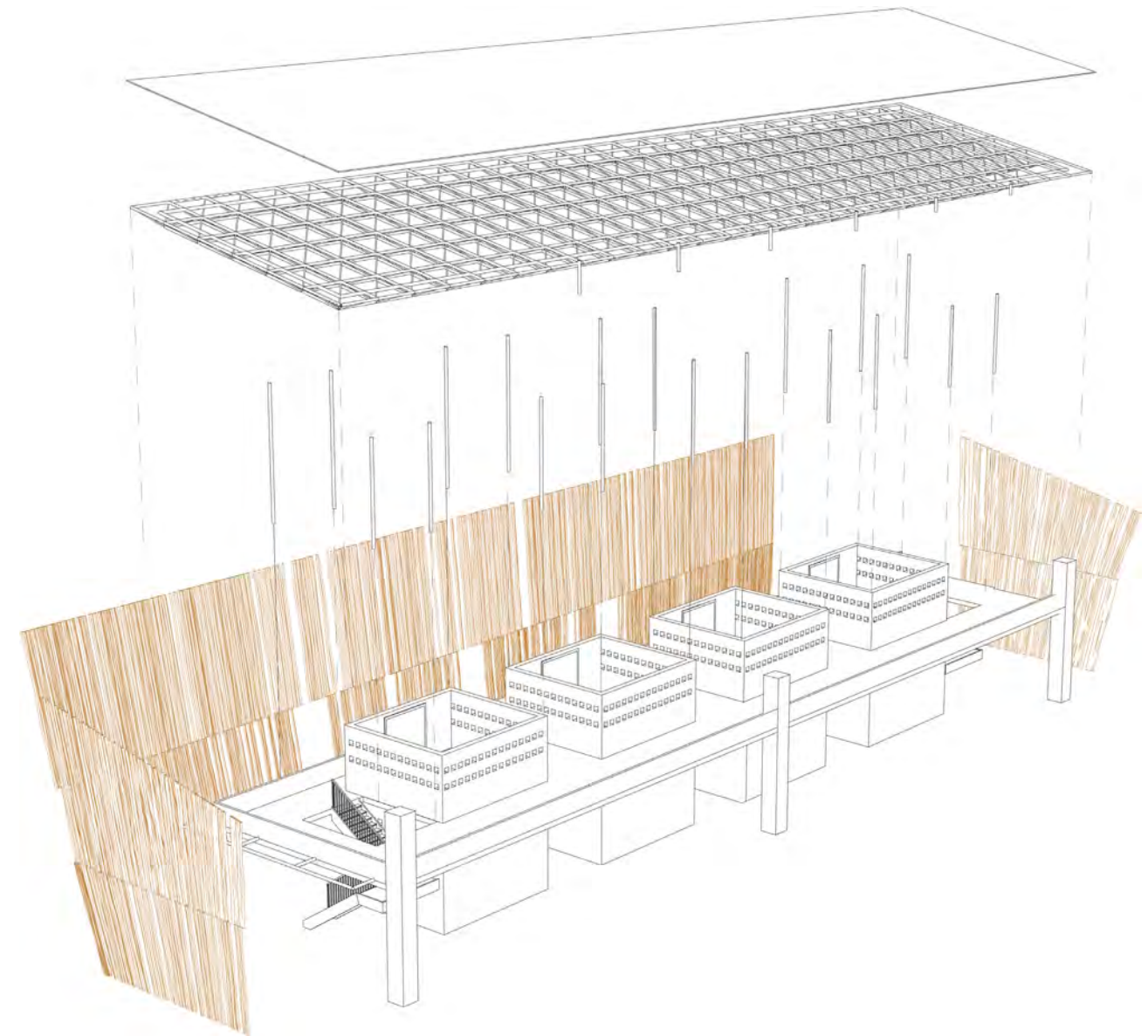
Scale 1: 500



The widened vault structure doubling the typical span was introduced to increase lateral stability while accommodating larger shaded volumes. This broader footprint distributes loads more evenly, reducing thrust at the base and enhancing overall structural performance with minimal reliance on additional supports. Functionally, the increased internal volume allows hot air to rise and escape through high-level openings, enhancing passive ventilation. The gallery spaces beneath benefit from this passive cooling strategy, with the vault acting as both a thermal buffer and a light diffuser, ensuring comfort without mechanical systems. Circulation is layered around this core to allow airflow and maintain shade throughout the day.



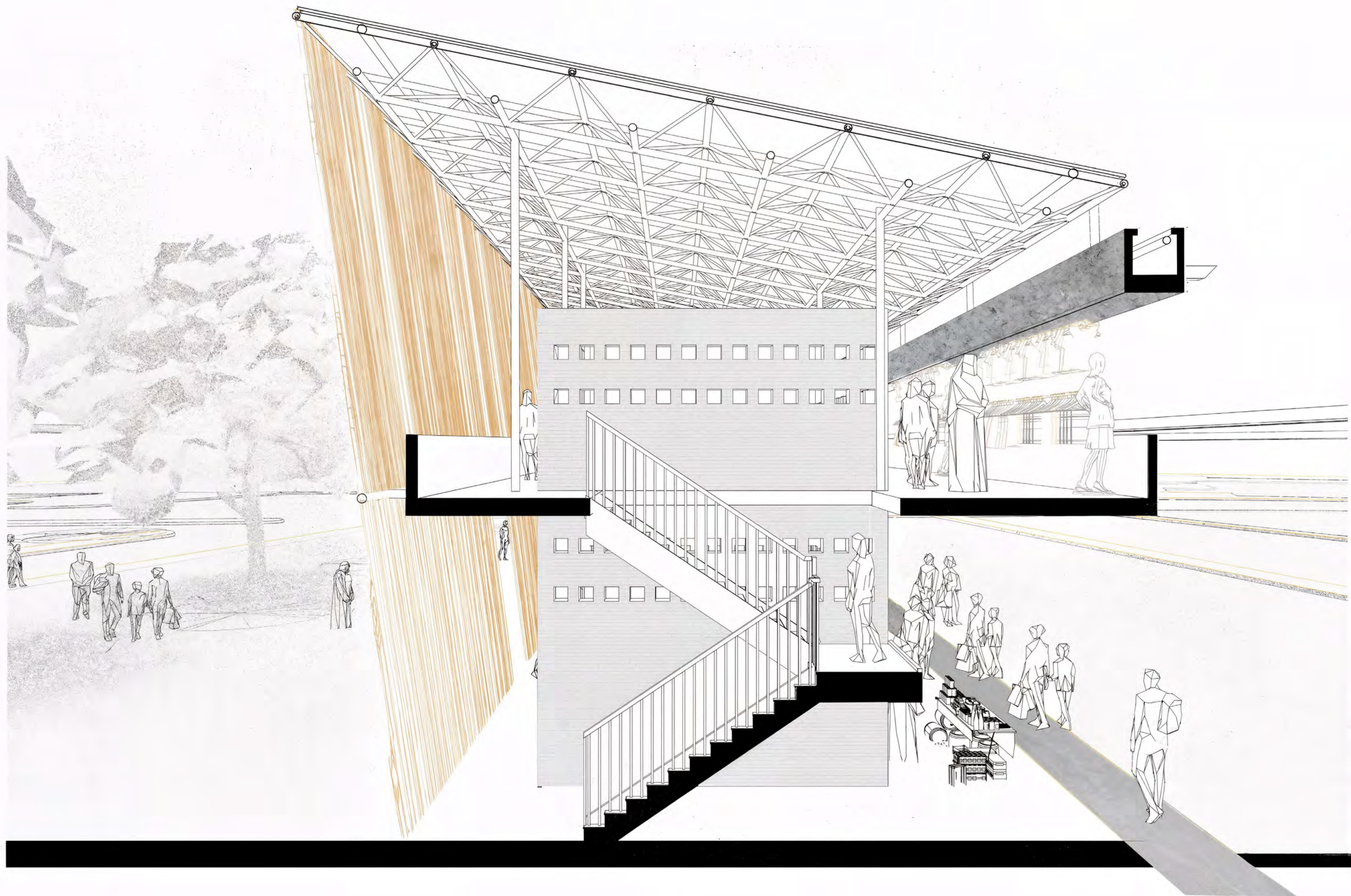
The wooden envelope acts as a protective screen, filtering dust and wind from the harsh desert environment while allowing air and light to pass through. Its vertical density reduces direct solar exposure and minimizes interior overheating, contributing to passive cooling. The structure itself is intentionally low-tech—composed of modular, locally sourced elements that are easy to assemble, repair, or adapt over time. This simplicity makes it both climatically effective and appropriate for the region's construction capabilities, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience.



Elevation

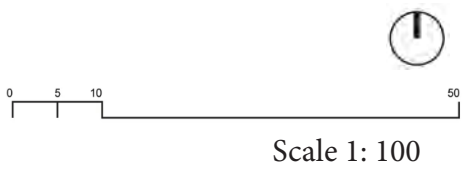


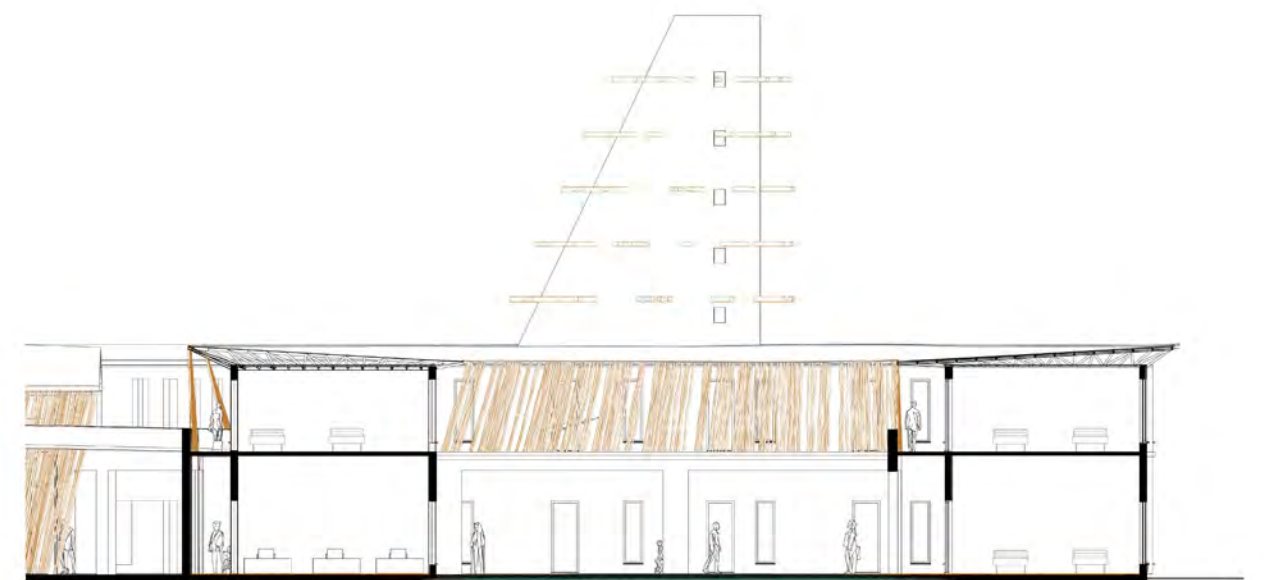
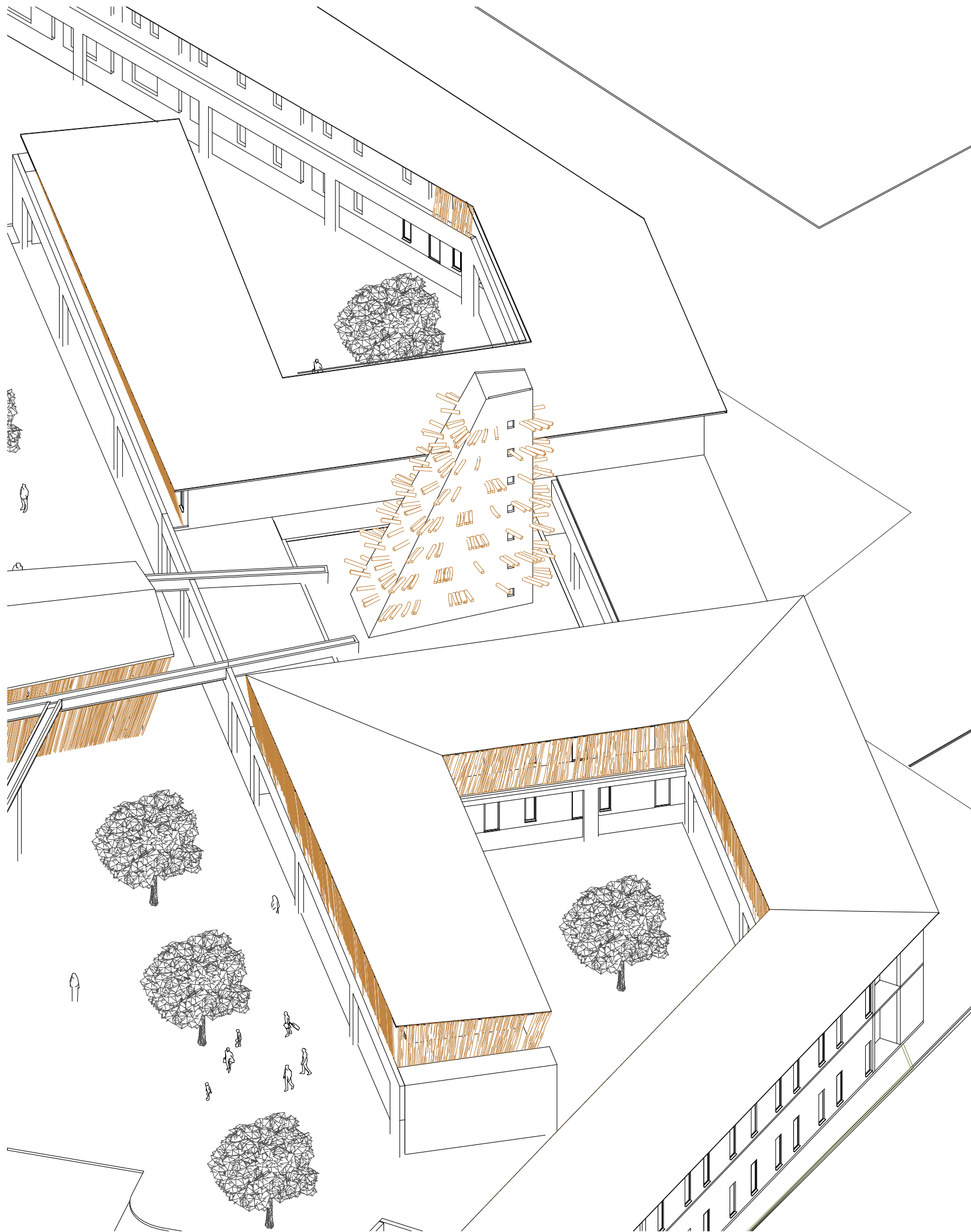
Scale 1: 200



Ground Floor Plan

- 1 Storage Cisten
- 2 Accomodation
- 3 Offices
- 4 Praye Room
- 5 Water Tanks
- 6 Information center

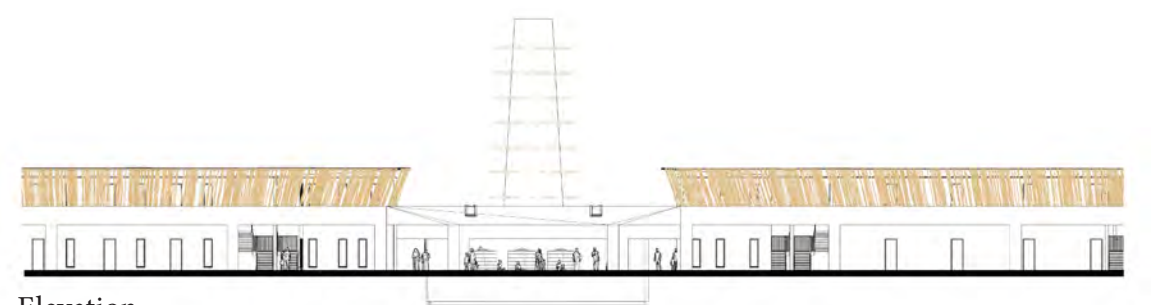




Section



Scale 1: 200



Elevation



Scale 1: 200

