



# THE ODD COUPLE

## An educational microcosm of Belgium

Nobody misses the irony that the country which is headquarters to the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and whose national motto is “Unity makes Strength” is itself, on the brink of breaking up into independent states.

Belgium has a long history of internal social, political, and economic struggle that can be observed through the scope of language. Belgium is ethnically divided into four groups: the Dutch-speaking Flemings in the north, Francophone Walloons in the south, small German cantons in the east, and the bilingual capital of Brussels.

The socio-political structure of Belgium, a whole containing disparate parts, serves as the catalyst for The Odd Couple: two individual secondary schools in Brussels, one Dutch-speaking, the other French-speaking, sharing the same site. The common element shared among the two schools is the public realm. Rather than shunning the public, the public is encouraged to actively engage in activities within the building. In this way the common spaces throughout the building take on the role of serving the needs and desires of both schools and the public, resulting in the necessity for dialogue and cooperation. By filtering program through a socio-political lens, a “school” typology emerges that emphasizes interaction and extramural learning.

### Backstory

Ever since the founding of Belgium in 1830 when French was imposed as the official language over a Flemish majority, Flanders and Wallonia have made for uneasy bedfellows. The Industrial Revolution made Wallonia economically strong due to coal mining and steelmaking. In contrast, the economy of Flanders in the north was based in agriculture, and they had comparatively little political strength. The Walloons flexed their economic and political might in part by banning the Dutch language in government and education, thus limiting the upward social mobility of the Flemish community. This had dire consequences in World War I when French-speaking officers led Flemish soldiers into battle, as many of them died because they couldn’t understand their orders.

After WWII, there was a complete power shift. As Wallonia’s heavy industries began to decline due to increased competition and labor costs, so did Wallonia’s influence. At the same time, finance, high-tech

and service industries began to grow in Flanders, and today, Flanders has the majority of affluence.

Resentments are strong between Dutch and French speaking Belgians. The Flemish resent the Walloons for, in the past, restricting their rights, and also now because they feel that Wallonia is a burden upon Flanders and consumes a disproportional amount of social services. The Walloons on the other hand resent the Flemish because they feel that the Flemish want to horde their wealth at the expense of the Walloons through the dissolution of Belgium.

The language divide among Belgians is pervasive in government and politics. Beginning in the 1960s, through a series of constitutional reforms governing official language use, Belgium has transformed from a unitary state to a federal state with regional and community governments operating under a significant measure of political autonomy. These regional governments are established within formal linguistic borders. In Flanders, the official language is Dutch, in Wallonia it is French, and in Brussels, both languages are official.

Linguistic borders also define Belgian political parties. In Belgium, no party exists as a bilingual or multilingual party. They are either wholly Dutch, French or German. In some instances, political parties were divided into two separate parties with the same political agendas, with the only difference being that they operate in different languages.

The political and governmental linguistic divides in Belgium highlight how difference is emphasized rather than collegiality. This is further underscored in Belgian society. In 1962 the Catholic University of Leuven in Flanders was divided into two autonomous Dutch and French groups under a common governing structure. Throughout the 1960s tensions arose due to Francophone academic staff receiving special privileges and the French-speaking academic community’s disdain for their Dutch-speaking neighbors. Student demonstrations increased in violence, and in 1968 the dispute was resolved by making the Dutch-speaking section an independent Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, and moving the French-speaking Université catholique de Louvain to a new campus in Wallonia just south of Brussels. Even the library was split in two with half the volumes staying in Flanders, and half moving to Wallonia.

Multi-lingual interaction is the exception rather than the rule. While Brussels is a global city where most everyone seems able to cooperate, in Flanders and Wallonia, media and education are linguistically exclusive. Throughout Belgium’s history political and social decisions have worked only to reinforce a linguistic divide that is pulling Belgium apart. Perhaps this quote from a November 13, 2007 article in the Los Angeles Times sums it up best. Thierry Brassine, who attended the Université catholique de Louvain in the 1970s and never mixed with a Fleming admitted “It’s only when I started working that I encountered many Dutch-speakers.”

Belgium has yet to form a new coalition government since the last one collapsed in April. In fact, the only other country to go longer without a government is Iraq. In 2007 after the last general election, it took Belgium over nine months to form a government. And this past June, a nationalist party won the majority of parliamentary seats in Flanders. With each successive day it seems more and more likely that Belgium will break up. Rather than putting their heads together for a solution, the Flemish and Walloons are butting heads and neither side is willing to budge.





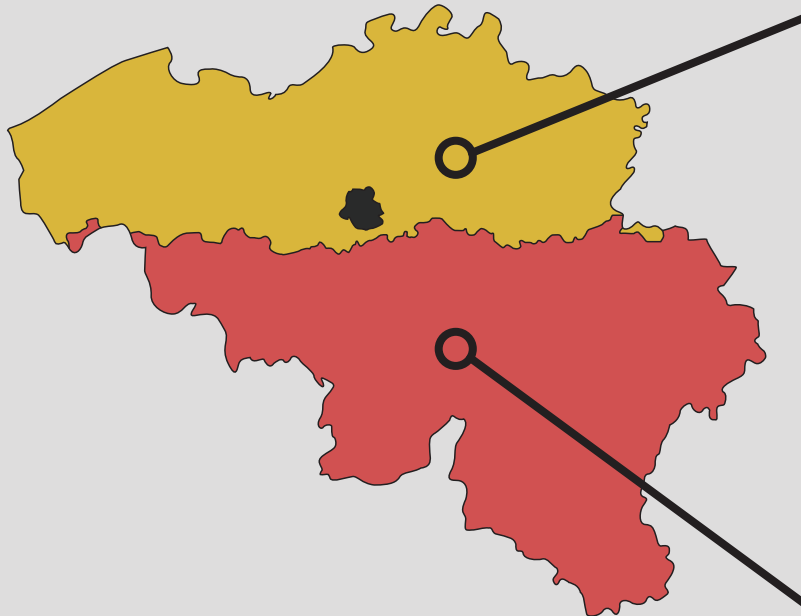




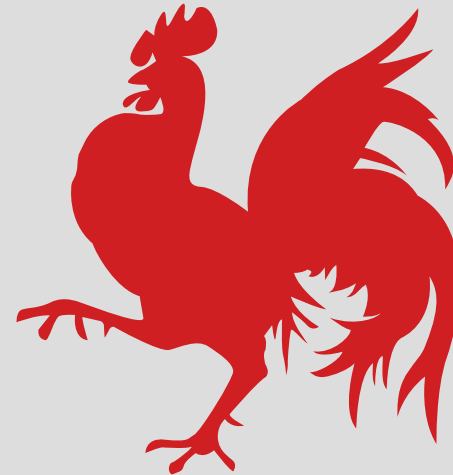




Flanders (Flemish)



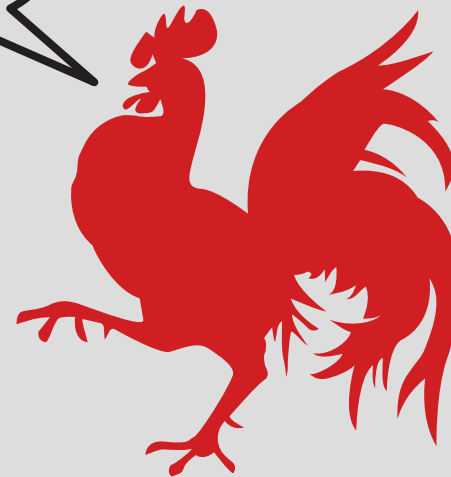
Wallonia (Walloon)



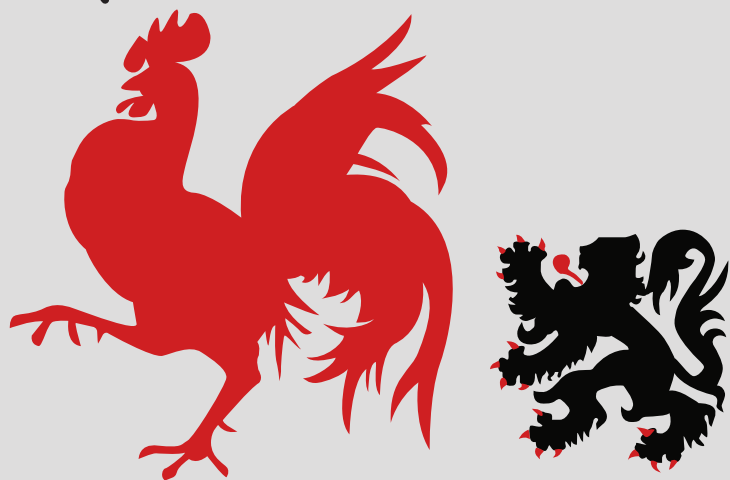
Ik spreek Nederlands.



Je parle français.

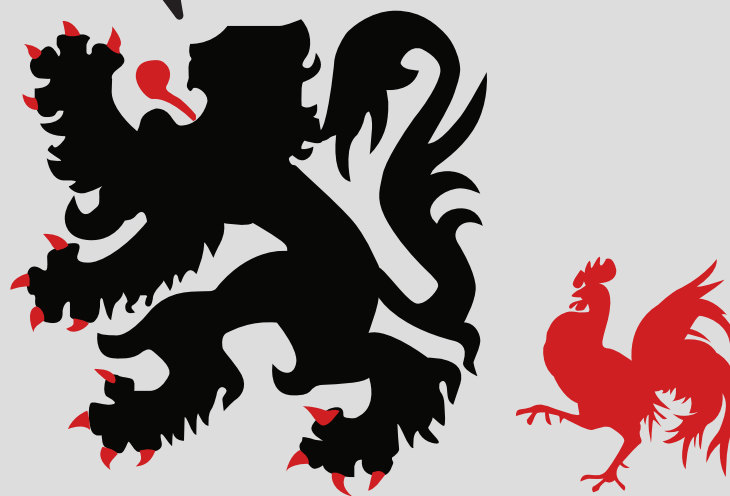


Je suis plus fort.

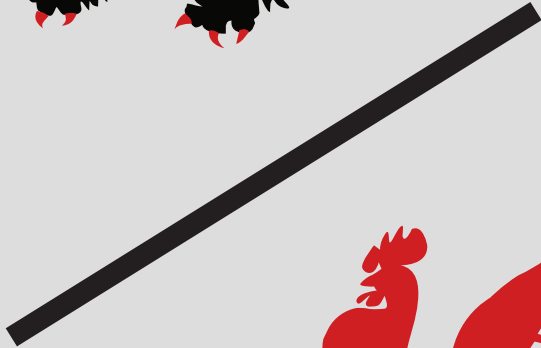


Pre-WWII

Nee, ik ben sterker.



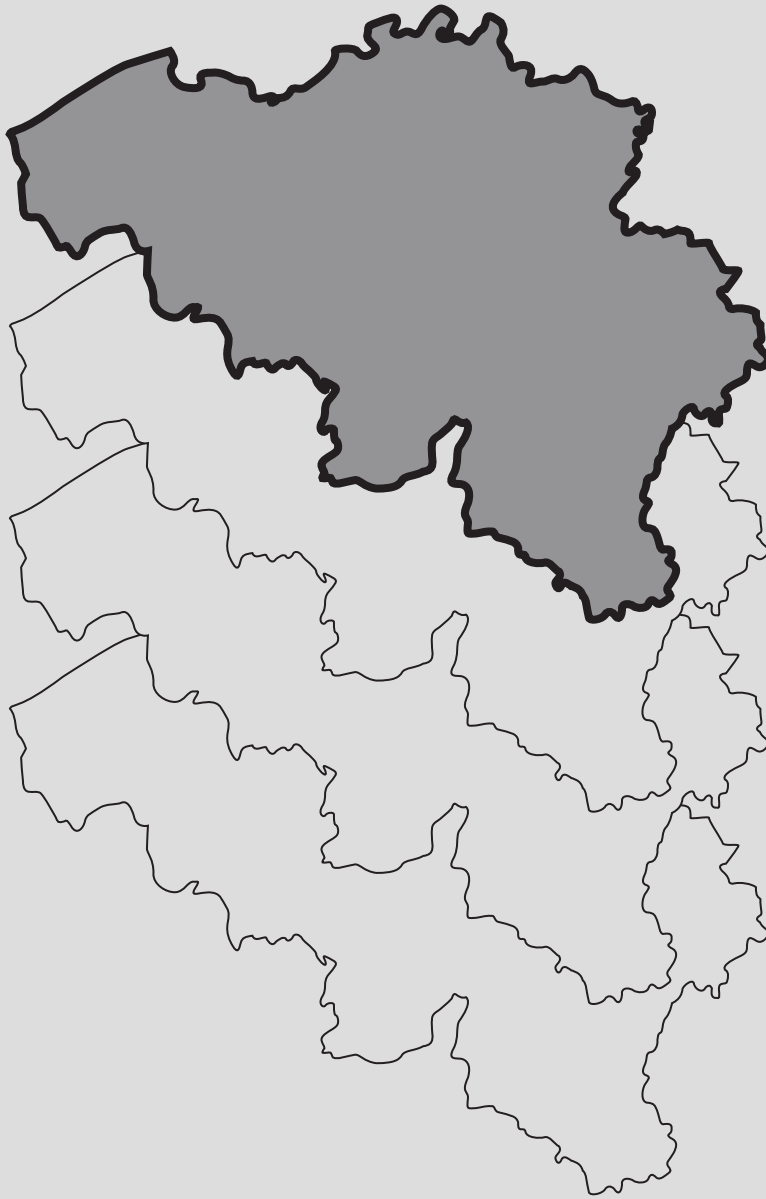
Post-WWII



## Federal Government

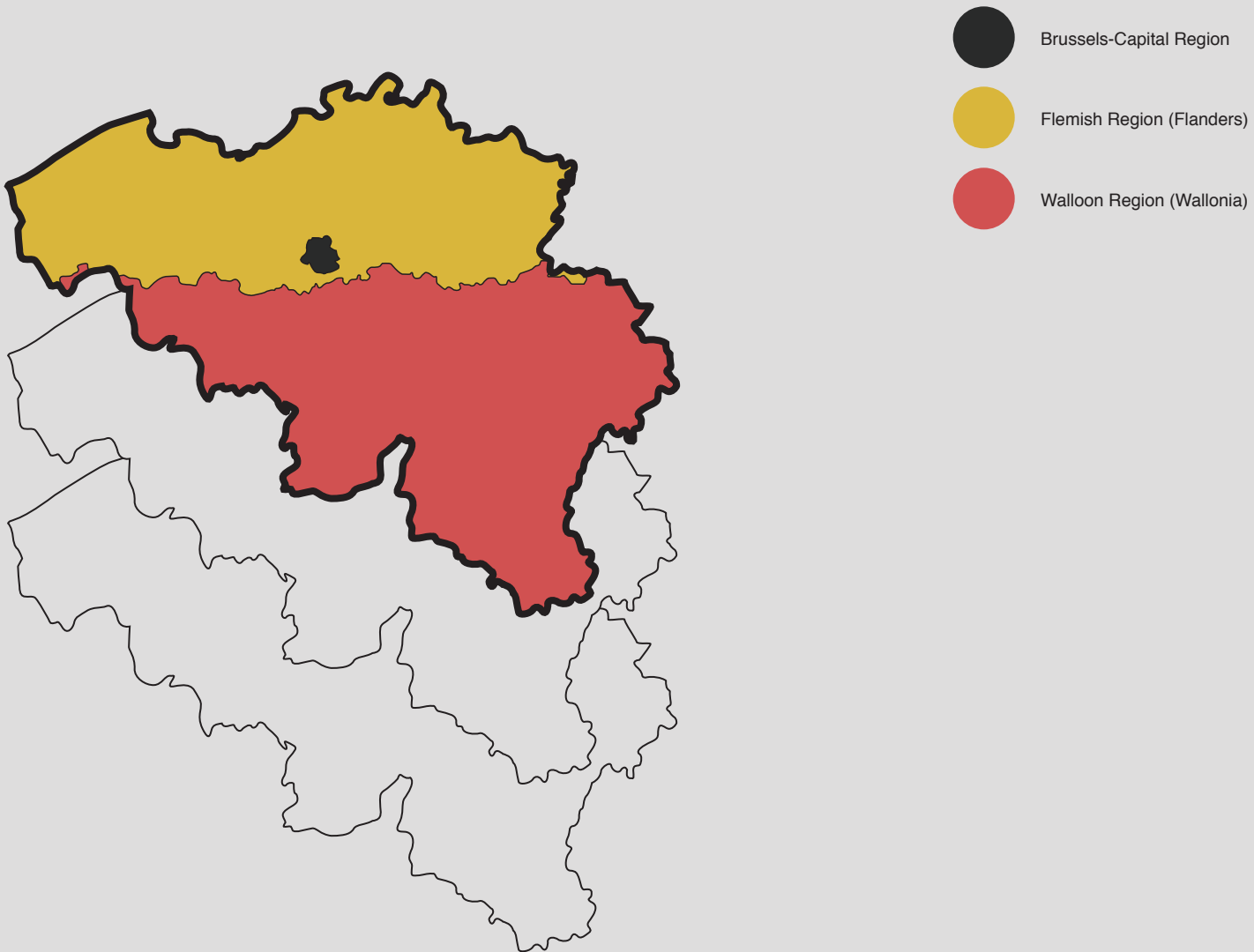


Federal government

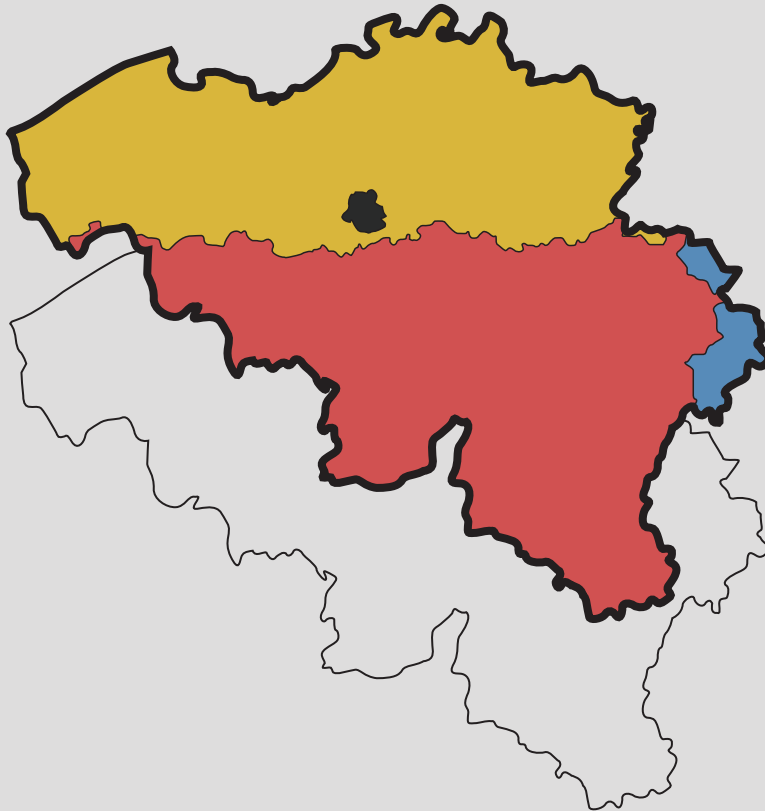




## Regions







## Communities



# Linguistic Borders

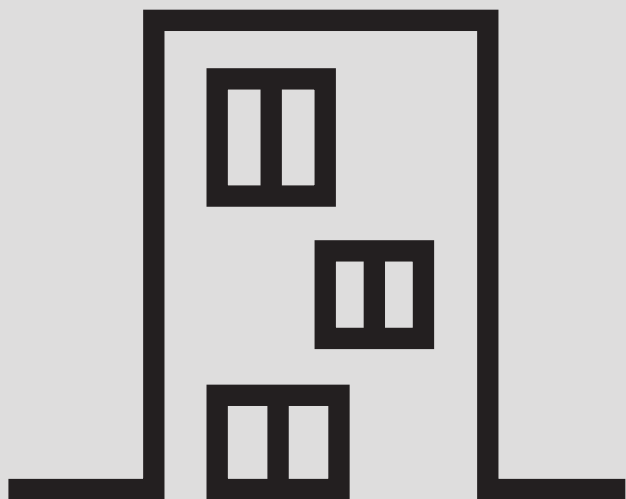
## Ethnic Groups

-  Fleming and Walloon (statutorily bilingual area)
-  Fleming (speaking Dutch)
-  Walloon (speaking French)
-  German

## Protected Minorities

-  Flemings in Walloon Region
-  Walloons in Flemish Region
-  Germans in Walloon Region





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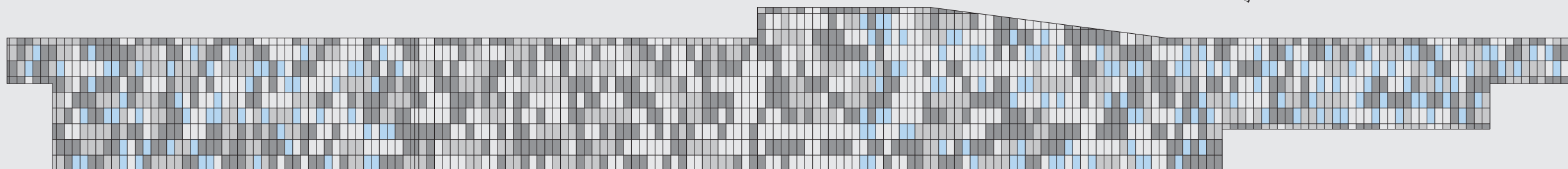
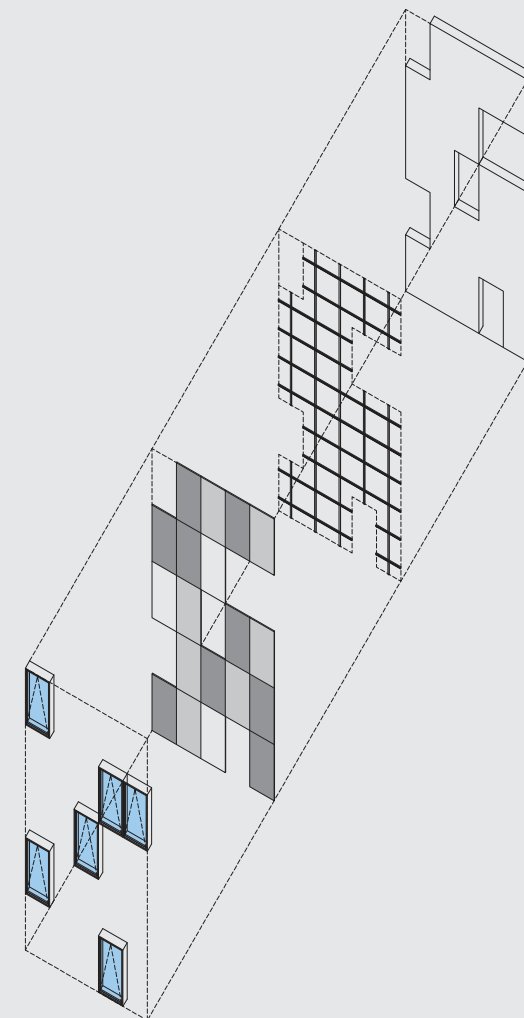
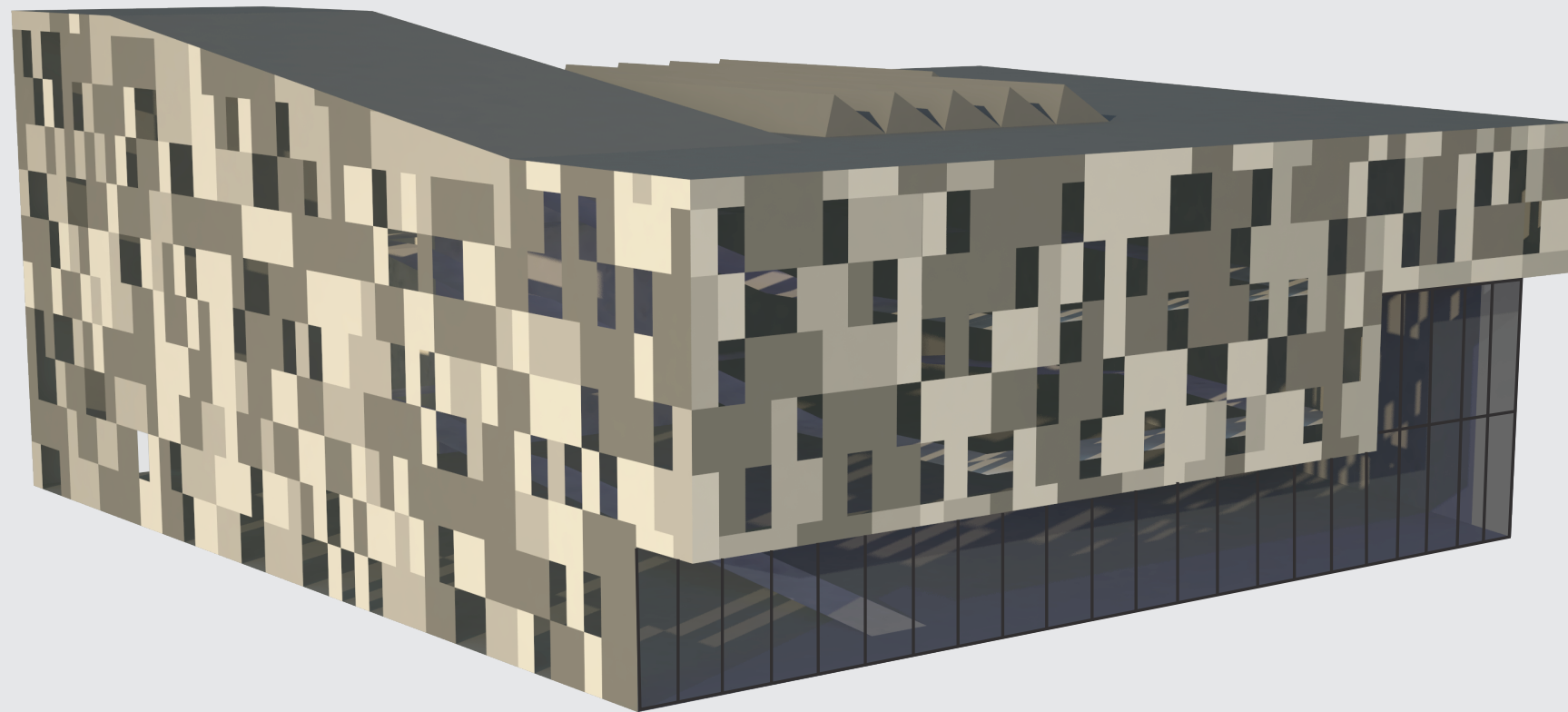


1830	A provisional government declared independence from the Netherlands.	
1831	Constitutional monarchy established.	
	The Industrial Revolution made Wallonia economically strong due to coal mining and steelmaking. In contrast, the economy of Flanders in the north was based in agriculture, and they had comparatively little political strength. The Walloons flexed their economic and political might in part by banning the Dutch language in government and education, thus limiting the upward social mobility of the Flemish community.	
1930	Flanders and Wallonia legally became unilingual regions.	
	Beginning in the 1960s, through a series of constitutional reforms governing official language use, Belgium has transformed from a unitary state to a federal state with regional and community governments operating under a significant measure of political autonomy.	
1962	Formal linguistic borders established along with elaborate rules protecting minorities in linguistically mixed border areas.	
1968	Student unrest resolved by splitting Catholic University of Louvain into two separate universities - one Dutch and the other French.	
1970	Flemish and Francophone cultural councils established with authority in matters of language and culture. Each of the three economic regions - Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels - was granted a significant measure of political autonomy.	
1984	German language community established.	
1989	Constitution amended to give additional responsibilities to the regions and communities. The most sweeping change was the devolution of educational responsibilities to the community level. As a result, the regions and communities were provided additional revenue, and Brussels was given its own legislative assembly and executive.	
1992	Belgium ratified Maastricht Treaty on European Union.	
1993	Constitution reform changed Belgium from a unitary state into a federal state.	
	As Wallonia's heavy industries began to decline due to increased competition and labor costs, so did Wallonia's influence. At the same time, finance, high-tech and service industries began to grow in Flanders, and today Flanders has the majority of population and affluence.	
2008	Belgium's King Albert II refused to accept the resignation of the prime minister and his government, calling on key officials to redouble efforts to resolve a longtime disagreement over more self-rule for the country's Dutch and French speakers.	
2010	Belgian Premier Yves Leterme's government collapsed after negotiations broke down to resolve a long-simmering dispute between Dutch and French-speaking politicians over a bilingual voting district.	
2010	Belgium voters gave a stunning win in general elections to the New Flemish Alliance, a separatist party that wants Dutch and French-speakers to end years of acrimonious linguistic disputes, or go their own way and break up Belgium.	

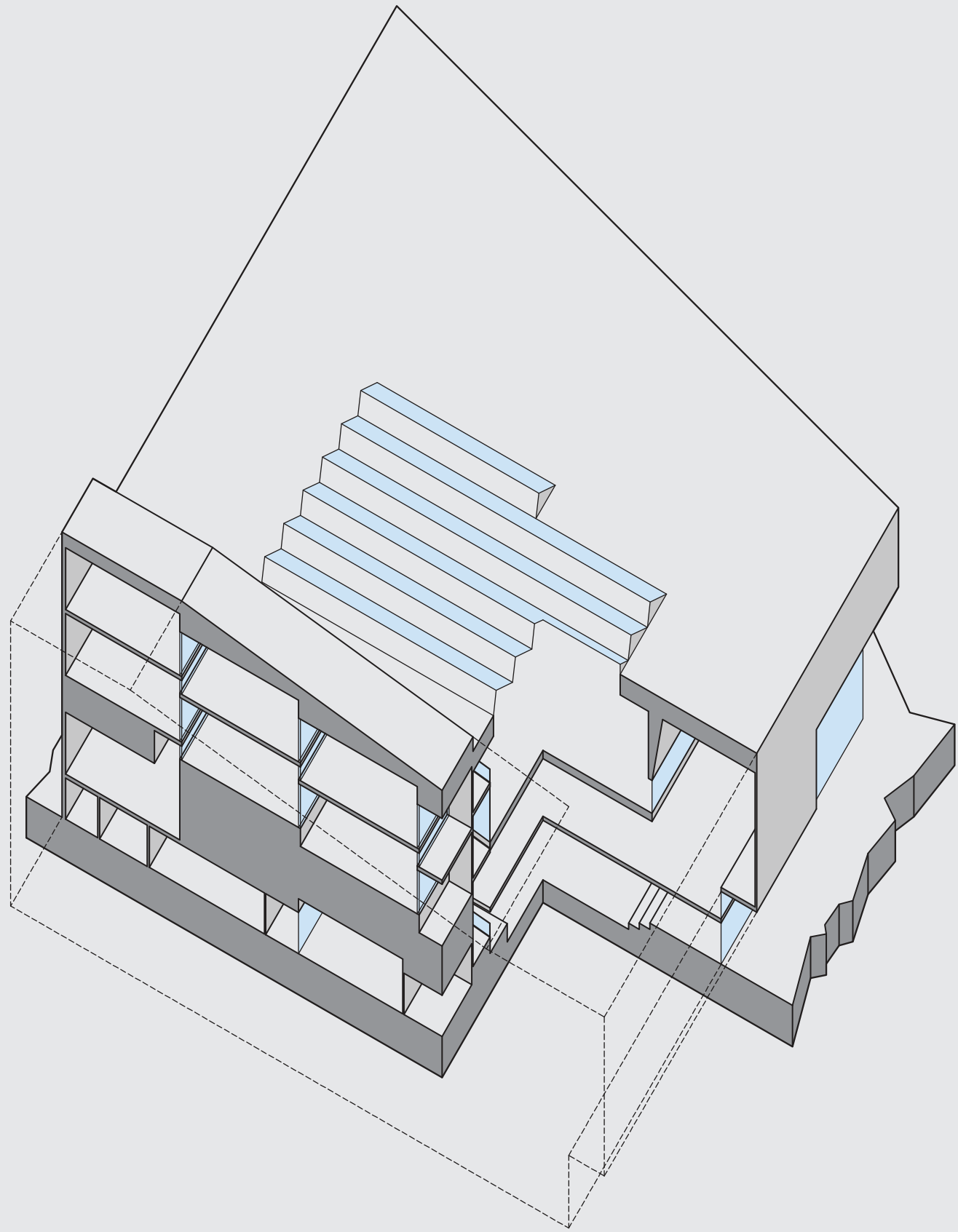


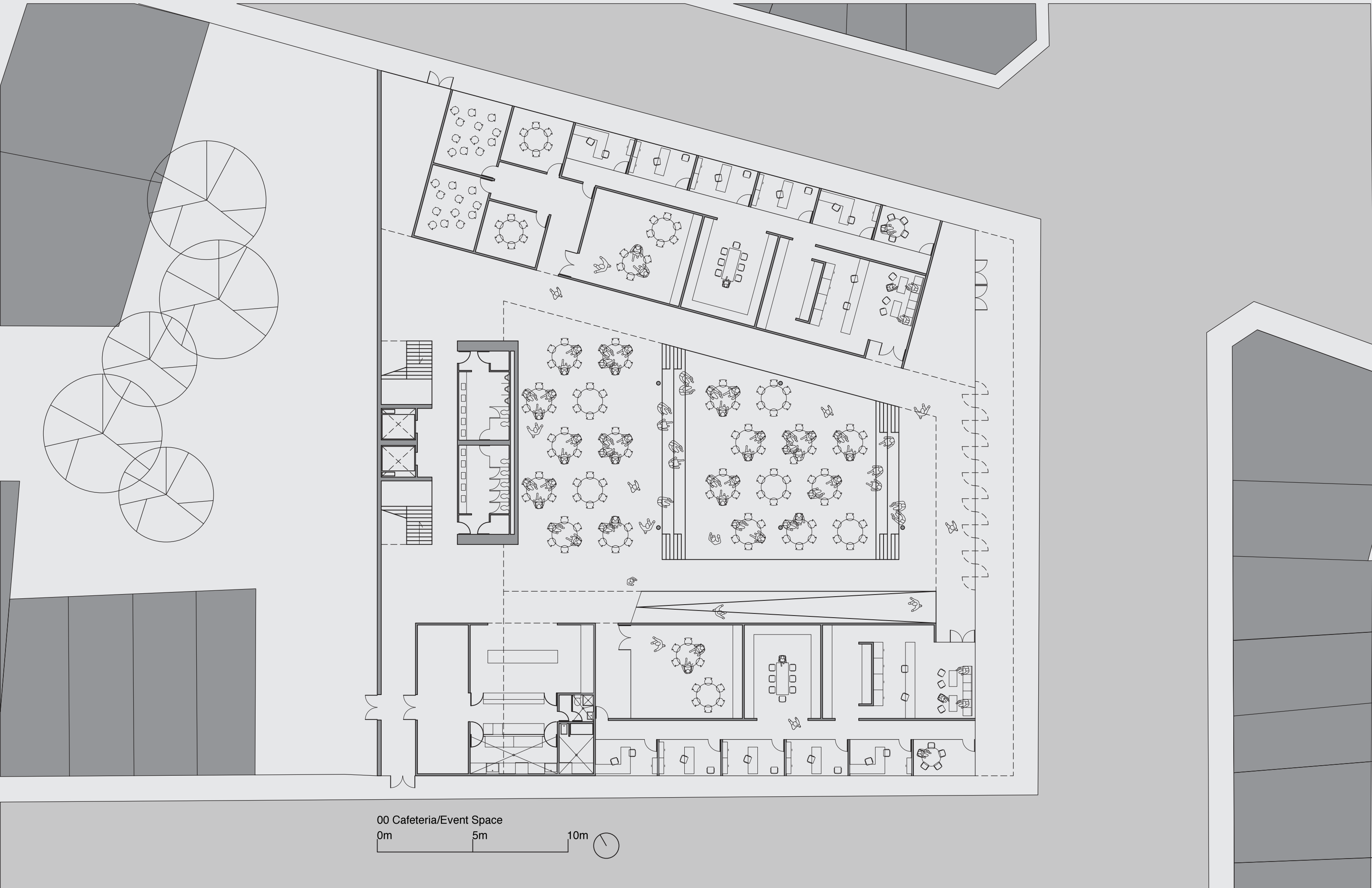












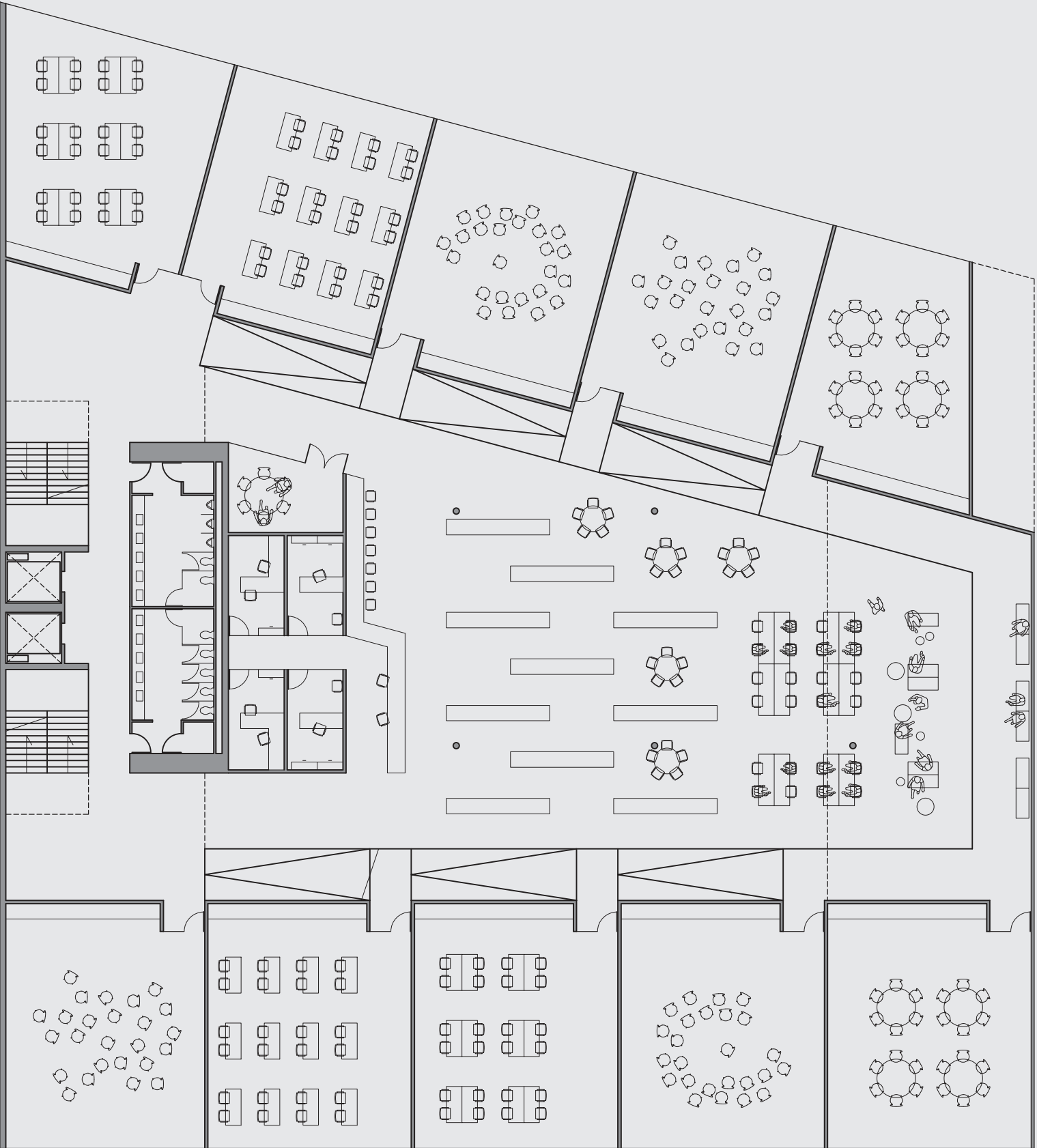
00 Cafeteria/Event Space

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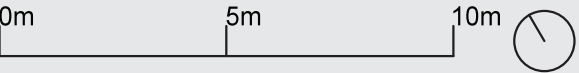
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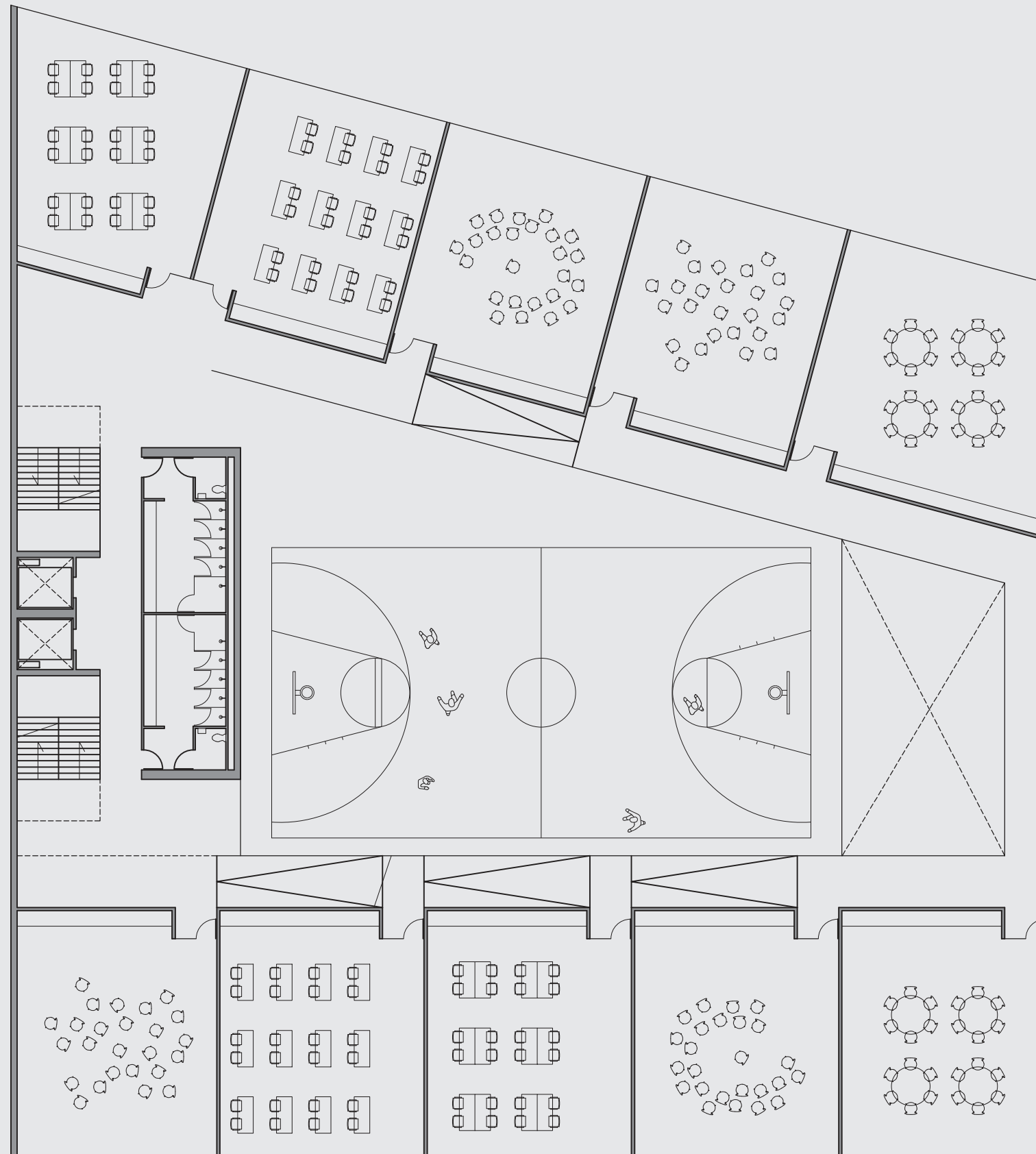
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01 Library





02 Gymnasium/Flex Space

