

**Labirint church and
Mihai Ionescu school**



Location Labirint Street, Sector 3, Bucharest

Function Seventh-day Adventist Church, middle school, and high school

Site area 1 336 m²

Built area 813 m²

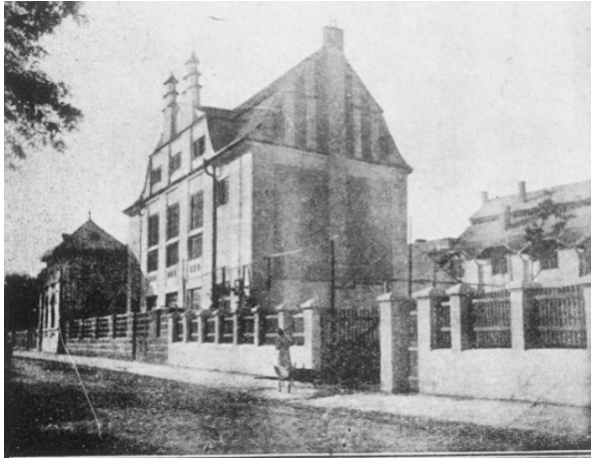
Total floor area 4 107 m²

Floors Basement + Ground Floor + Mezzanine + 2 Floors + Partial 3rd Floor

Height +19.20 m (accent at +22.0 m)

Building volume 16,280 m³





Church building around 1960 and 2022

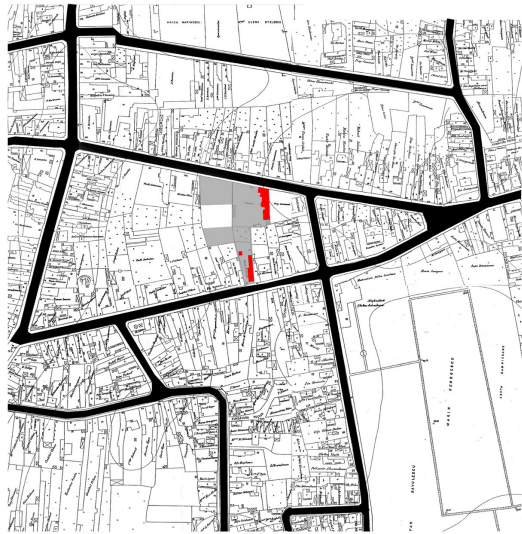


Church interior around 1960 and 2022 - the wooden railing is visible - the only original element kept after modernisation

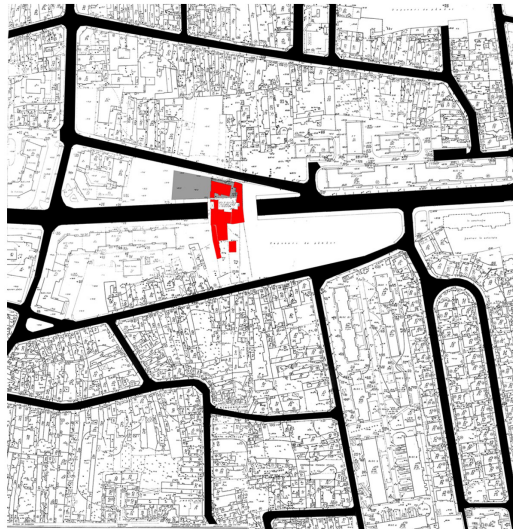
CONTEXT / HISTORY

For over a century, 116 Labirint Street has nurtured a vibrant community, hosting a **Seventh-day Adventist church, school, kindergarten, publishing house, nursing program, and others**. However, **urban changes** and systematisation in the 1990s fragmented the property and led to the **demolition** of many original buildings, leaving only the church and two annexes, misaligned on the lot and unfit for coherent redevelopment.

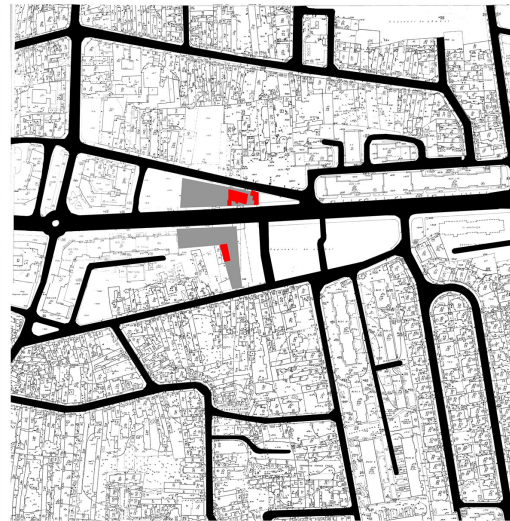
Built in the interwar period using reinforced concrete, the church suffered from a degraded, **unsafe structure** and **inappropriate renovations** over time—insulated facades, PVC windows, and modern interiors stripped it of its original character. A technical assessment revealed **major degradation** and seismic risk, making safe use impossible.



Plan 1911



Plan 1990



Plan 2022



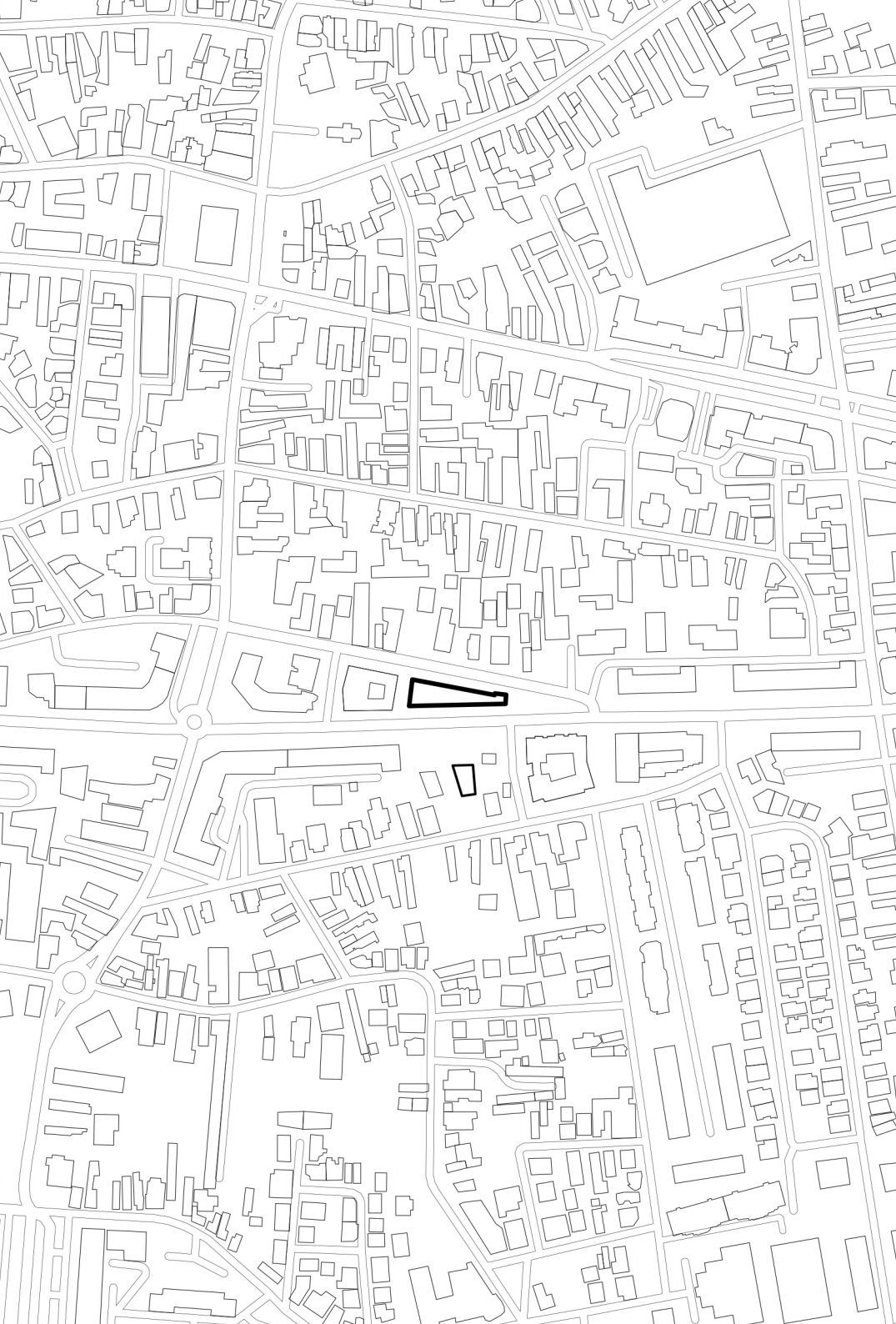
Plan 2025

Evolution of the site

Still, many community members—deeply attached to the church as a place of life events and shared memory—resisted the idea of **demolition**. After a long process of dialogue and reflection, the decision was made: to build a new, safe, and functional building, **honoring memory not through physical preservation but through continuity of purpose**.

A joint project was launched with the “Mihai Ionescu” **School**, which **once operated on the site**, envisioning a contemporary structure that remains true to the spirit of the place—**open to the community, rooted in history, and ready for the future**.

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Location plan



Site plan - it includes future development

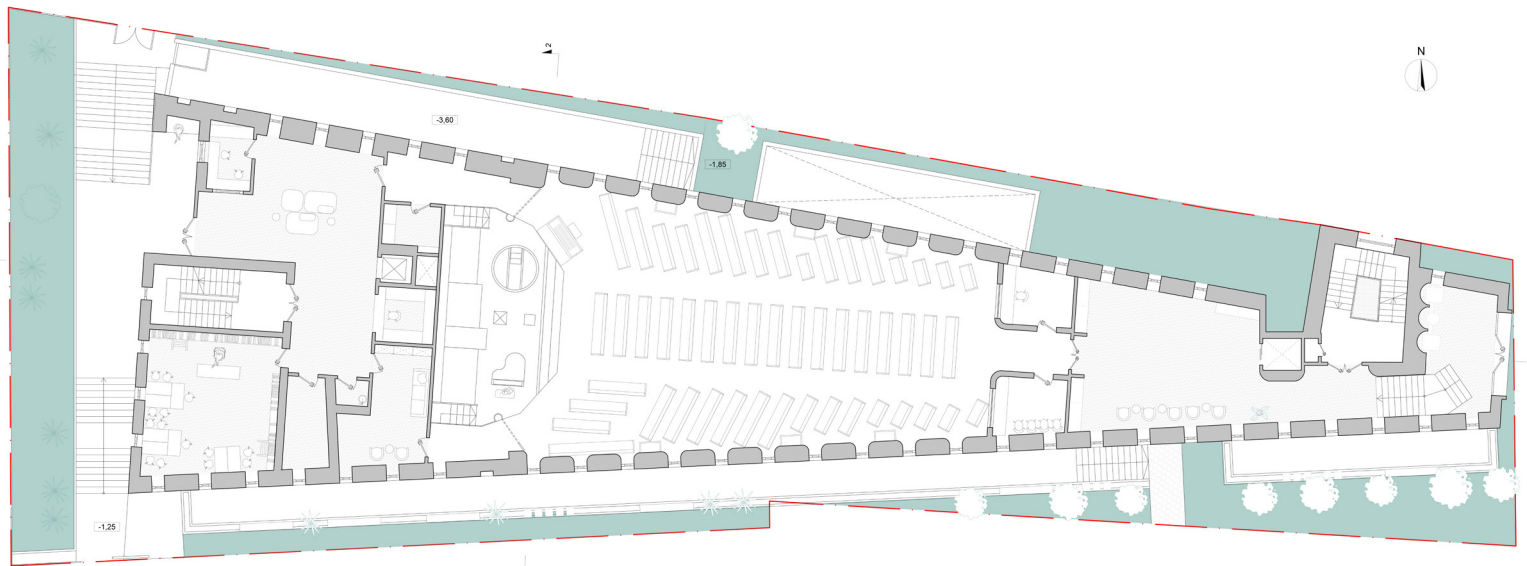
FUNCTIONAL ZONING

The school functions are spread across all levels: the basement accommodates **science labs** (biology-physics, computer science, chemistry) and a **sports hall**, all naturally lit via perimeter light courts, with floor-to-ceiling windows. The mezzanine hosts administrative spaces, including **offices, secretariat, kitchen**, and a **boardroom**. The 1st and 2nd floors contain **classrooms** for middle and high school, an **art studio**, and the **teachers' lounge**. The 3rd floor includes classrooms as well as complementary educational functions—**greenhouse, culinary workshop, counseling room, study hall**, and extracurricular activity areas. Additionally, the walkable **rooftop terrace** enriches the outdoor experience, offering a space for community and student activities. The arrangement of rectangular classrooms creates more than just **corridors**—it results in dynamic, varied zones ideal for children's interaction and development. Spanning one or two levels with corners and open areas, this flexible environment encourages collaborative play, idea exchange, and group work.

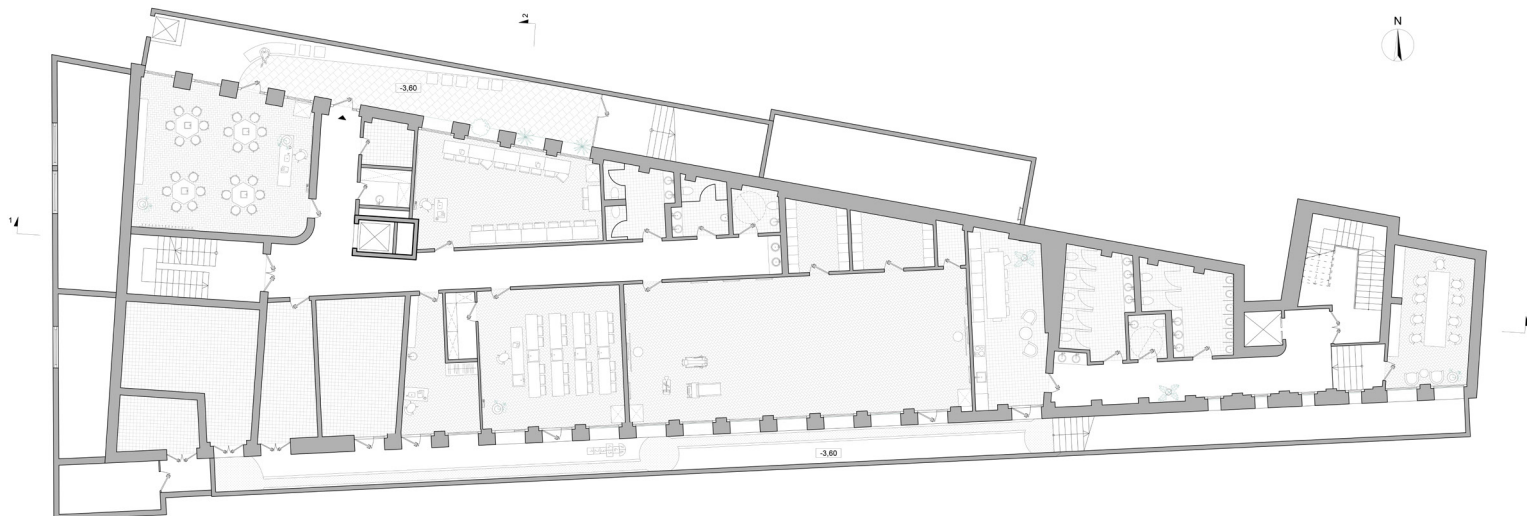
The church occupies the ground floor, where a **foyer** and the **main hall** serve both religious services and school festivities. The annex rooms for the church, such as **restrooms, study rooms, rehearsal spaces, diaconal** and **committee rooms**, are located on the basement and mezzanine levels. The church has a **separate entrance** from the school.



Computer lab / School corridor



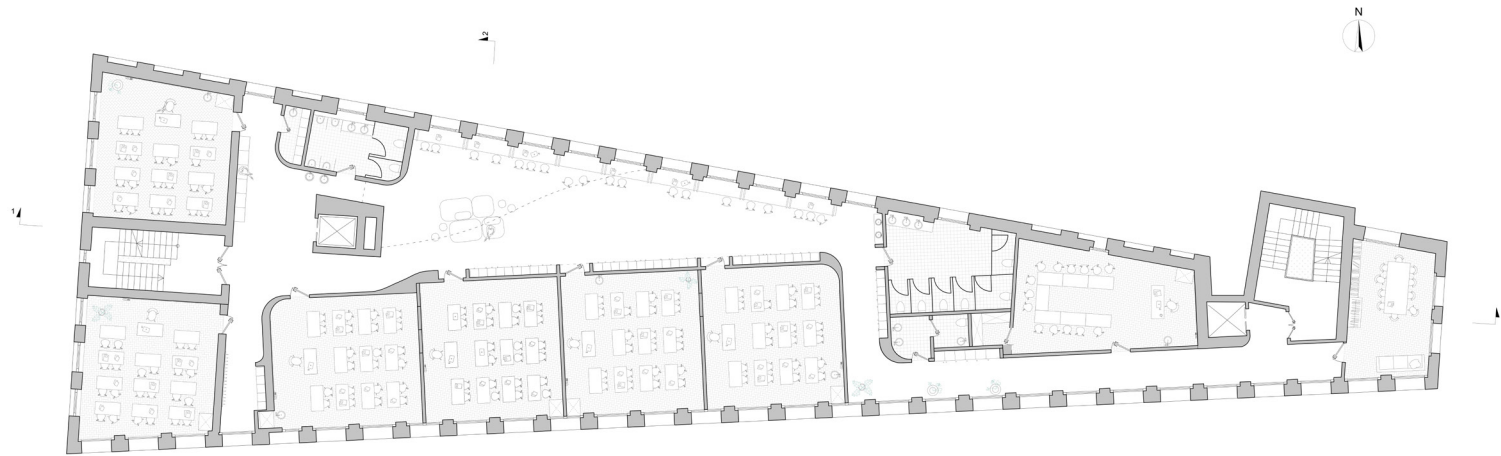
Ground floor plan - school foyer, library, main hall, church foyer



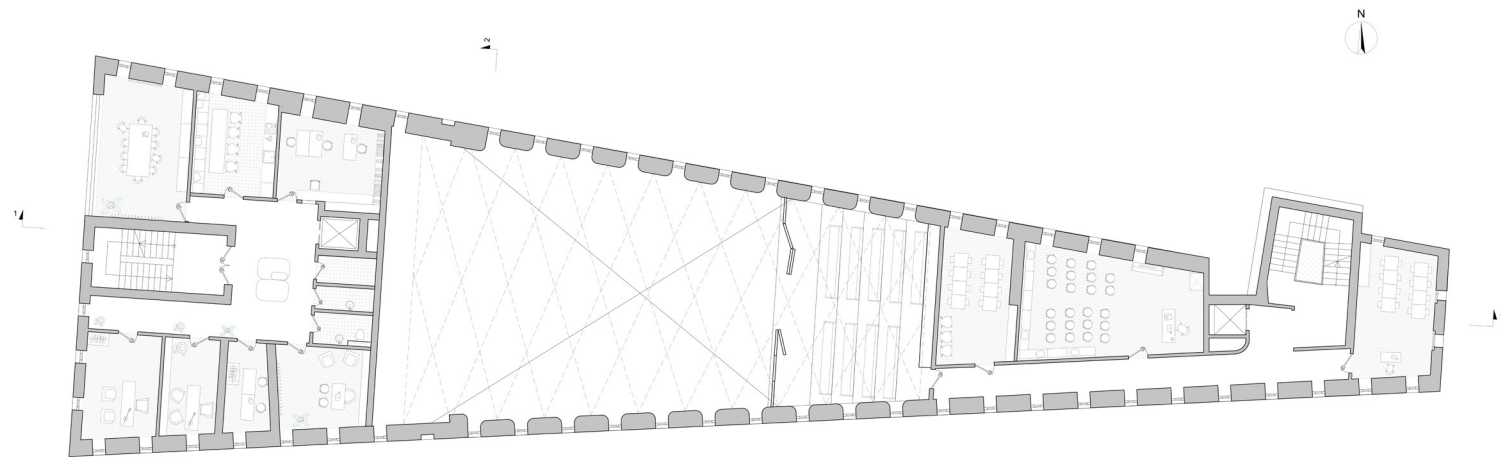
Basement - technical rooms, school labs, sports hall, church annex rooms / light courtyards

0 1 2 5

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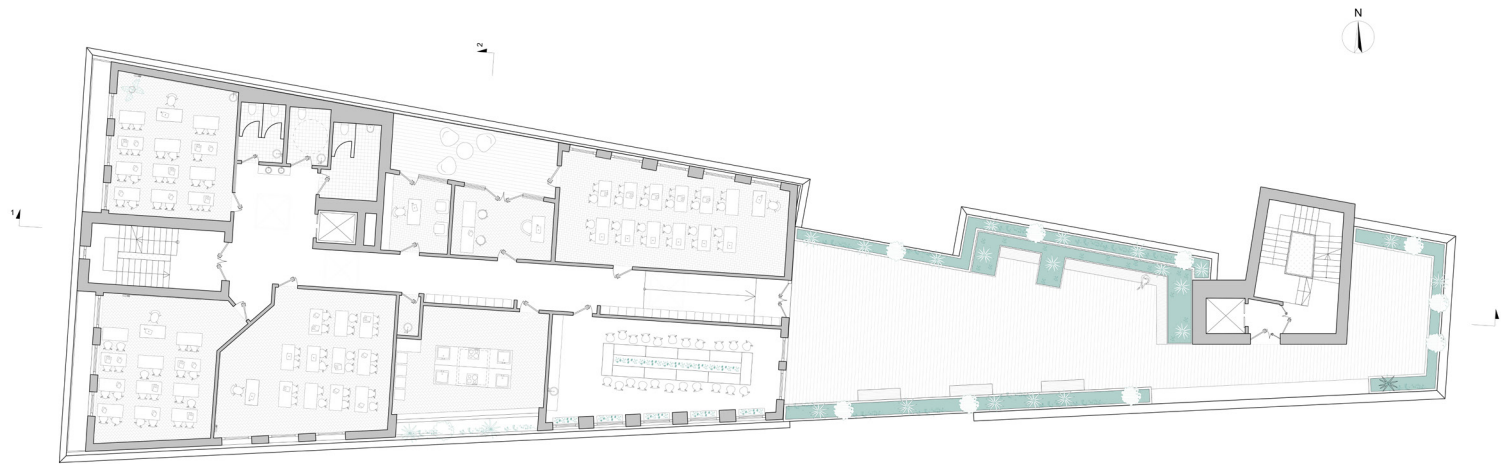


First floor plan - classrooms, art studio, teacher's lounge

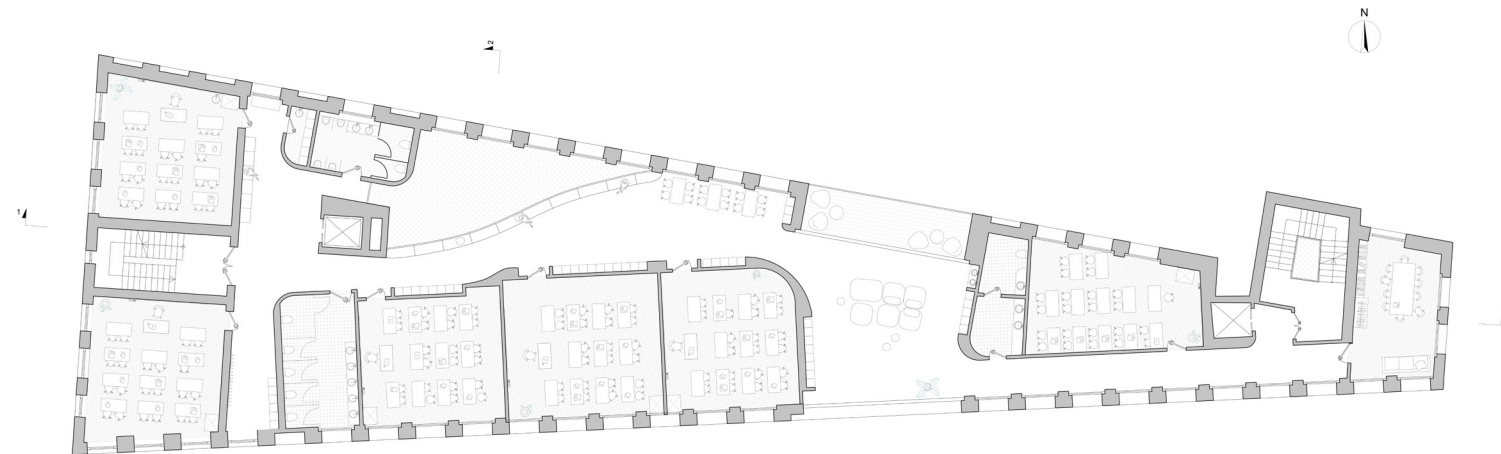


Mezzanine floor plan - school administrative spaces, main hall balcony, church annex rooms

0 1 2 5



Third floor plan - classrooms, counseling office, study room, cooking workshop, greenhouse, terrace



Second floor plan - classrooms, teacher's lounge



Greenhouse / rooftop terrace

SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental Sustainability

The project regenerates a **previously built-up urban plot**, avoiding urban sprawl and making optimal use of a difficult, irregular site. The site has been transformed from a fully paved surface into one that now integrates ground-level **vegetation** as well as planted areas along terraces and façade elements. The vegetation is perennial, climate-adapted, pollinator-friendly, and mostly local. Passive design strategies—such as the orientation of classrooms, natural ventilation, and underground courtyards—maximize **daylight** and **thermal comfort**. **Energy efficiency** is enhanced through solar panels on technical terraces, ventilated façades, LED lighting with presence sensors, automatic taps and a centralized heating/cooling system with room-specific controls. Ventilation systems supply **fresh air** based on indoor oxygen levels. A **selective waste collection** system and **sustainability education** for students further support responsible environmental behavior.

Material Sustainability

The project uses durable, low-maintenance materials to **reduce long-term operational demands**. It also incorporates a strong ethos of **reuse and memory**: bricks from the original church were salvaged and rebuilt into a memorial wall, the original wooden balcony balustrade now serves at the entrance staircase, **a new organ from three old ones**, extending the life and story of each component.

Functional Sustainability

Labirint is designed to adapt over time and reduce unnecessary spatial duplication. Key rooms have been conceived as **multi-functional**, with movable partitions, flexible furniture, and adaptable installations that allow the same spaces to serve both school and church programs at different times. The main hall has its own **separate climate control** and ventilation system, activated only when in use, while the rest of the building operates through a centralized system with room-specific temperature control.

Social Sustainability

Community involvement was continuous. The building is **fully accessible**, featuring two elevators, accessible restrooms, and an assistive audio system for people with hearing impairments. The architecture supports **character-building and civic engagement** among students - the culinary workshop, located on the top floor, is used weekly by student groups who help prepare lunch, later served to classmates who wish to purchase it. All proceeds are donated to social causes or extracurricular activities. In a neighborhood where access to quality education is limited, the project meets a real need, offering a brand-new school, already **operating at full capacity**, and a gathering space for the entire community.

Economic Sustainability

Labirint is a financially resilient project, supported primarily through **donations** from the community, school-organized events, and partner churches. **Efficient resource systems** such as solar power, zoned climate control, and sensor-regulated lighting and water use keep long-term operational costs low. The flexible design supports **additional revenue streams**: the main hall and cafeteria can be rented for events, and already attracts artists interested in performing, responding to a real demand in Bucharest, and the school's consistently high demand (with a long waiting list) ensures **financial viability** well into the future.



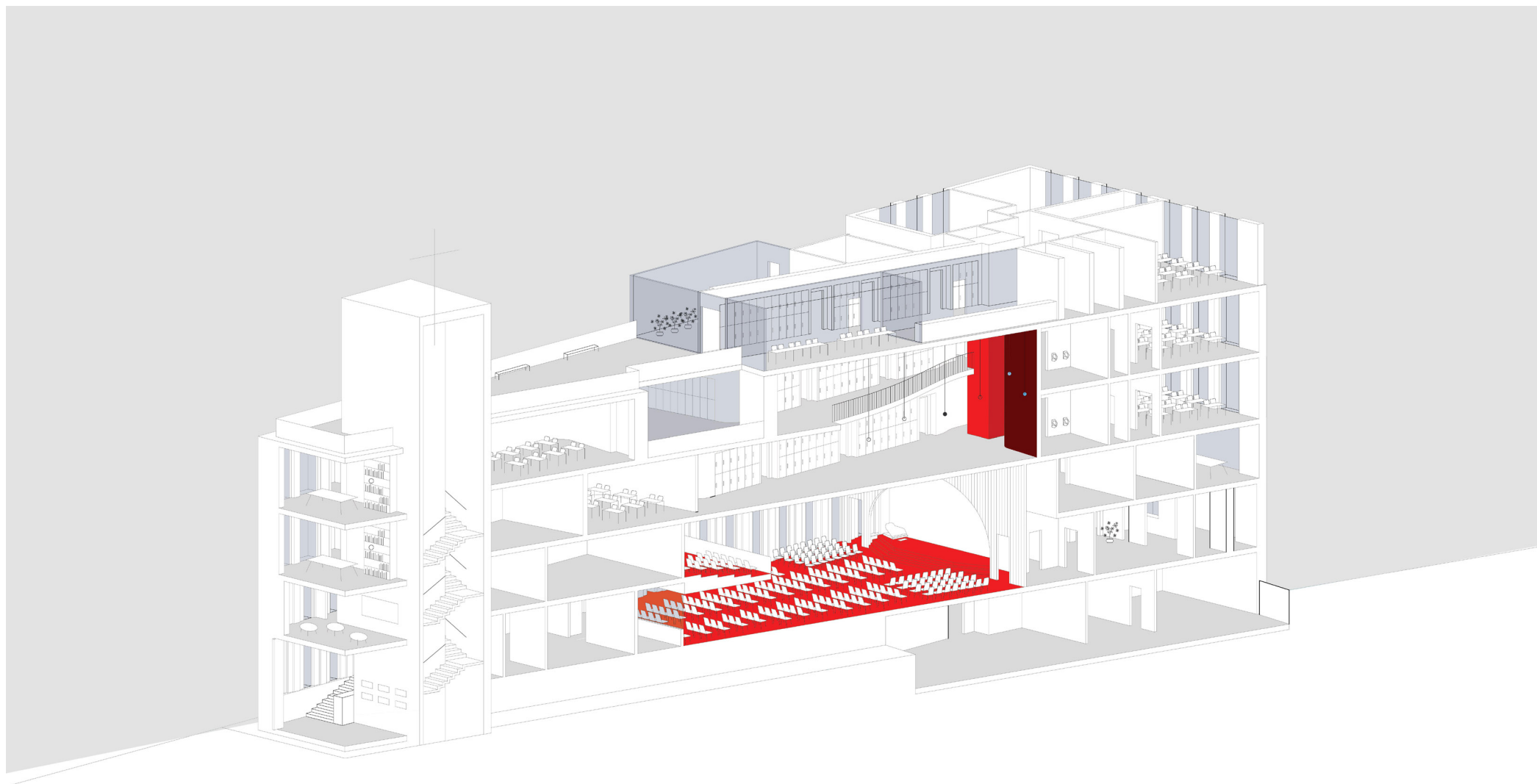
North facade - Labirint street



West facade - school entrance



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RECOVERED ELEMENTS

Facade on Labirint street with the restored facade / memory wall with recovered bricks and recovered wooden rail

During the reconstruction process, a careful analysis was carried out to identify authentic elements that shaped the identity of the former building.

The **façade** of a set of annex rooms facing Labirint Street had withstood the passage of time with minimal interventions. It became a symbol of continuity and was integrated as a starting point for the new architectural identity, transforming it into the church tower.

At the church entrance, visitors are greeted by an imposing wall, approximately five meters high, made of **bricks salvaged from the old building**, as a silent witness to the history of the place. This is where a memory space was created, showcasing archival documents, old photographs, and even a model of the former church.

One of the few interior elements that survived all previous interventions is the **wooden railing** from the balcony of the old hall. Recognizable in all historical images of the interior, it was preserved and brought back to life, now mounted as the railing of the staircase at the church entrance, near the brick wall.

Additionally, **wooden beams** recovered from the old building's structure were repurposed into liturgical furniture used in services.



Transversal section



Longitudinal section



East facade - church entrance



South facade - Matei Basarab street



COMMUNITY



Church special events



Children music programmes



First-aid workshops



Rooftop social gatherings

From the very beginning, the **involvement of the people** was active and constant—not only through donations, which made the construction works possible, but also through ideas, symbolic contributions, moral support, and at times, through painful acts of letting go. For many, **accepting the demolition** of the old church was difficult, because the place represented more than just a building: it was where they had grown up, been baptized, married, and lived defining life moments.

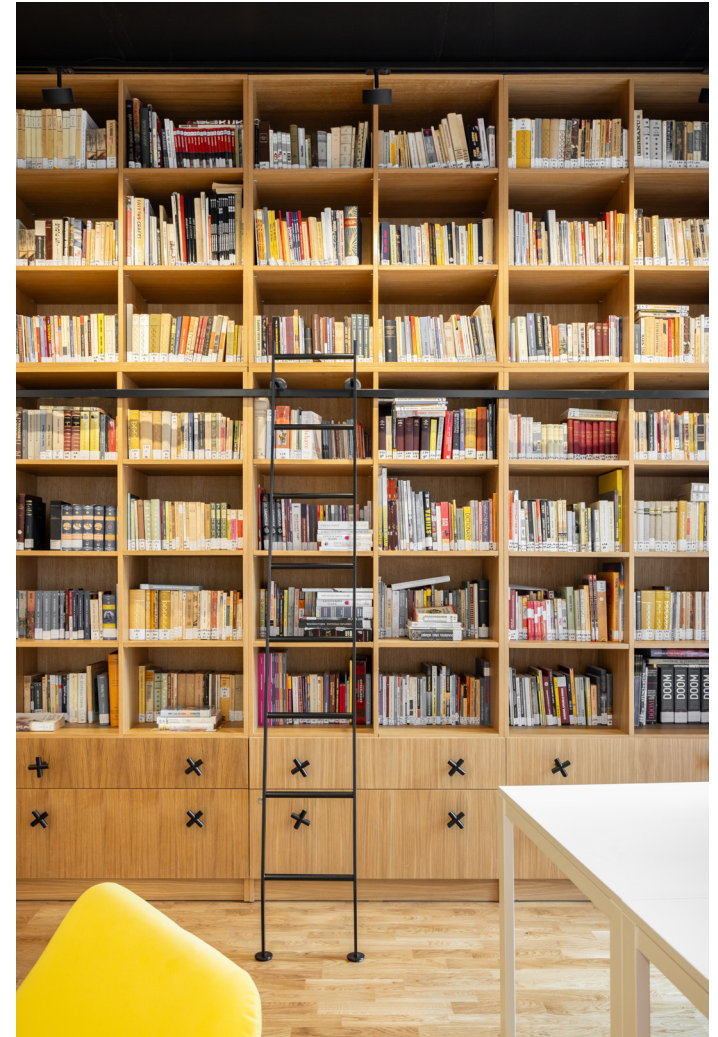
Community members actively participated in the **recovery and preservation of certain elements** from the original building.

In this context, the **architect's role** was necessarily that of mediator and moderator. The project involved ongoing dialogue with two distinct beneficiaries— the school and the church—each with specific needs, sometimes apparently conflicting.

The new Labirint responds to **a real and pressing need in the neighborhood**: the shortage of school spaces for local students. The school is already operating at **full capacity**, with waiting lists, and the church and school collaborate in organizing **cultural and educational events open to the broader community**. The building became a **local landmark**, uniting past, present, and future in a community of faith and learning.



School library



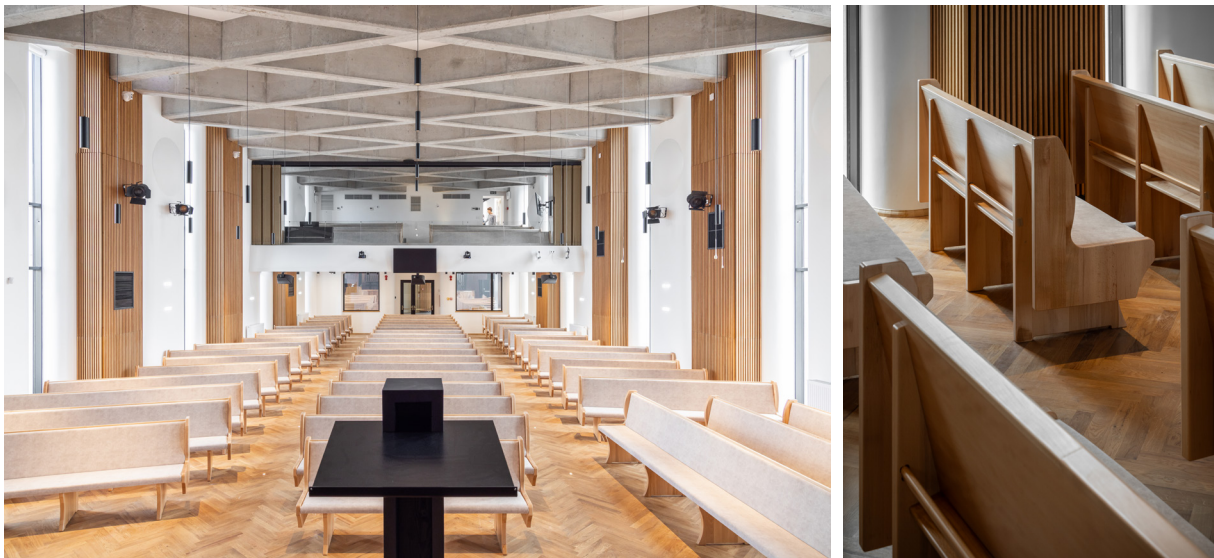


HALL / ORGAN / ACOUSTICS

The main hall is the symbolic and functional heart of the building. It houses a truly special organ, **assembled from parts of three different instruments**—one from Romania and two from Germany—historic organs that had lost their function in their original churches. Their unification in this new construction was made possible by the craftsmanship of **a Transylvanian artisan**, one of the few remaining organ builders and restorers in Romania.

The hall was designed with particular attention to **acoustics**, to accommodate a wide range of uses. The hall is also equipped with a **complex audio system adaptable** to various usage scenarios.

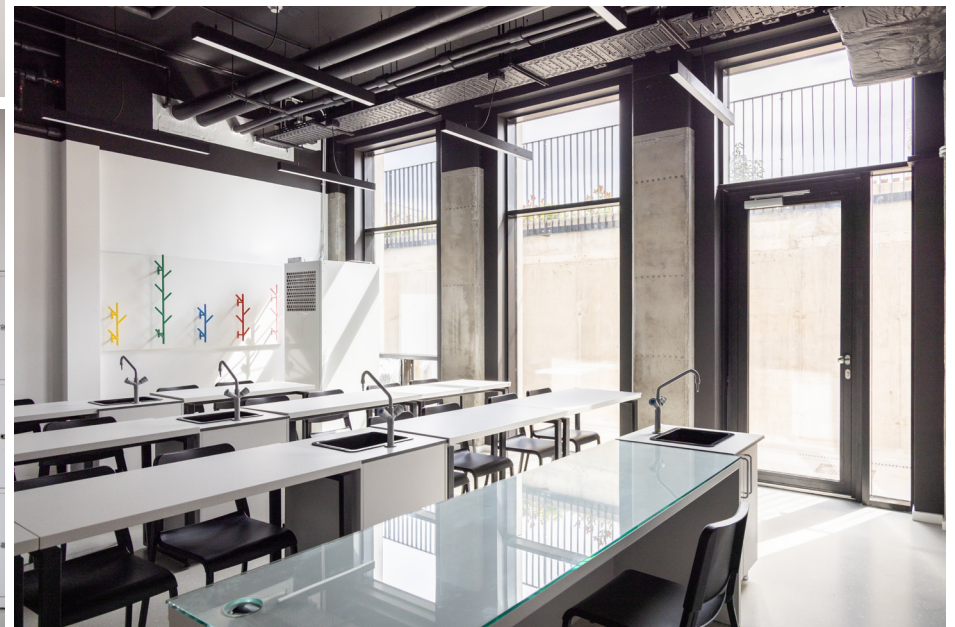
The balcony can be separated by a mobile partition system, **transforming it into an amphitheater** used by the school for workshops, readings, or educational activities.



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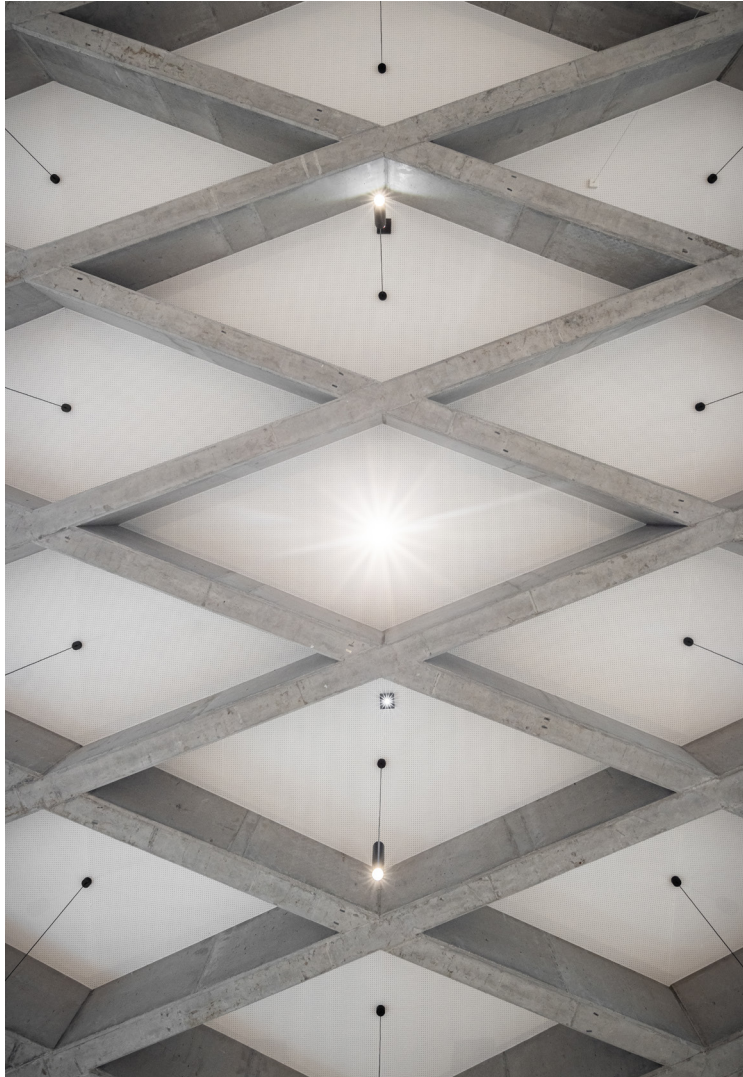
School interior images



STRUCTURE



Main hall - exposed concrete coffered ceiling



The structural system of the Labirint building reflects the complexity of the program and the constraints of the site.

Locating the main hall at ground floor level—a large space with no interior columns—required the development of special structural solutions to support the upper floors.

The slab above the mezzanine
- **coffered ceiling** with exposed concrete beams

The slabs above the 1st and 2nd floors
- **post-tensioned slab** technology—a system in which the reinforcement is tensioned after the concrete has cured, allowing for superior load-bearing capacity and optimized thickness.

The third floor - **lightweight structure** made of folded steel sheets, which helps reduce the building's load and allows for rapid construction.

Labirint project confronted several layered **questions**:

Can sacred and educational spaces coexist in a single building without diminishing one another?

Can architecture carry forward memory without becoming nostalgic?

Can a space marked by trauma, fragmentation, and loss be transformed into one of continuity, openness, and healing?

How can you design a structurally efficient building on a narrow, irregular urban plot, affected by decades of changes and systematisation?

How do you suspend three floors above a column free hall?

The answers were sought not just in form, but in dialogue — between two institutions, between past and present, and between permanence

and adaptability, through empathy. Rather than erase what was, the project wove in fragments of the old — structurally, materially, and symbolically — while giving shape to contemporary needs.

Towards the end of construction, an elderly woman, part of the community, who had been deeply hurt by the demolition returned to visit the site. She had avoided the street entirely, convinced that nothing of her past would remain. But she came to thank us. She told us she had expected the new generation to erase everything, but instead found a space that respects the past while speaking to the future — and that, to her, meant everything.



Sports hall / basement



Main hall foyer

UNDER DEVELOPMENT / FUTURE

The plot located across from the main building, shaped by the urban systematization processes of previous decades, is now functionally integrated as an extension of the educational and community complex. The area will be arranged as a space dedicated to **outdoor sports and recreational activities**.

The existing building on this lot will be reconfigured into **a multifunctional community center**, which will include a food service area (kitchen and dining space), educational workshops, meeting rooms for groups, a tea room, and other flexible spaces for social use.

