

**WHAT IS THE LIBRARY? THE NEW ONTOLOGY.**

**Cityscape**

The city of Varna is a post-war city with an extended sea front. The urban fabric presents rich diversity as it encompasses a range of small scale houses and large scale socialist architecture. The area of the competition is surrounded by monumental public buildings, generic socialist housing blocks, houses with red-tiled sloping roofs and various architecture ventures of the last decades. Since a library is an institutional structure that is highly valued by the local community, it is placed on a prominent site next to the main spatial landmark, the Municipality Hall of Varna. The site is located on the national street E87 that places the city in the national road network. This adds extra importance on the new Regional Library building which will be seen by any passing through the city passengers. The strong feature of the site is the Socialist Boulevard, a wide pedestrian zone defined by two green strips. This urban feature is of major importance for the competition concept, since it belongs to the pedestrian network that links the cultural buildings of the area and acts as a unifying zone for the municipality, the new library and the adjacent cultural buildings. Therefore, it becomes an opportunity for the new library building to animate this linear public square in front, by making use of it for open activities, events and exhibitions.

**Statement**

Be an incubator. Bulgaria is the country with the lowest percentage of libraries per resident (3.47%) in Europe. We would like to set the beginning of a new era based on the principle of the domino effect: a library can radically alter the intellectual scene of a city, by becoming an urban condenser and a new civic landmark.

Cause Brain Organism. The new digital online area requires well trained digital literacy tutors that can navigate the users within the complex, vast, online resources. Remember 'the good stuff' is always online, and it is always free! Apart from the library's infrastructure, the library's service model will be adapted, to be proactive about user's needs, and organize or update the resources in a more effective, thus being always relevant. The aim of the library is to produce well resourced population. The new infrastructure creates space for an epistemology embracing integration of knowledge consumption, thinking and making.

Act as Node. The infrastructure acts as learning hub that attracts people to meet, interact, socialize, and work together. On a second level, the library functions as a tourist meeting point, where visitors meet and enjoy a relaxing time, checking out exhibitions, playing with multimedia, drinking coffee and getting informed for the city's attractions and happenings. Be ubiquitous, quaquaversal. A digital community is established that connects the physical structure with the city; it can be a network system that gives access to the library's resources via internet from home, or through physical info points spread around the urban fabric. New outreach programs that can be supported by the new space are invented to brand the library in a wider range of possible users. It is of paramount importance to think beyond walls and reach out to people.

Be an embedder connector. Using the physical proximity with the local government can set a new interactive and mutually informing relationship. In addition, place the library in the centre of the cultural system and forge collaborations and partnerships with the rest cultural organisations, to make a focus for each organisation and its resources to the point. This could lead to the emergence of an urban cultural moment. As Jennifer J. Salvendy puts it, this is the 'opportunity to leverage the critical missions of our institutions.'

**GENERIC LIBRARY, SPECIFIC PEOPLE**

**Concept**

The act of subtracting a large longitudinal void across the compact orthogonal volume suggests a symbolic gesture that creates 'air', space for the etheric body - the knowledge - to be developed. The open space of knowledge divides therefore the mass of the building into two solid volumes, one in front of the Boulevard and one in the backside of the site. The back volume is fragmented in three large zones, so that on the back of the building a 'spine' is created, a well-structured verticality that accommodates the fundamental parts of the library - the archive and the administration.

The slabs of the two remaining volumes are shifted, the void is distorted. The ground-based volume is shifted towards the city opening up knowledge to the public. Artificial, geometrical contour lines, forming a climax, bare the library's finish, the books and the book stacks; it is about the embracement and protection of the book. The climax unfolds till the ground floor and expands outside the building. The 'Library' is given back to the city. This linear zone (Lobby) is the most public space of the building. The floating volume, a condensed act of knowledge, is shifted towards the Source; an Act On the books, 'stouring' the books, absorbing knowledge learning.

**Organisation**

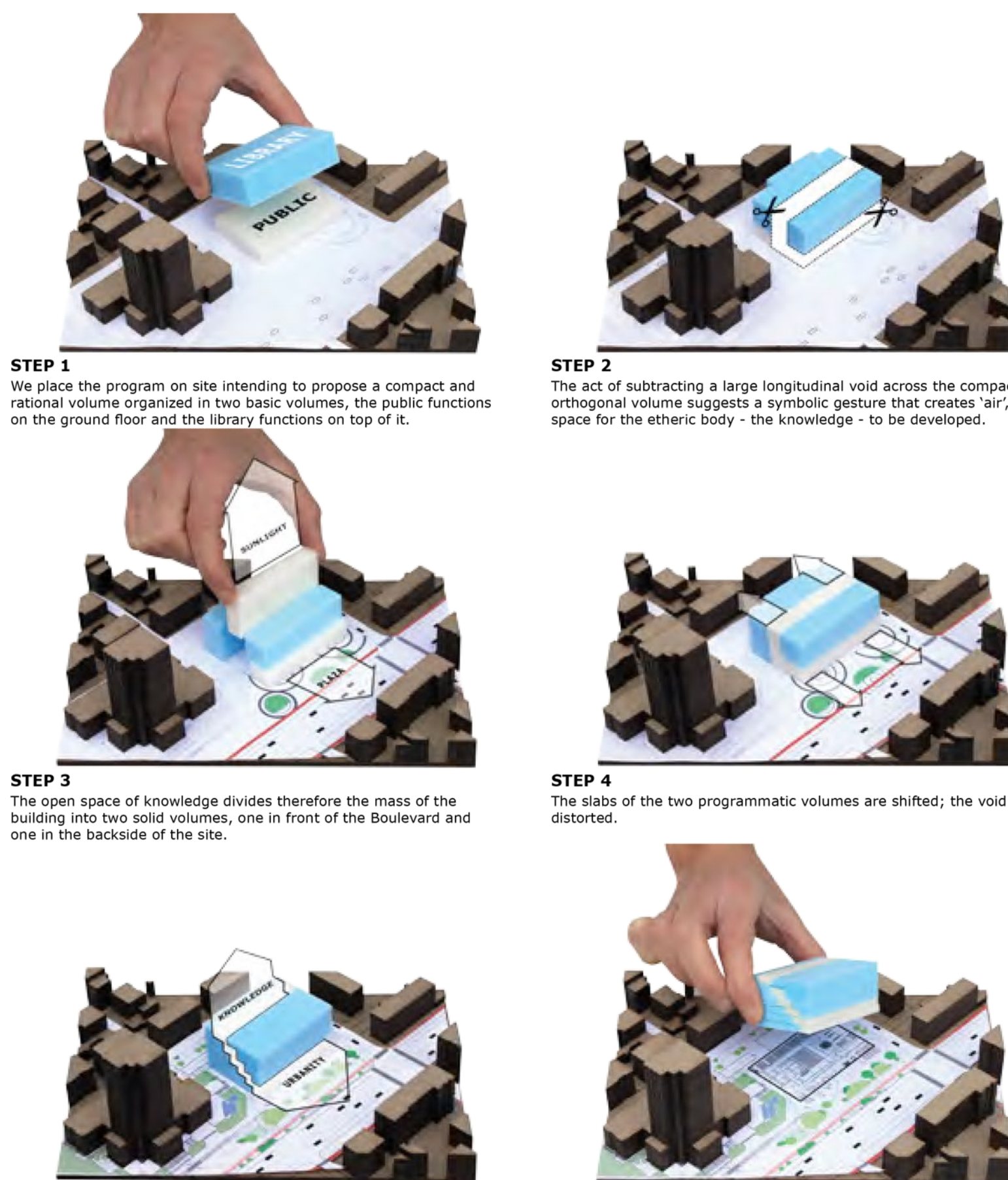
Each level bears its own programmatic function. The cutting through void allows the transmission of light into the heart of the building, but also strong visual connections between floors and spaces. A ramp connects the ground, the first and the second floor of the building. This diagonal alters the quality of the space, creating a dynamic flow. Programmatically it connects the most public part of the building, the ground floor, with the children's and teenager's space. Bridges on every level interconnect the reading rooms with the bookshelves areas. The vertical volume, the administration and the archive, structured in a denser way, can be accessed on all levels both through the building, but also form a separate entrance in the side road. The core interconnects vertically the archive, the administration and the leading zone, however each of these zones maintains different levels of accessibility and autonomy. The biggest mass of the books and book stacks is accommodated on and within the climax volume. Among the bookshelves there are silent reading places. More diverse reading places can be found on the high raised level. Entering the building the visitor finds himself in the lobby, a linear zone that takes over the whole front of the building and develops along with the parallel, linear square in front of the building. The lobby zone offers access to two different options: 1) on the left reaching firstly the ramp that leads the visitor to the upper levels, but also a one of all the road, group work and hands-on activities - registration/information desk, the souvenir shop, hobby zone, training center, conference rooms, individual work station, copy center; 2) on the right reaching the open, public, social zone - auditorium, exhibition area (storage), dressing rooms, stage storage, customer service, kitchenette, and storage. The first part of the ramp leads to the first level, where an entrance zone welcomes the visitor to a second copy center, the serials desk and the IT lab. The first level accommodates the children zone - book collection and reading places, reading games and events area, area for parents, circulation and reference desk, outdoor reading and playing area. A second ramp takes the visitor to the second level, the teenager's space - book collection and reading places, reference books, study and individual work area, hobby zone, circulation and reference desk, office desk and office supervisor. Parallel to the second level begins the above floating volume that accommodates low bookshelves and mostly reading places.

The access to the third floor is achieved by a round staircase. Different programmatic groups compose this level on both volumes; the Arts and Media center, the American center and the Deutsche Lesesaal - the library items collection, lobby zone, circulation and reference desk for each one. The specialized reading areas are also placed on this floor - the local history and the rare and valuable documents (reading area, storage, and circulation and reference desk). A small amphitheater brings the user from the third to the fourth and fifth level to the adults section: book collections and reading places, individual and group work area, circulation and reference desk. The fifth floor provides access to the sixth floor where a small pavilion resides, along with a small café, interior and outdoor reading areas.

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**STEP 1**  
We place the program on site intending to propose a compact and rational volume organized in two basic volumes, the public functions on the ground floor and the library functions on top of it.

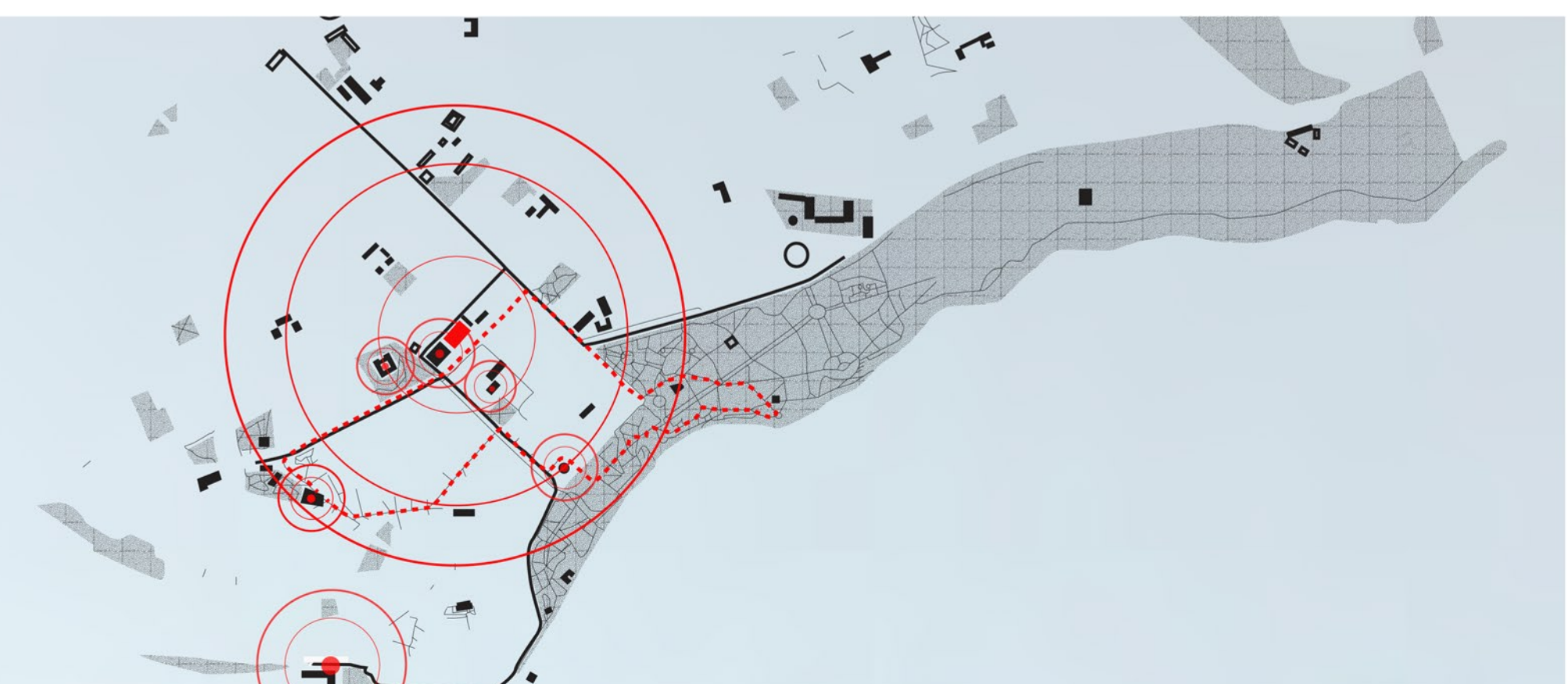
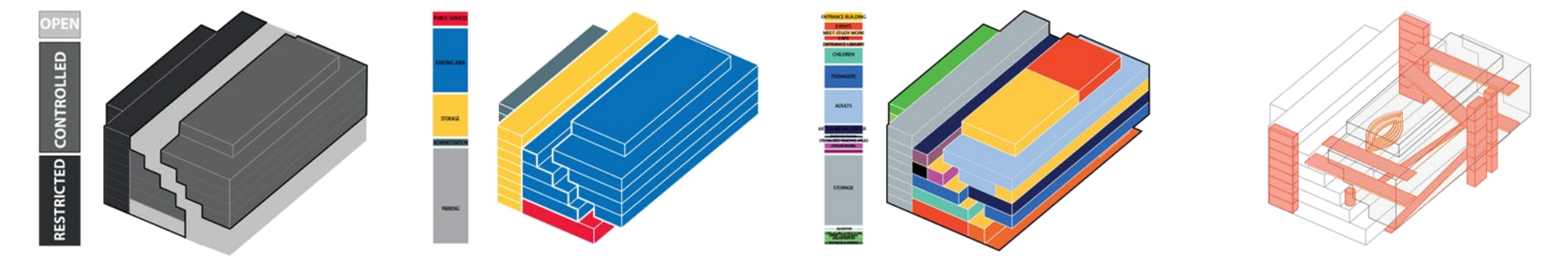
**STEP 2**  
The act of subtracting a large longitudinal void across the compact orthogonal volume suggests a symbolic gesture that creates 'air', space for the etheric body - the knowledge - to be developed.

**STEP 3**  
The open space of knowledge divides therefore the mass of the building into two solid volumes, one in front of the Boulevard and one in the backside of the site.

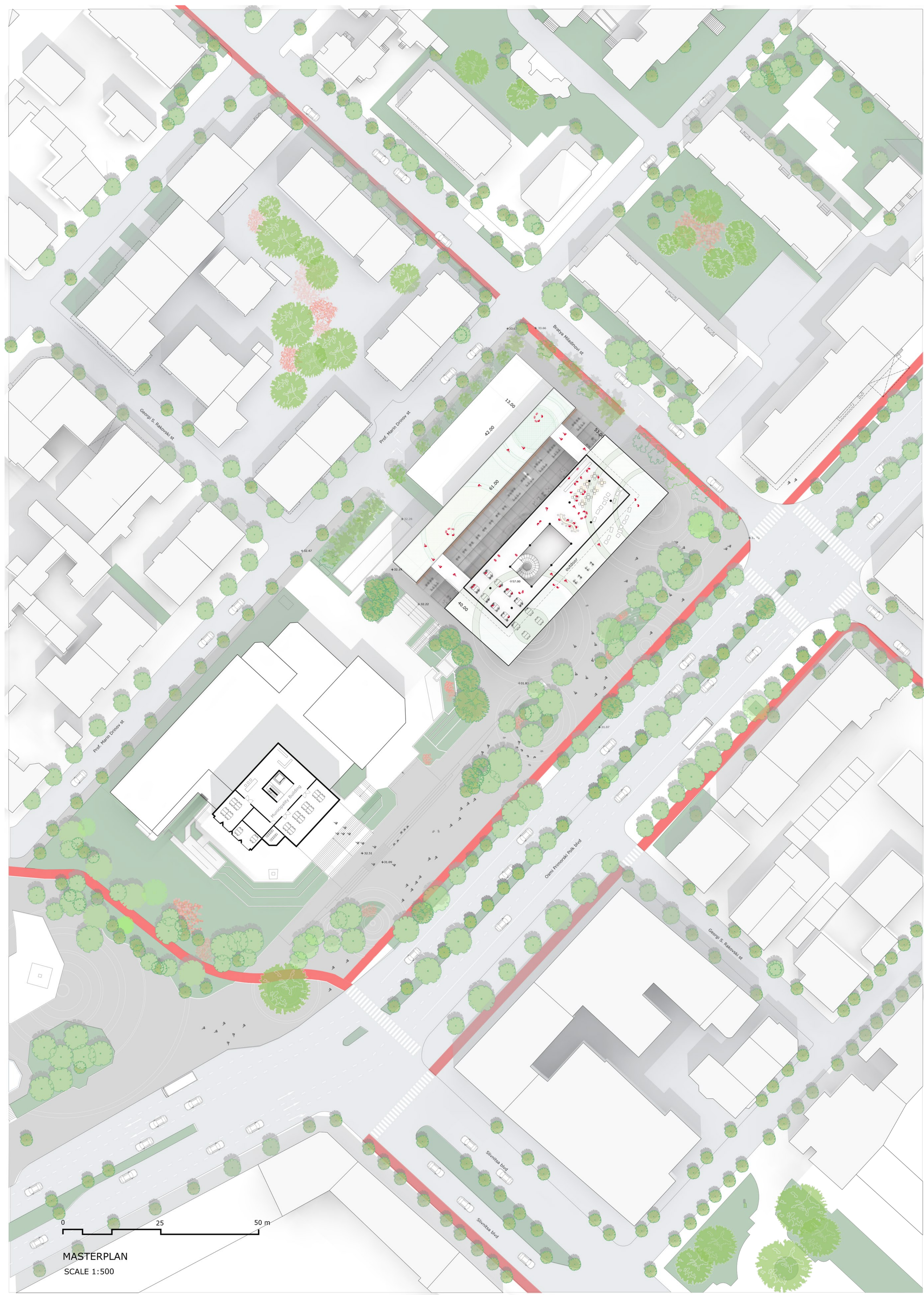
**STEP 4**  
The slabs of the two programmatic volumes are shifted; the void is distorted.

**STEP 4**  
The ground-based volume is shifted towards the city, opening up knowledge to the public and the urban continuum.

**STEP 6**  
The library becomes and urban condenser, an extension of the city that receives urbanity and gives it back augmented.



**BIRD'S EYE VIEW FROM SOUTH-EAST**



0 25 50 m

**MASTERPLAN**  
SCALE 1:500