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Liminality in Cultural Narratives: Reviving Abandoned Mall Spaces with Focus on Economic Efficiency and Social-Environmental Cohesion

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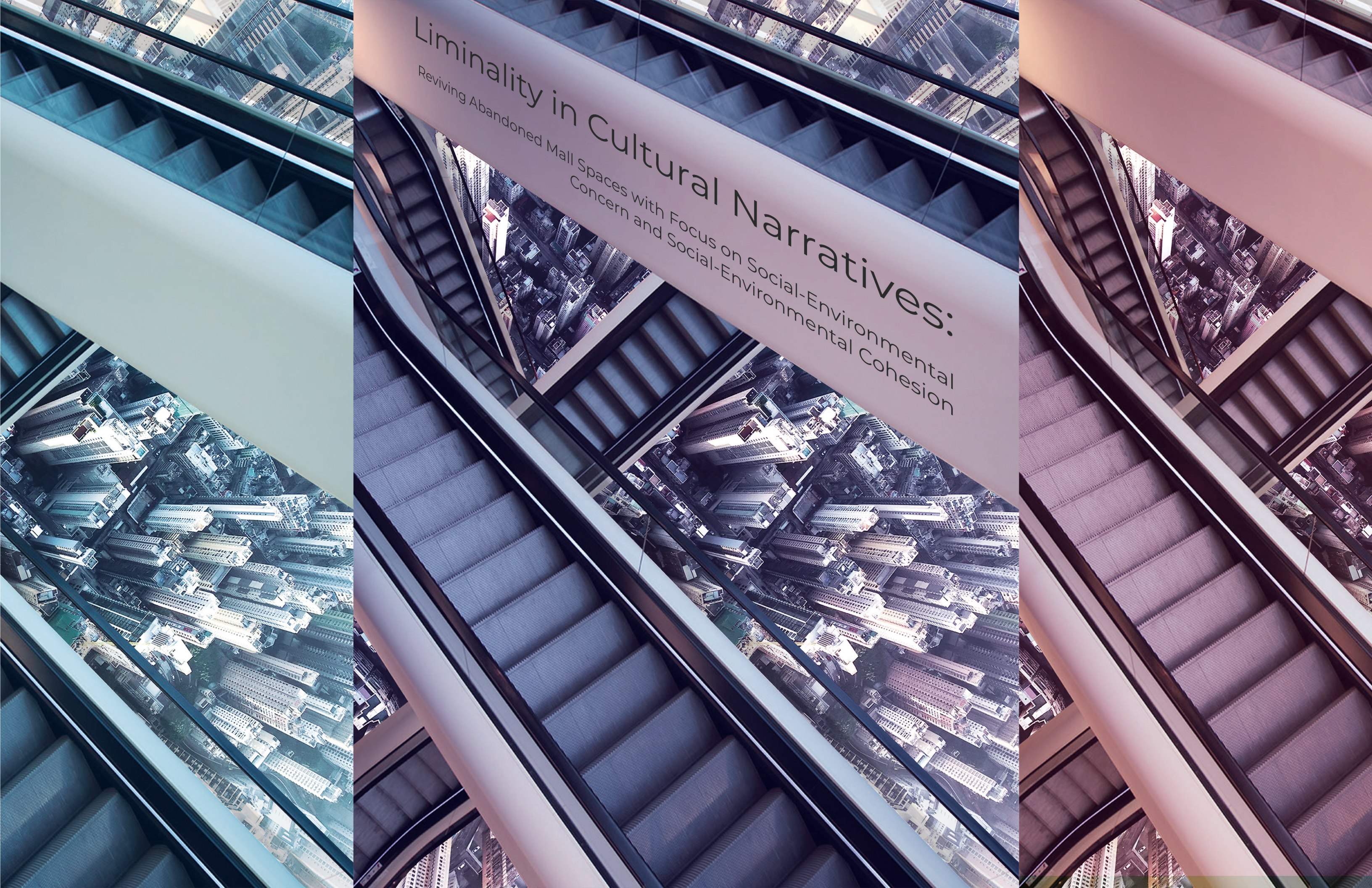
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Liminality in Cultural Narratives:

Reviving Abandoned Mall Spaces with Focus on Social-Environmental Concern and Social-Environmental Cohesion



Liminality in Cultural Narratives:

Reviving Abandoned Mall Spaces with Focus on Social-Environmental Cohesion

Thesis Project is Presented to:

Professor Pegah Zamani, Thesis Advisor

and to the

Faculty of Architecture
College of Architecture and Construction

Management by

Edwin Romero-Simon

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Architecture

Kennesaw State University
Marietta, Georgia

May 9, 2024

Thesis Statement

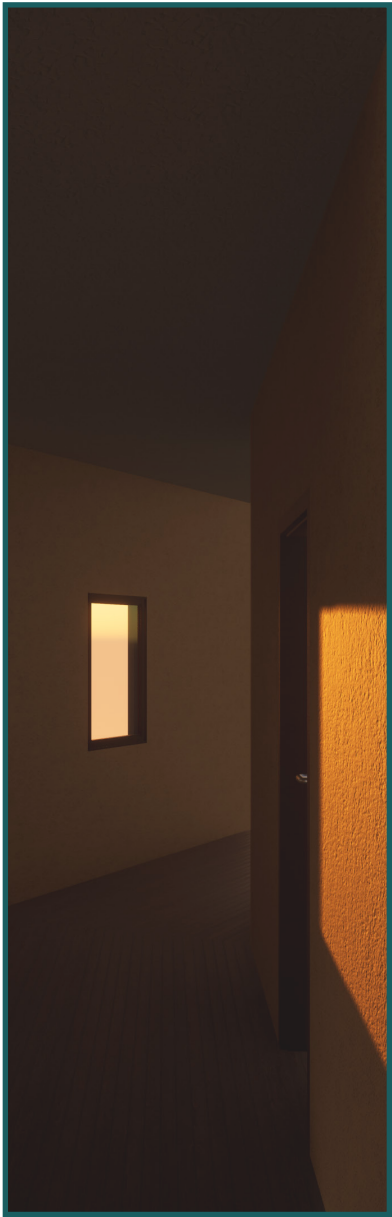
This thesis focuses on the problematic design trends of malls, particularly those that prioritize economic efficiency at the expense of social and environmental considerations. It highlights how many struggling or closed malls share similar design strategies, often focusing on retail anchor stores and circulation-centric layouts. These design choices have contributed to an unsuccessful typology over the years.

The thesis aims to address this issue by proposing a new approach to a case in Duluth, Georgia. It centers around the concept of liminality, referring to a transitional state characterized by continuity, obscurity, and sentimentality. By applying this concept, the thesis suggests reimagining the mall as a cultural hub, utilizing the abandoned space to create a cultural district.

In this proposed cultural district, the focus shifts from solely economic activities to providing a space for meaningful human-centric experiences. By incorporating elements of liminality, such as continuity in the cultural narrative, obscurity in the blending of diverse cultural influences, and sentimentality in fostering emotional connections, the redesigned mall becomes more than just a commercial space—it becomes a place for community engagement, artistic expression, and social cohesion.

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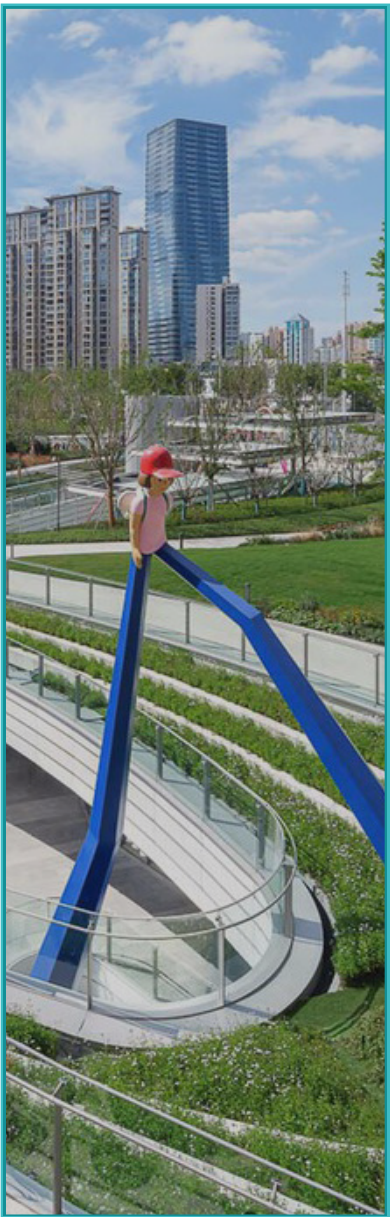
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Design Theorem

Pg. 8

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Design Analysis

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Design Process
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Design Synthesis
Pg. 42

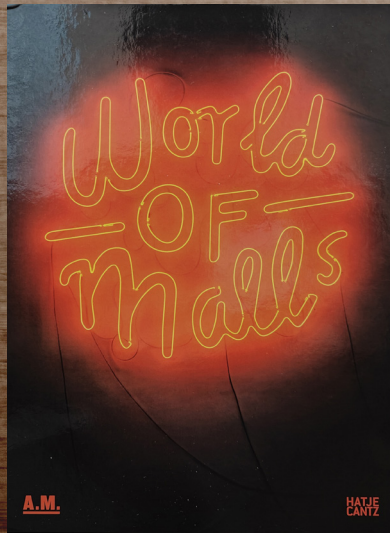
DESIGN THEOREM

Why are American malls closing at such a fast rate?

What is a liminal space?

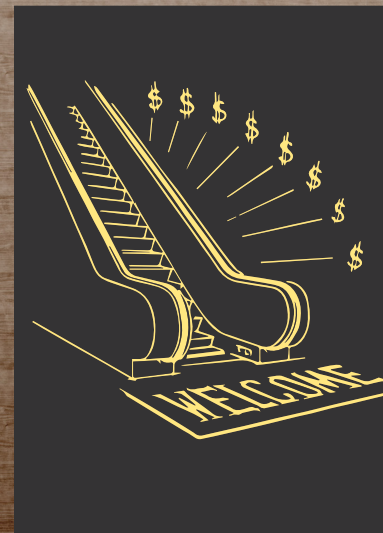
How can liminal spaces be used to develop a more successful typology?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



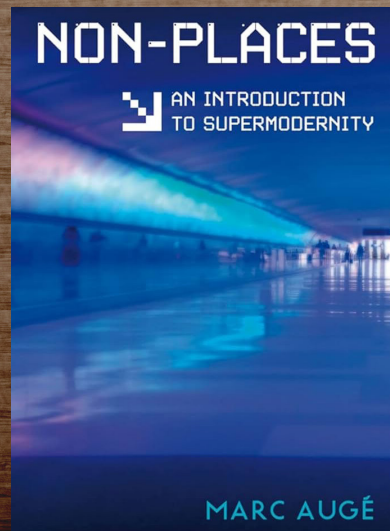
World of Malls

Authors: Andres Lepik and Vera Simone Bader



Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping

Authors: Chuihua Judy Chung and Sze Tsung Leong



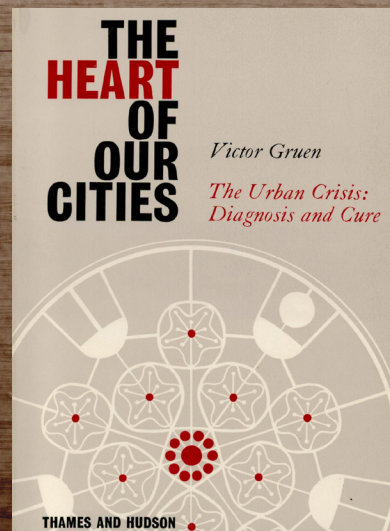
Non-Places

Author: Marc Augé



Junk Space with Running Room

Authors: Rem Koolhaas and Hal Foster



The Heart of Our Cities

Author: Victor Gruen

LITERATURE REVIEW



This book serves as a timeline of opinions on the mall typology over time. It is a collection of articles discussing the mall's past, present, and future in addition to various malls as they've sprung up from 1951-2021.

Key Concepts:

- in the 19th century, manufacturers and vendors were housed in the same commercial arcades
- there has been a constant push for higher distribution leading to the separation of vendors and manufacturers
- this ultimately led to the development of a purely commercial space

"...with its parking lots, shopping promenades, atria, and courtyards, the mall remained in the hands of a single proprietor... the shopping mall [is] an architectural typology that itself represents a commercial product."

- Lepik

World of Malls: Architecture of Consumption

Authors: Andres Lepik and Vera Simone Bader



This book is a collection of essays discussing retail and its impact on cities. It takes a look at commerce and how its spaces have evolved over time from the oldest trade cities to present day department stores.

Key Concepts:

- Retail spaces outnumber every other program type in size and quantity
- Retail is dependent on external factors meaning it needs to eternally change with the times to survive
- Changes came in the form of physical expansion, integration in other programs, and technological advancements

“Yet even though shopping is such an inherent part of daily life and even though it overwhelms other activities in number and in scale, it is also the most unstable, most short-lived, and most vulnerable to the threat of decline and obsolescence.”

- Leong

Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping

Authors: Chuihua Judy Chung and Sze Tsung Leong

COMMERCE OVER TIME

1500 B.C.E

The City of Thebes



The city of Thebes was founded to serve as a trade city. Cities established for the same reason were some of the first examples of locations dedicated to commerce.

1556 - 1568

The Royal Exchange



The Royal Exchange in London was an example of commerce or social based architecture which mimicked early Greek styles. These structures also served similar purposes.

400 B.C.E

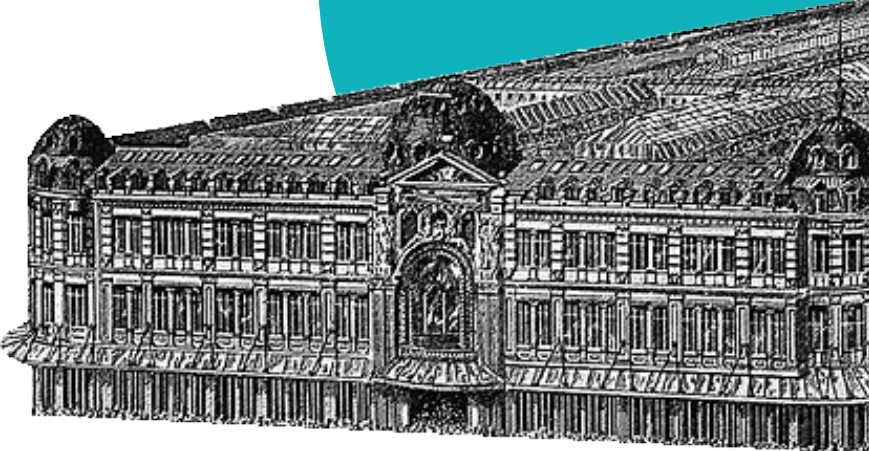
Greek Agoras



Ancient Greek Agoras are some of the oldest examples of architecture built for the purpose of communing, trading, and other social activities

1852

Au Bon Marché



1852

Southdale Center



The Southdale Center was the first example of the modern day shopping mall. Designed by Victor Gruen, it marks the beginning of commerce focused architecture despite Gruen's negative opinions on the subject.

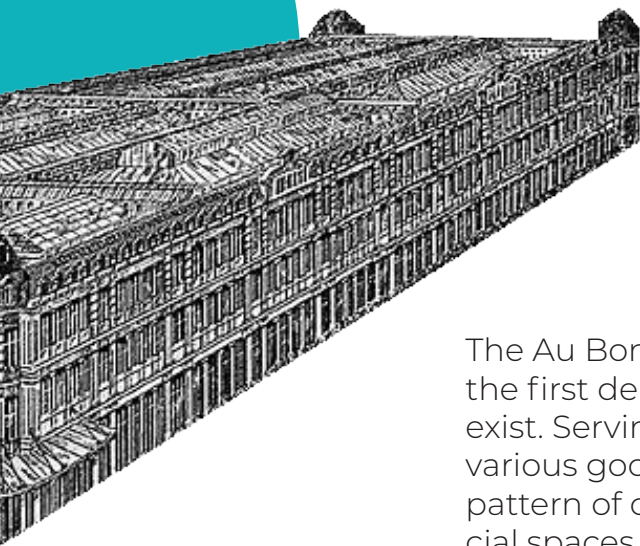
Present Day

Gwinnett Place Mall



Gwinnett Place Mall is one of many shopping centers which are inevitably closed down. Today, it is abandoned with only two department stores left. Thousands of malls have closed since the late 1800s and many have not been re-purposed or redeveloped.

che



The Au Bon Marche in Paris was the first department store to exist. Serving as a location to buy various goods. This is where a pattern of condensing commercial spaces begins to appear.

JUNKSPACE *with* RUNNING ROOM

‘If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet.’

Rem Koolhaas / Hal Foster

This book consists of two writings regarding liminal space. One is Rem Koolhaas's Junkspace and the other is Hal Foster's response to it titled Running Room. Junkspace is written as a self criticism which mimics the monotony of his subject. Running Room, on the other hand is a more academically written response to Koolhaas noting the necessity of spaces like this.

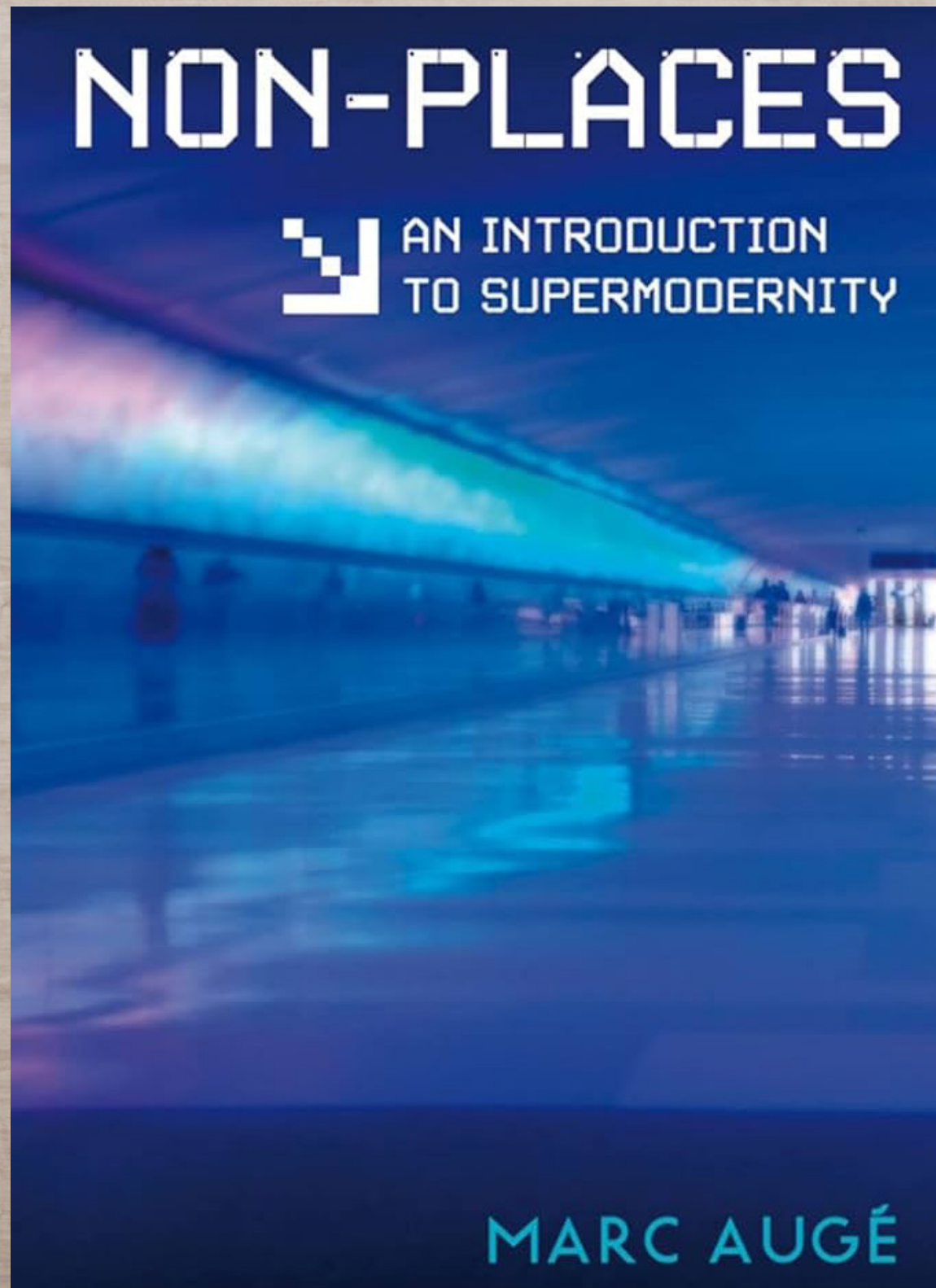
Key Concepts:

- liminal space (junk space in Koolhaas's words) is the product of consumerism
- liminal spaces like malls, airports, roadways are constantly being updated (built to change, not to last)

“Junkspace thrives on design, but design dies in Junkspace. There is no form, only proliferation... Regurgitation is the new creativity; instead of creation, we honor, cherish, and embrace manipulation...”
- Koolhaas

Junkspace with Running Room

Authors: Rem Koolhaas and Hal Foster



In this book, Marc Augé introduces the concept of “non-places,” referring to spaces that lack a strong sense of identity, history, or social interaction. Non-places include areas like airports, shopping malls, highways, and hotels. In other words, spaces designed for efficiency, functionality, and rapid transit.

Key Concepts

- “anthropological places,” in contrast to non-places are locations that have cultural significance, history, and a sense of community.
- Non-places facilitate individualized experiences, but they may also contribute to a sense of isolation and alienation.

“The term ‘space’ is more abstract in itself than the term ‘place’, whose usage at least refers to an event (which has taken place), a myth, (said to have taken place) or a history... It is applied in much the same way to an area, a distance between two things or points... or to a temporal expanse (‘in the space of a week’).”

- Augé

Non-Places: an Introduction to Supermodernity

Author: Marc Augé

LIMINALITY

- derived from latin word "limen" (meaning threshold); relating to a transitional or initial stage of a process

Ex:

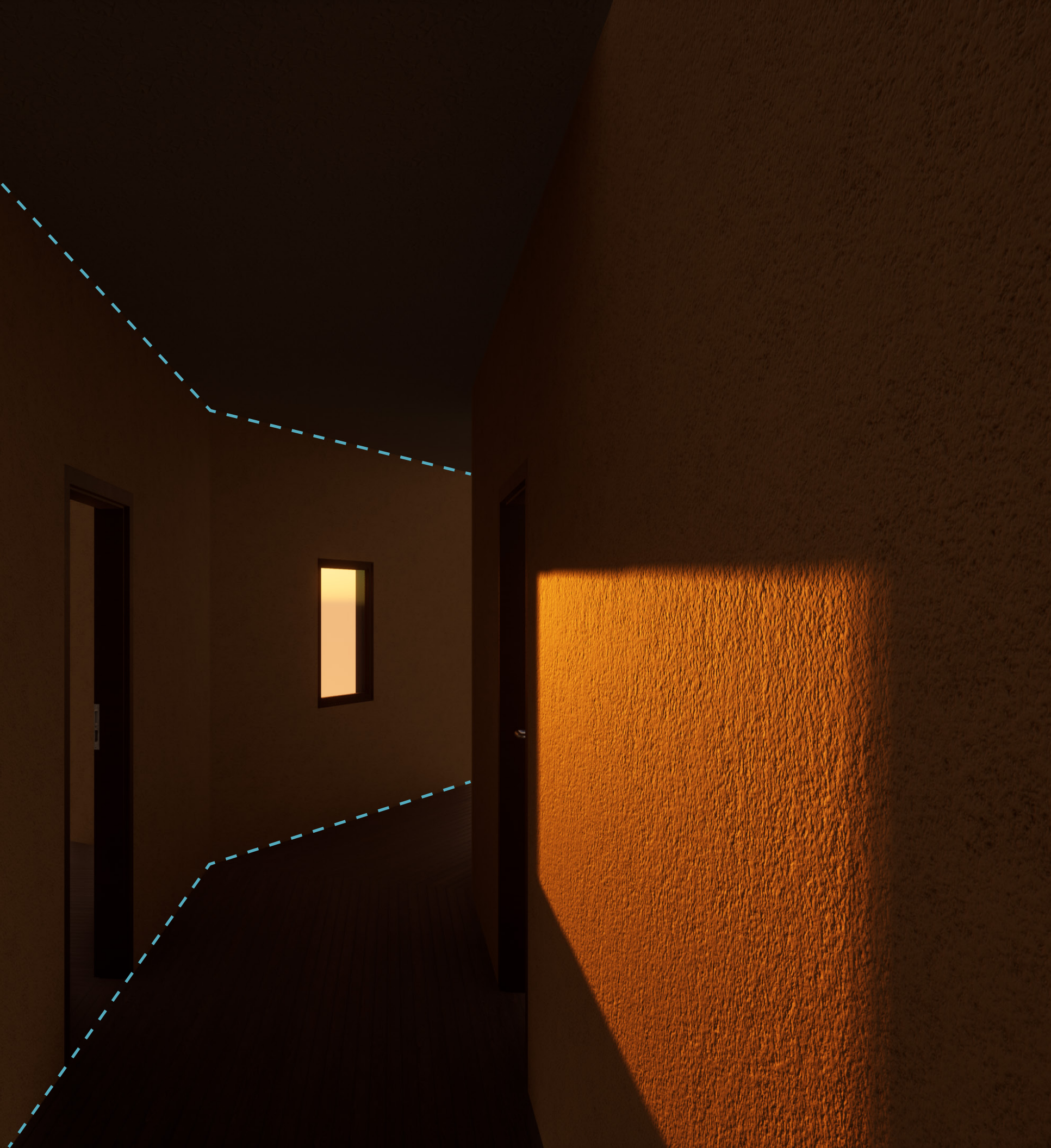
- period of time in between consciousness and unconsciousness
- personal growth
- physical movement from one point to the next

LIMINAL SPACE

- spaces which main purpose is to connect two or more other spaces

Ex:

- hallways, elevators, escalators
- roadways, sidewalks, tunnels
- airports, subways, malls



Continuity

This characteristic of liminality refers to consistent gestures over time. Examples include movement, time, repetition, and progression.

In the context of mall architecture, continuity is often seen through linear program layout, monotonous materiality, or unvaried forms.

Sentimentality

This characteristic of liminality usually refers to human experience in a space. Examples include emotional and psychological experience.

In the context of mall architecture, sentimentality is often expressed through the use of different materials, forms, and proportions.



Obscurity

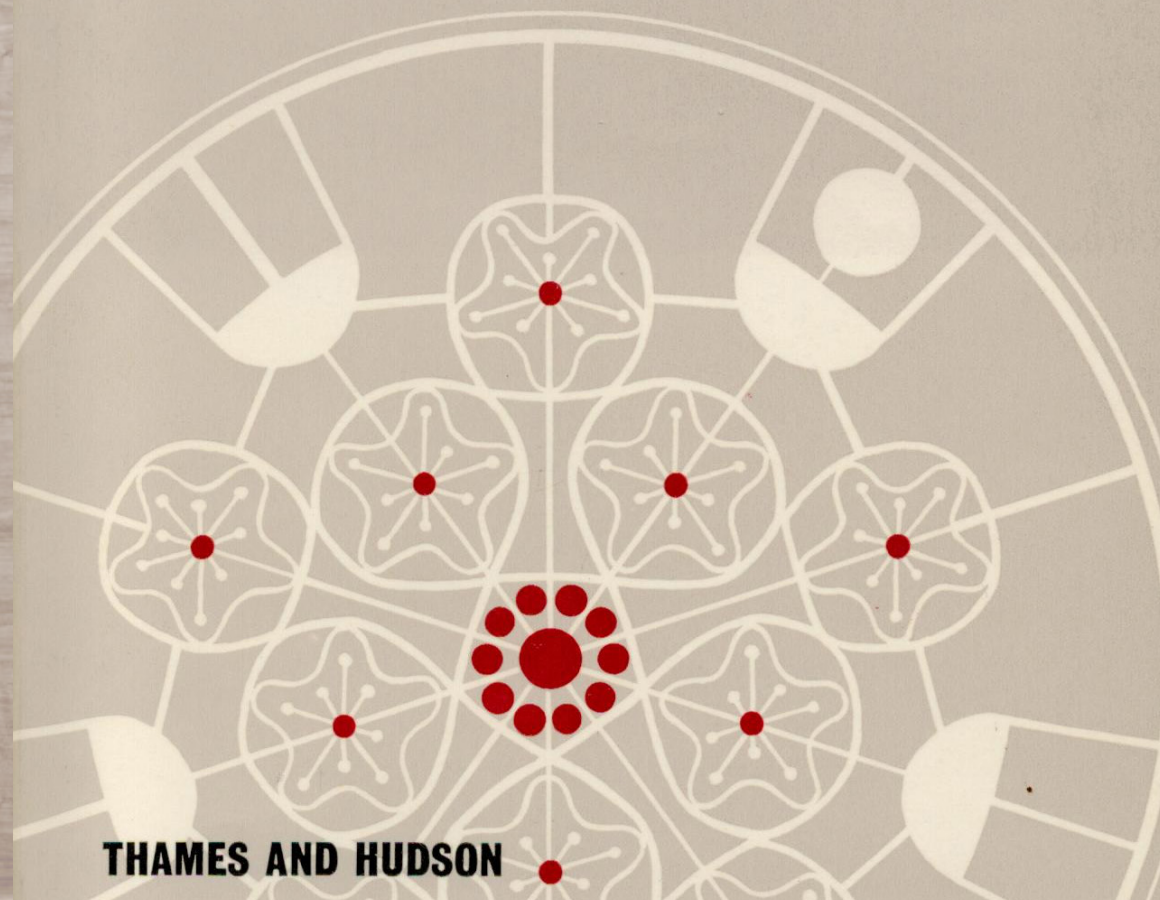
This characteristic of liminality usually refers to physical perception. Examples include visual, auditory, and tactile senses.

In the context of mall architecture, obscurity is often seen through isolation from the outside, design with a lack of identity, and consumerism-focused program.

THE HEART OF OUR CITIES

Victor Gruen

*The Urban Crisis:
Diagnosis and Cure*



This book covers Victor Gruen's philosophy on urban design. It defines what makes a successful city, current issues caused by urban sprawl, and strategies to remedy these problems. Many of Gruen's ideas of an indoor city are based on these macro-level considerations.

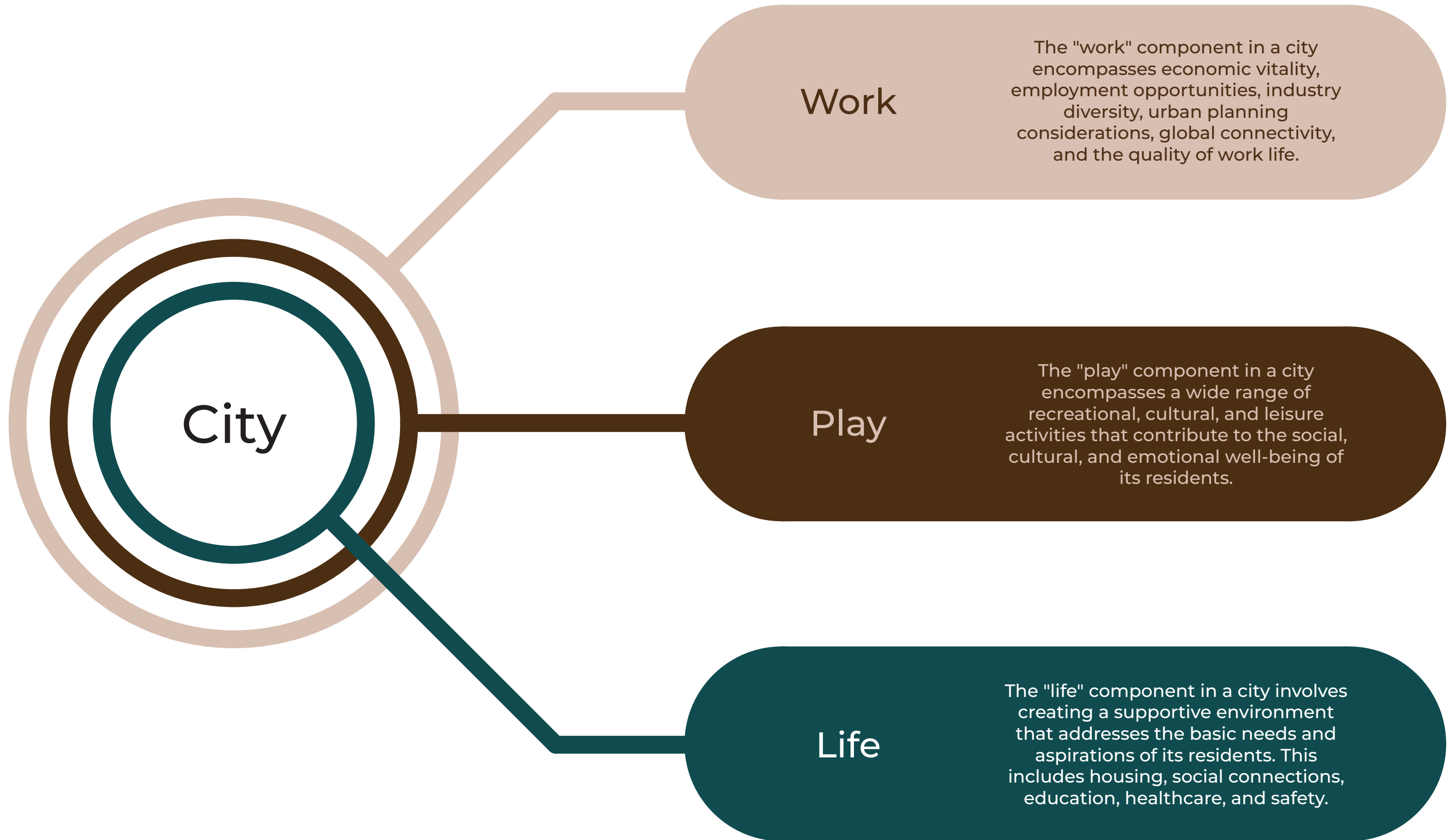
Key Concepts

- A city is defined by three basic qualities:
 - Compactness
 - Intensity of public life
 - Intertwined pattern of all human activity
- A city core requires a melding of human activity, organization of private and public transportation, and separation of industrial areas

"We proudly assert that our living standards are the highest in the world. But this is true only of the standards of private life, which have been raised at the cost, and to the detriment, of public life."
- Gruen

The Heart of Our Cities: The Urban Crisis

Author: Victor Gruen



DESIGN ANALYSIS

PARC CENTRAL





Location: Guangzhou, China

Architects: Benoy

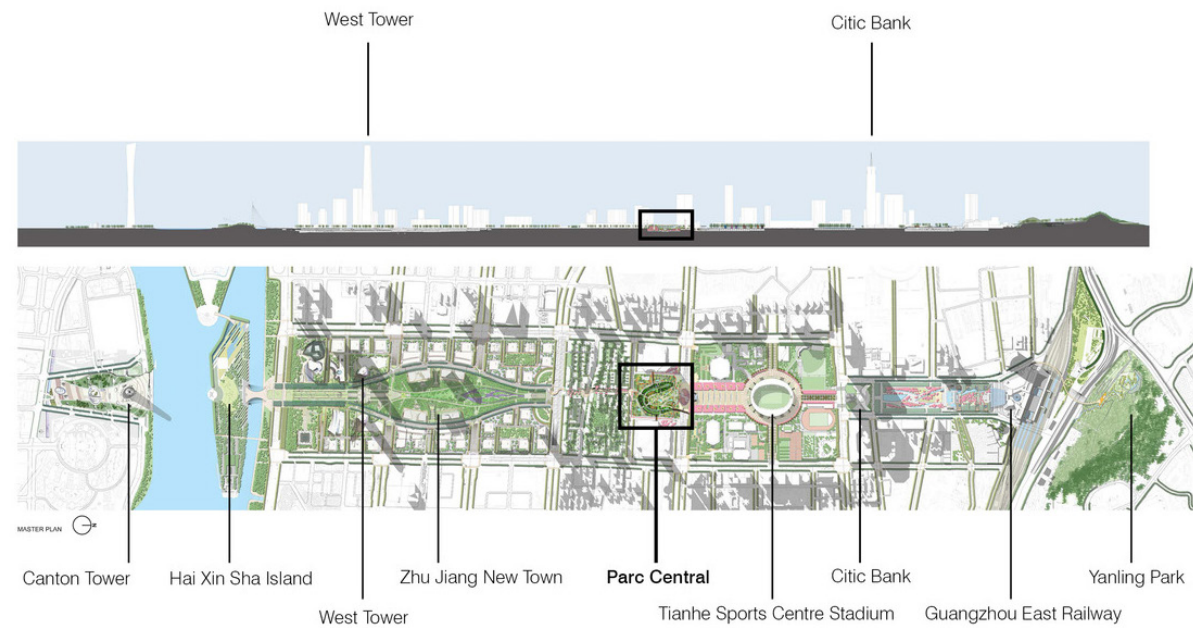
Parc Central is situated in the heart of Guangzhou's Central Business District, contributing to the city's dynamic urban landscape. The architectural design of this project revolves around the concept of blending above and below-ground retail spaces within a multi-level park. The development seeks to offer a unique and harmonious environment that integrates seamlessly into the city fabric.

Takeaways

Project is the centerpiece of a large axis of greenspace which ties the city together.

Underground subway system establishes connections into and out of site promoting use of public transit.

Park-style exterior space melds retail and office space.



AZABUDAI HILLS





Location: Tokyo, Japan

Architects: Heatherwick Studio

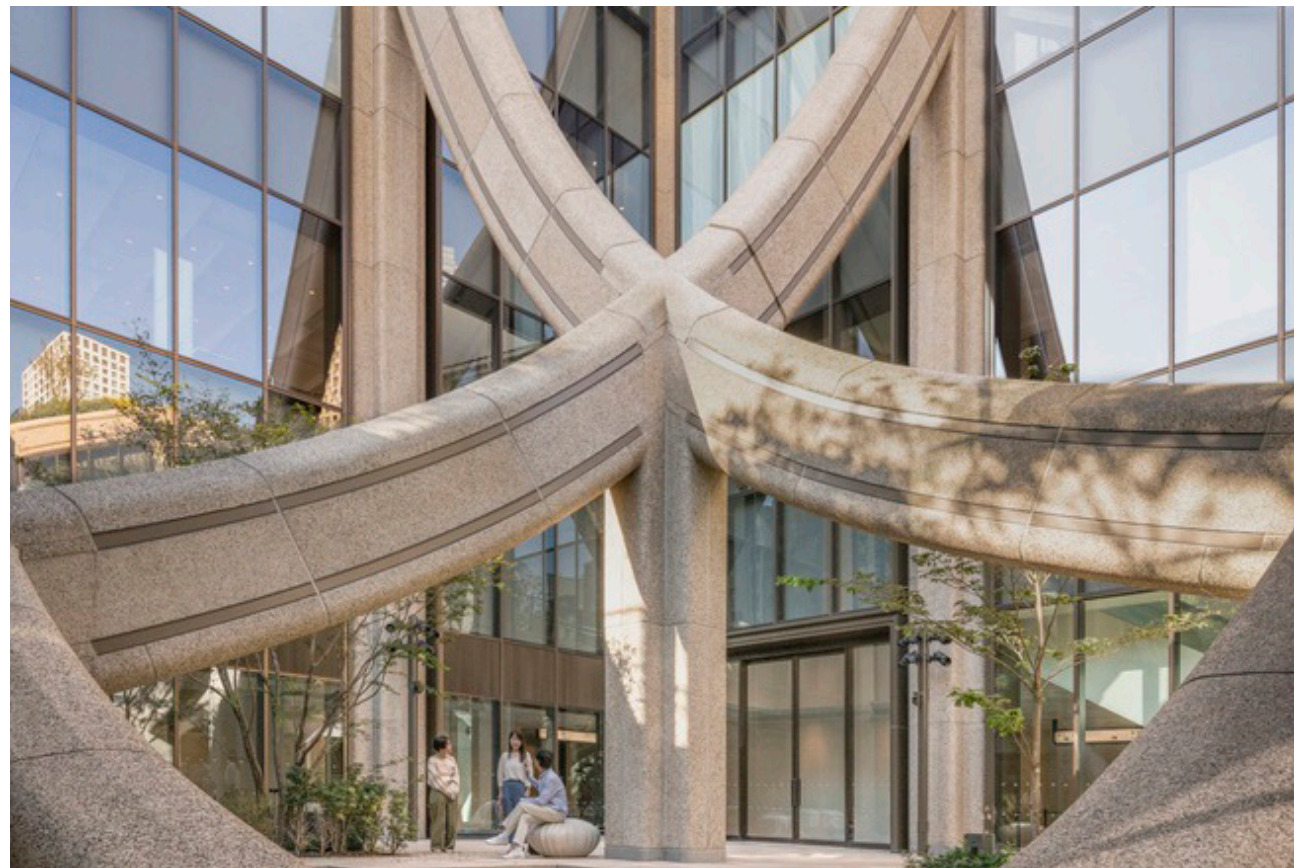
The Azabudai Hills are a mixed-use development just under two large high-rise buildings. Through this project, Heatherwick Studio hoped to establish a more community-focused programs including housing, retail, galleries, event spaces, and other cultural programs.

Takeaways

Mixed-use development is designed to have all aspects of life, work, and play.

Green space is spread throughout the masterplan reducing the heat island effect.

Cultural spaces tie together local community by bringing people in from outside site context.



SHANGHAI SUHE MIXC WORLD





Location: Shanghai, China

Architects: Kokai Studios

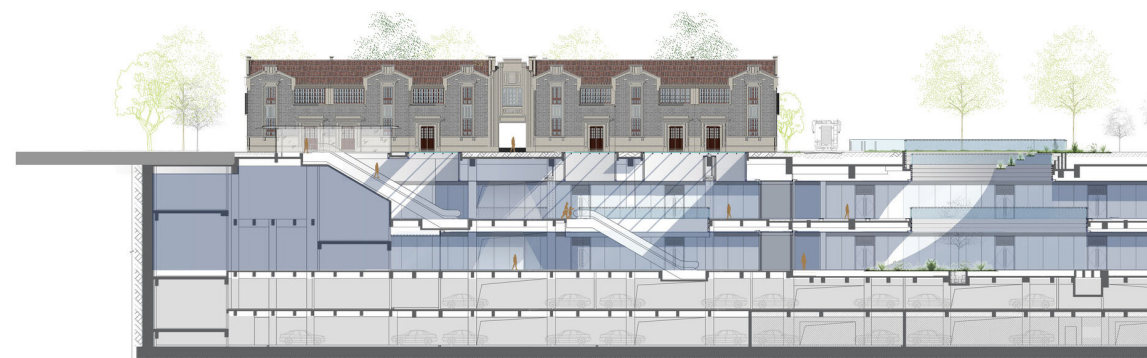
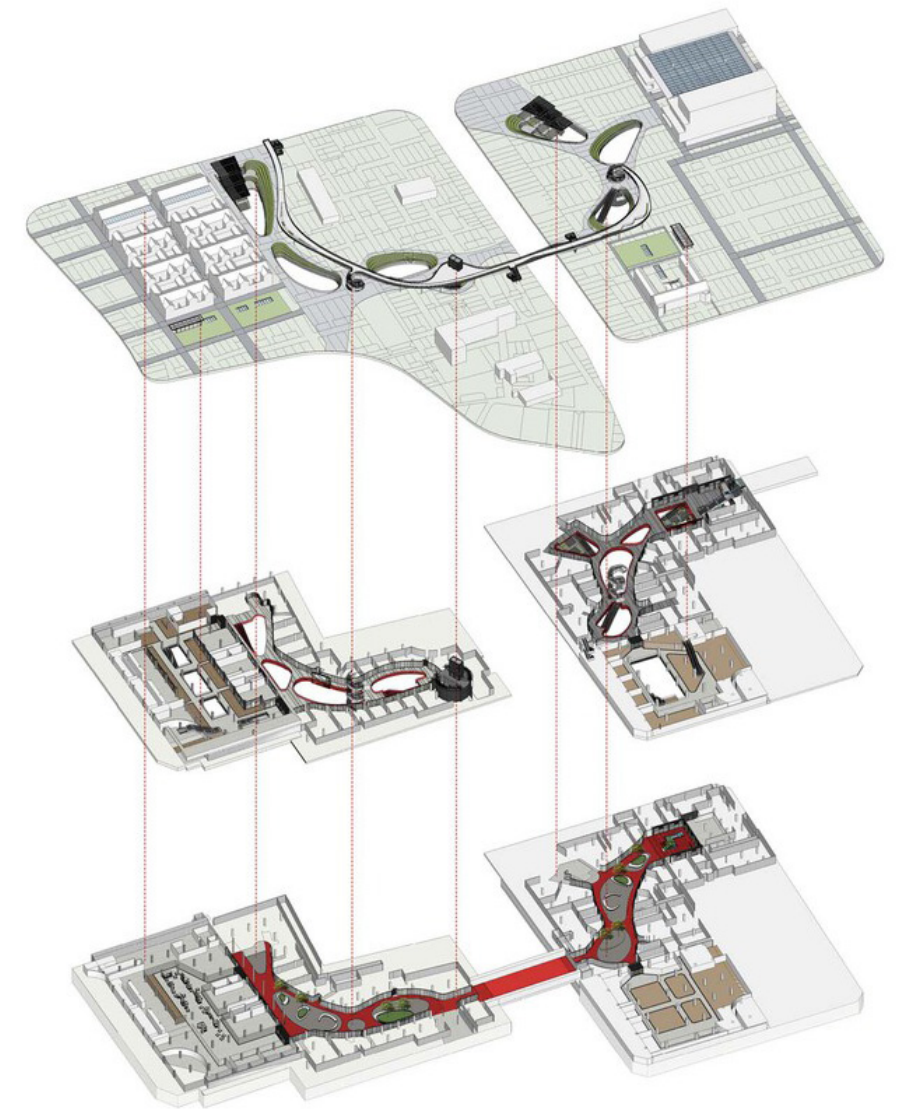
Shanghai MixC World is an underground shopping center located in a dense urban district. It was designed in an attempt to better blend commercial programs with surrounding context. The park on ground-level also establishes this project as a public space which the community can experience.

Takeaways

Surrounding context is composed of office buildings. Park/mall program creates a relationship between work and play.

Openings allow natural light and views to pierce the program creating physical and visual connection between floors.

Underground parking allows people outside of site to have a direct connection to commercial program



Sections 1



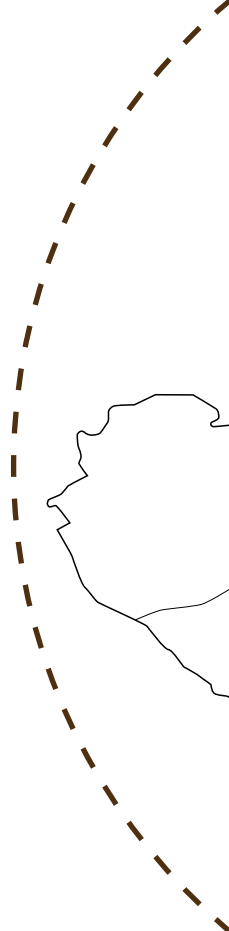
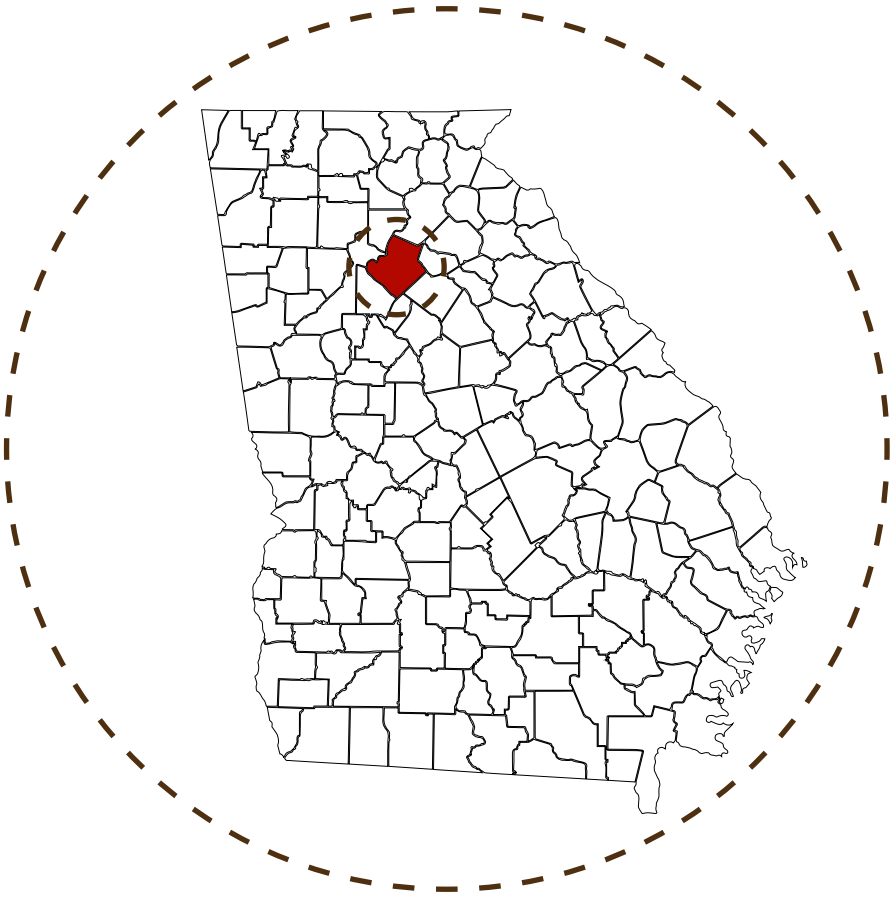
DESIGN PROCESS

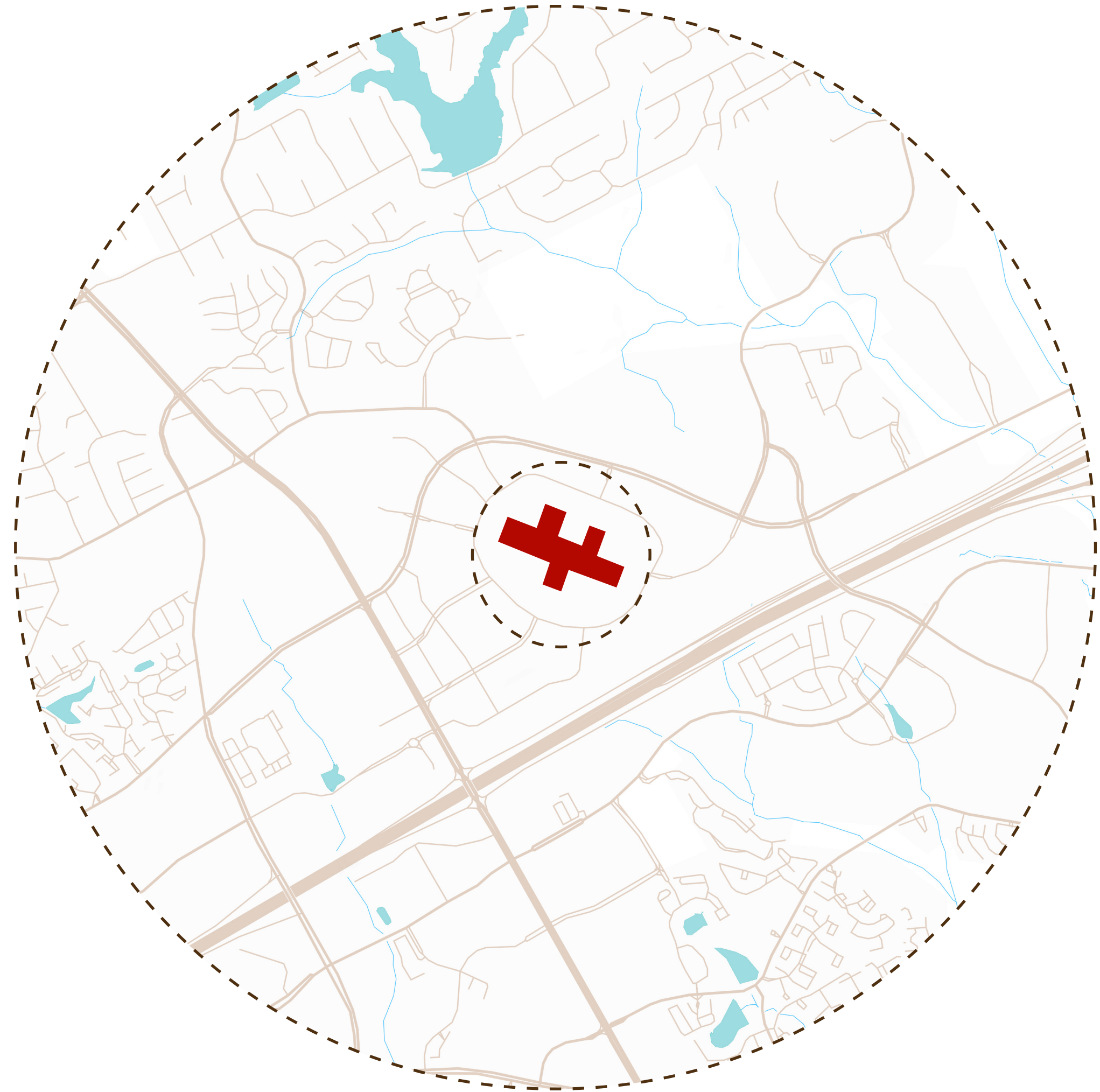
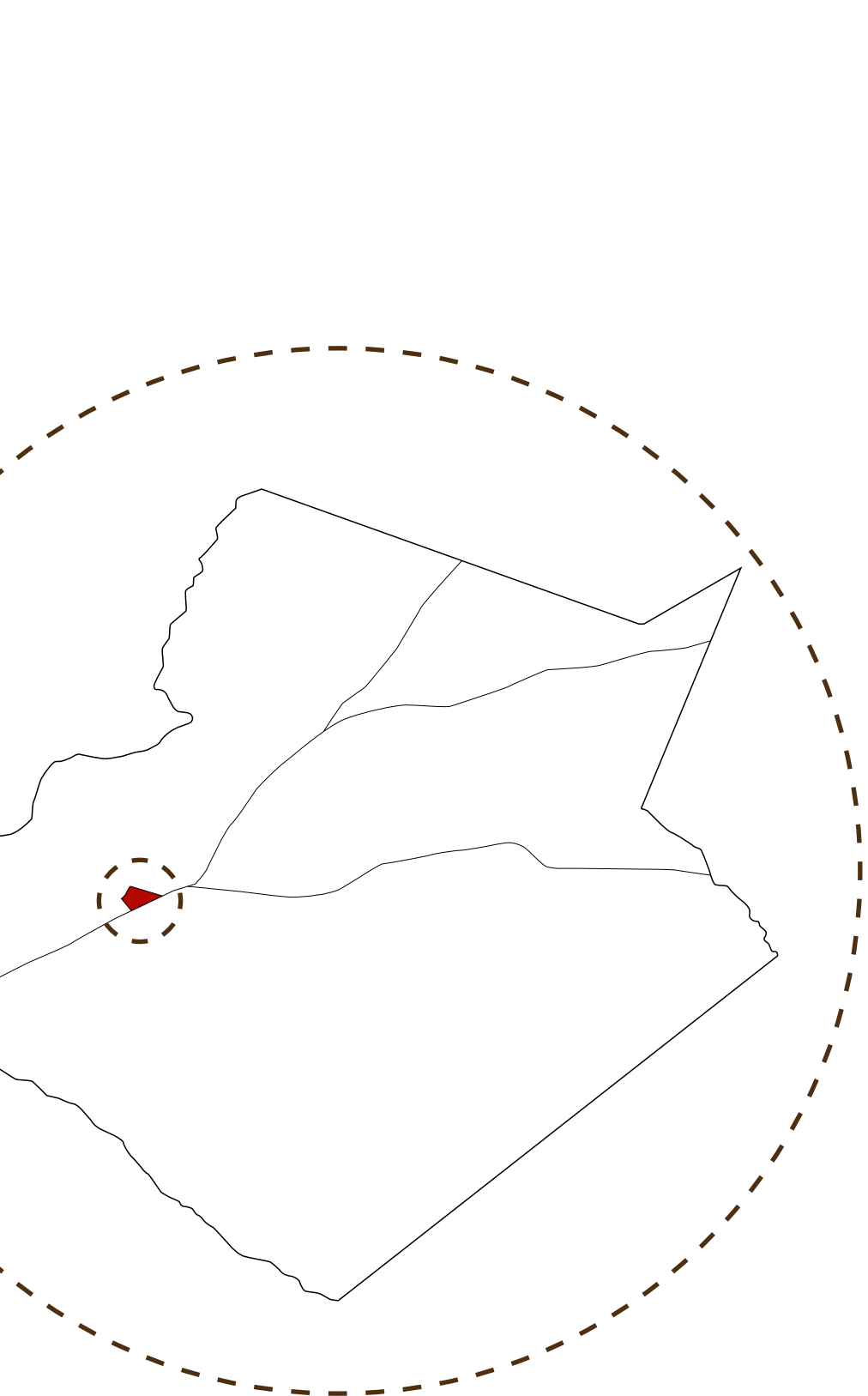
SITE DETAILS

Location 2100 Pleasant Hill Rd, Duluth, GA 30096

Land area 295,000 sqm (3,150,000 sqft)

This location was a well known mall in the Duluth area in the early 2000s. However, as newer, bigger malls opened nearby, pedestrian traffic reduced and led to multiple stores closing. Today, the mall is vacant save for 3 large department stores. Gwinnett county has plans to redevelop this area in the next 20 years.





MAP OF GWINNETT PLACE





Surrounding Context

Gwinnett Place is **district** in Gwinnett County, Georgia. Much of the surrounding context of the site can be described as a typical suburbia. In the immediate vicinity of the site, most buildings consist of retail and restaurant locations. Further from the site, more residential areas can be found with more instances of commercial buildings throughout. Based on the organization of the urban plan, it can be inferred that Gwinnett Place Mall was meant to be a central core to Gwinnett Place. However, after the opening of newer malls such as Discover Mills (now Sugarloaf Mills), Gwinnett Place now sits desolate as an abandoned city hub.

Takeaways

The site is circled by large residential zones, restaurants, parks, and local businesses establishing the central nature of the cite which could have served as a cultural battery for Gwinnett Place.

Major road ways have direct access to the center of Gwinnett Place and the site location. The accessibility is a boon for a more successful project.

Close proximity to Sugarloaf mills led to the closing of the majority of Gwinnett Place Mall. To avoid repeating history, a different approach must be taken.



Public Gyms



Parks



Schools



Gwinnett Place Mall (Now Closed)

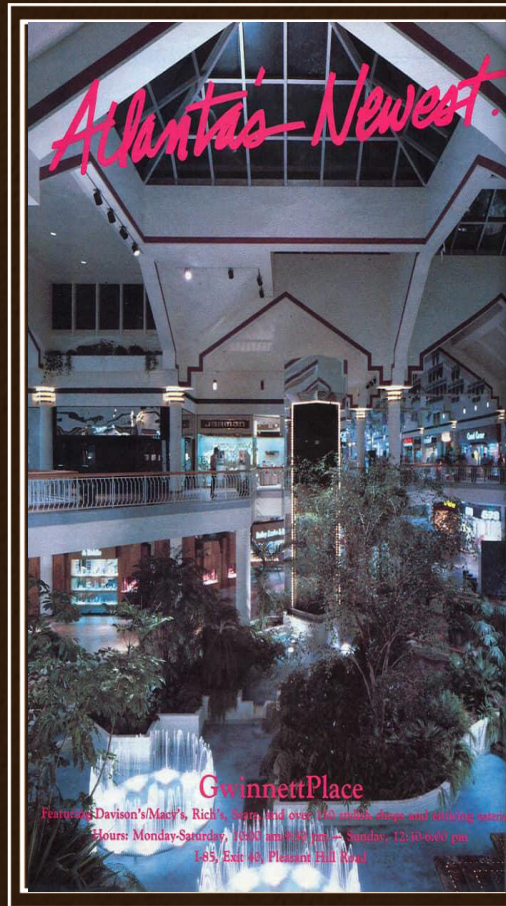


Discover Mills Mall (Now Sugarloaf Mills)

1984

1991

1998



Gwinnett Place Mall
Opens



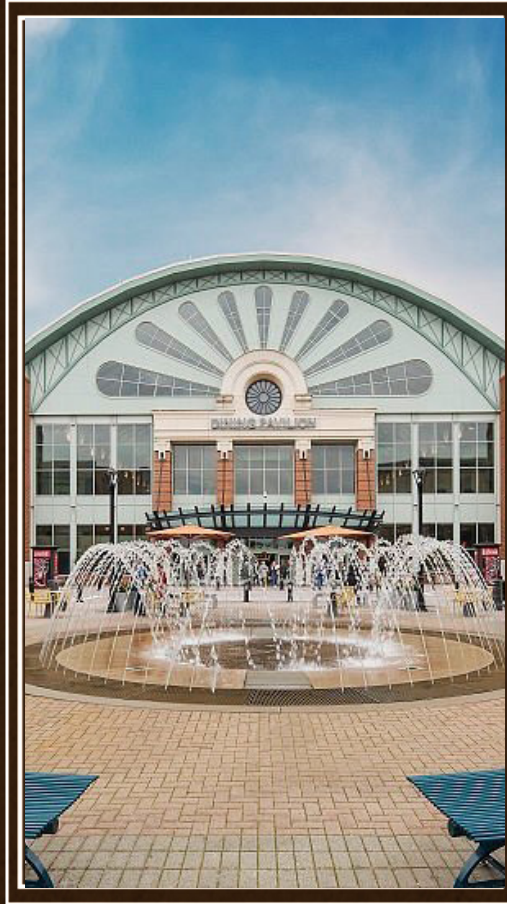
Peak popularity;
cultural hub



Cosmetic
Upgrades in
Preparation to
Compete with New
Malls

GWINNETT PLACE MALL LIFESPAN

1999



Mall of Georgia
Opens

2001



Discover Mills Mall
(Now Sugarloaf)
Opens

2012



Official
Forclosure as Main
Chain Stores Leave

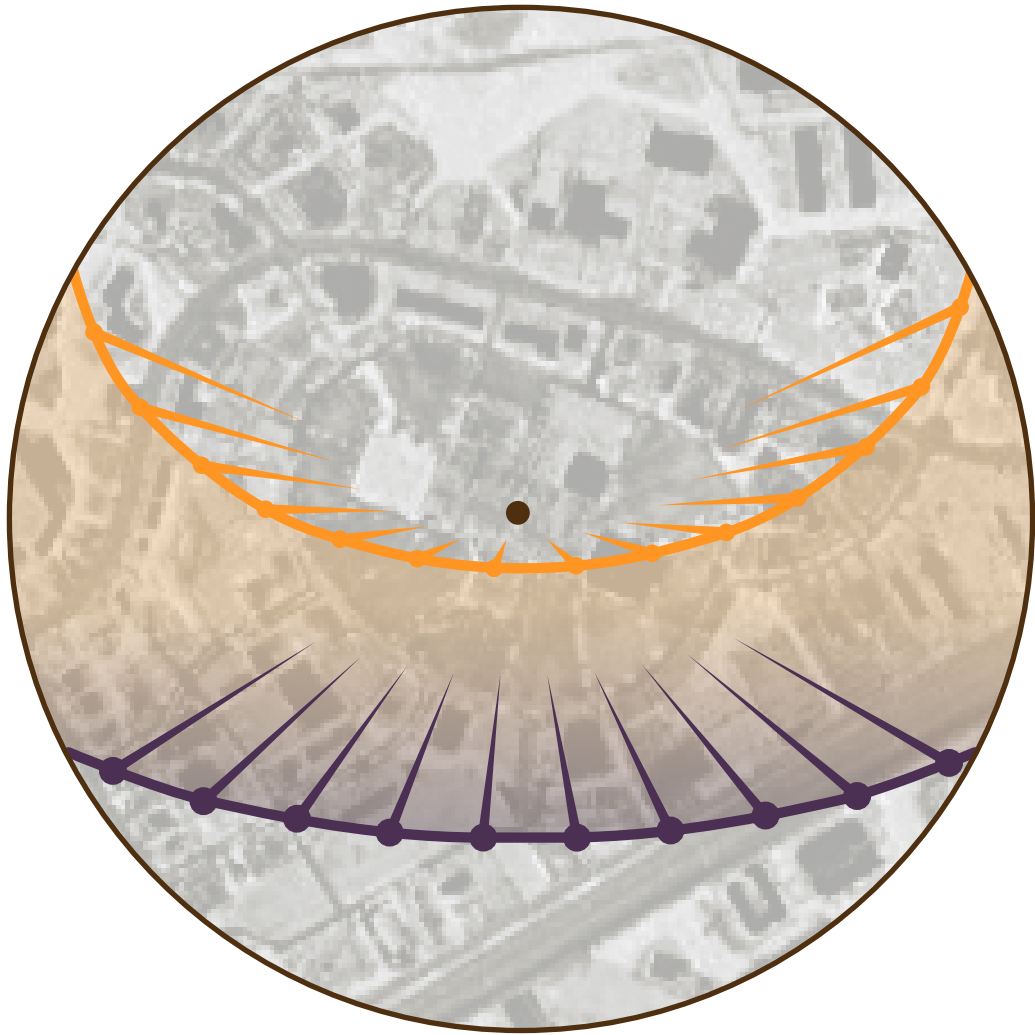
2016-PRESENT



Majority of Space
Vacant Save for a
Few Department
Stores

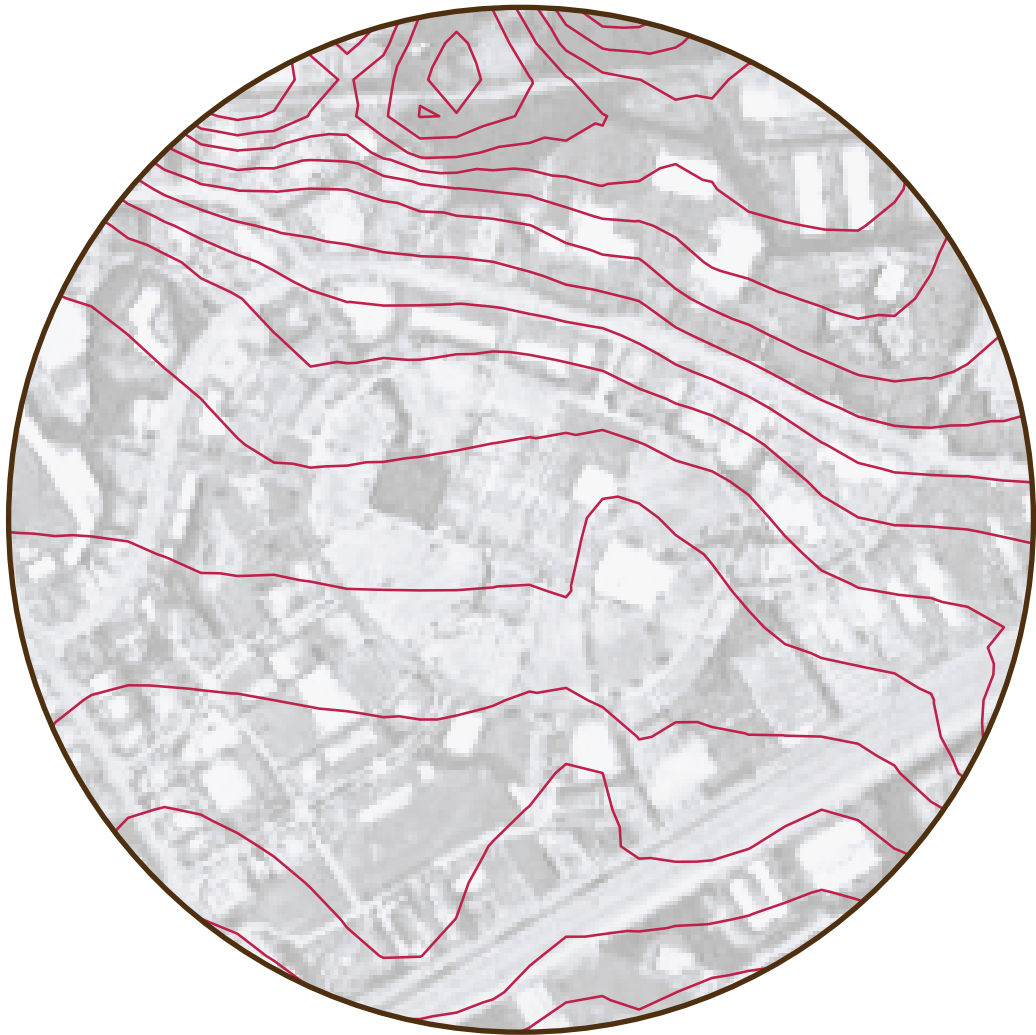
SITE ANALYSIS

Sun Path



During the summer season, the site gains most of its sunlight from the east, west, and south. During the winter season however, the site loses a lot of its light from the east and west in addition to the reduced daylight throughout the day. Programs with a preference for natural lighting should be placed south of the site and, buildings should be organized laterally to optimize lighting.

Topography



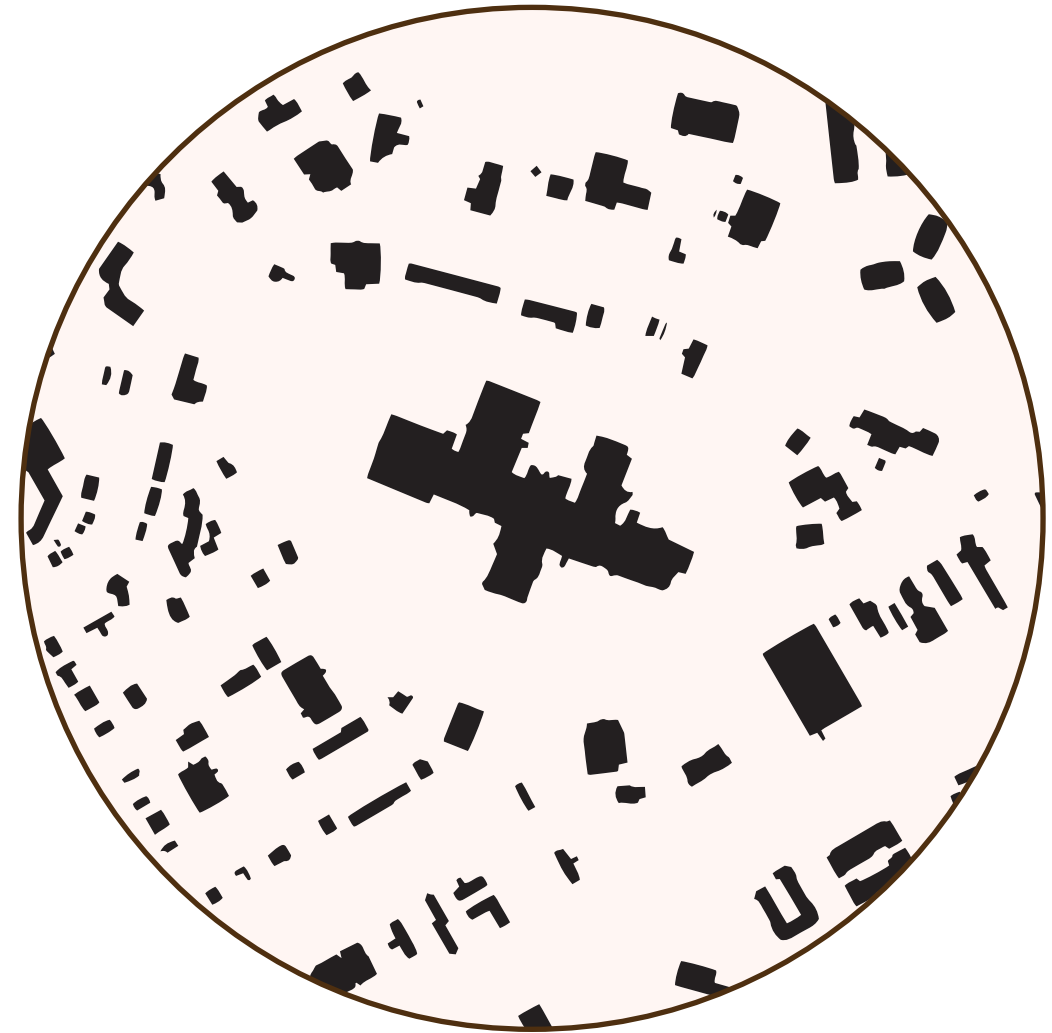
The site itself remains relatively flat only raising ... in the span of roughly ... The varying ground level surrounding the site, however, block views from important roads. The slight change in ground level on the site, allows more opportunity for seamless program development.

Green Spaces



Green surrounding the site consists of lots of unkempt grass, areas dedicated to civil structures, and a local park north of the site. The site itself has minimal plant life with the only green spaces being the occasional trees splitting up the large parking lot.

Figure-Ground



The original mall structure contrasts with the surrounding buildings in sheer size. Additionally, the building has a large buffer zone established by the parking lot surrounding the building. This creates an island effect separating it from the surrounding context which unsuccessfully connects it to the city it inhabits.





Road Access





The site has multiple points of access from the road network. Three main intersections connect the site to the rest of the city and establish the location as a central hub. As the mall has lost its stores and visitors, the site has become a desolate place for curious explorers and learning how to drive in the large parking lot. Without the mall to welcome visitors, the area is now only used by the three sole department stores which have remained.

Takeaways

The site is circled by large residential zones, restaurants, parks, and local businesses establishing the central nature of the cite which could have served as a cultural battery for Gwinnett Place.

Major road ways have direct access to the center of Gwinnett Place and the site location. The accessibility is a boon for a more successful project.

Close proximity to Sugarloaf mills led to the closing of the majority of Gwinnett Place Mall. To avoid repeating history, a different approach must be taken.

-  Primary Roads
-  Secondary Roads
-  Entrances to Site
-  Tertiary Roads

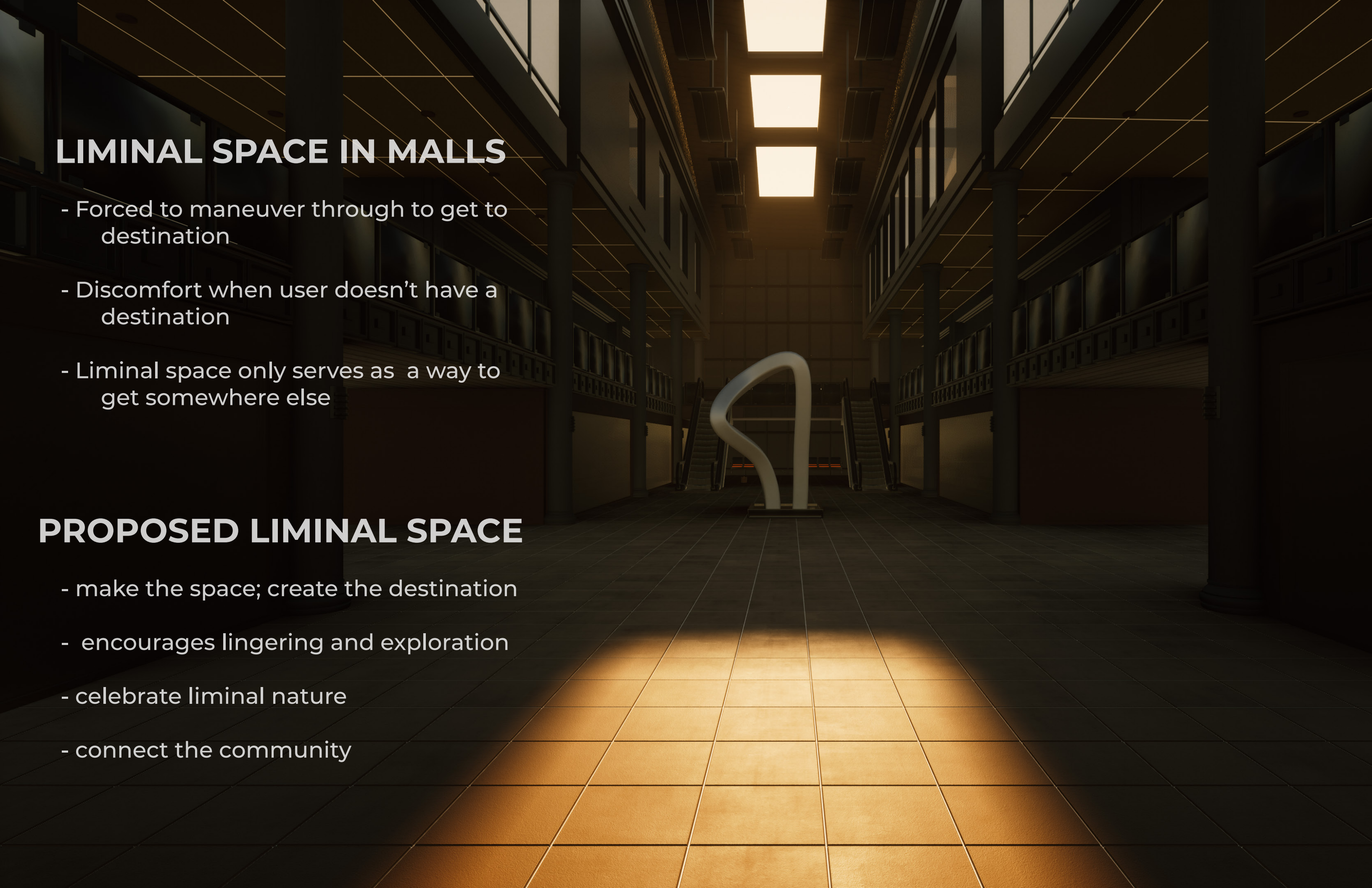
DESIGN SYNTHESIS

LIMINAL SPACE IN MALLS

- Forced to maneuver through to get to destination
- Discomfort when user doesn't have a destination
- Liminal space only serves as a way to get somewhere else

PROPOSED LIMINAL SPACE

- make the space; create the destination
- encourages lingering and exploration
- celebrate liminal nature
- connect the community



DESIGN ELEMENTS



Continuity

This characteristic of liminality refers to consistent gestures over time. Examples include movement, time, repetition, and progression.

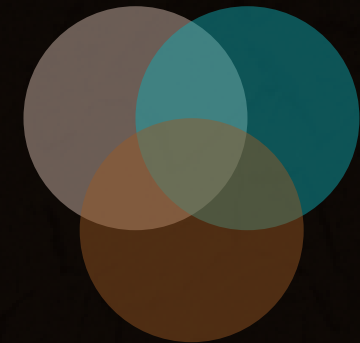
The proposal will be designed around the concept of continuous movement. The goal would be to encourage movement instead of simply heading to one destination.



Obscurity

This characteristic of liminality usually refers to physical perception. Examples include visual, auditory, and tactile senses.

The proposal will be designed around the concept of sense. The goal would be to create a landscape which encourages exploration and establishes unique view points.

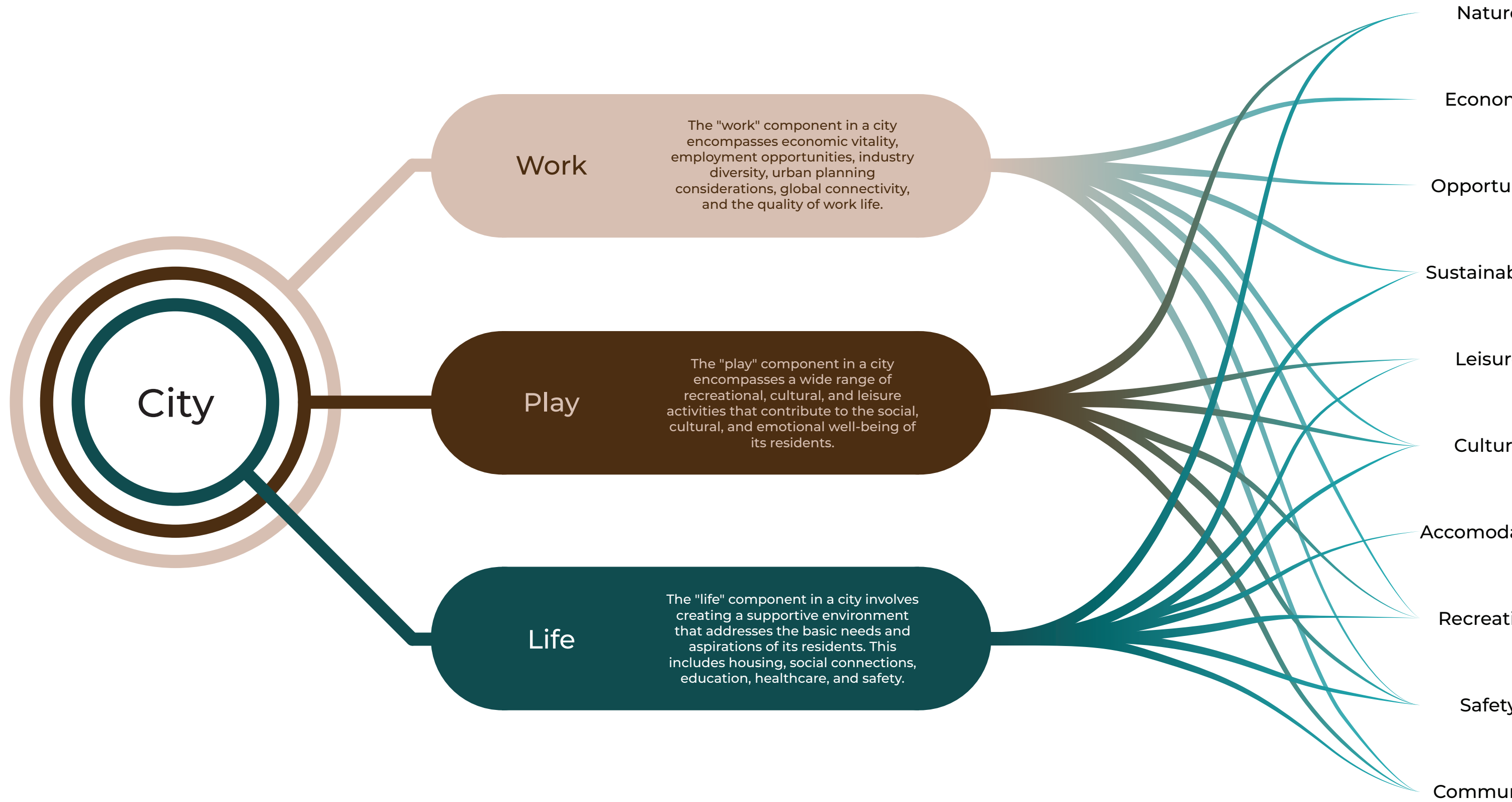


Sentimentality

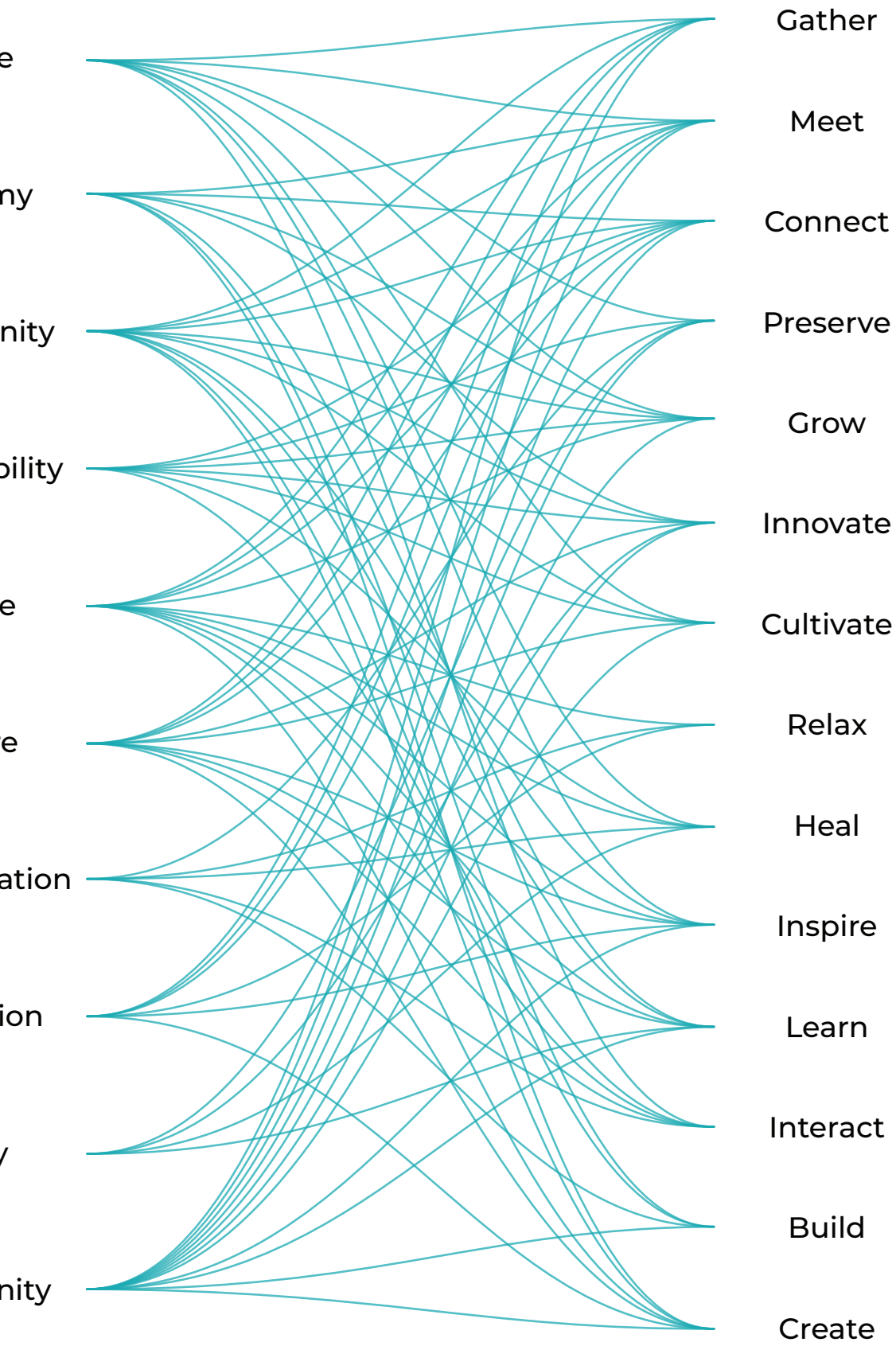
This characteristic of liminality usually refers to human experience in a space. Examples include emotional and psychological experience.

The proposal will be designed around the concept of emotion. The goal would be to use varying materials to evoke different emotions while the users navigate the site.

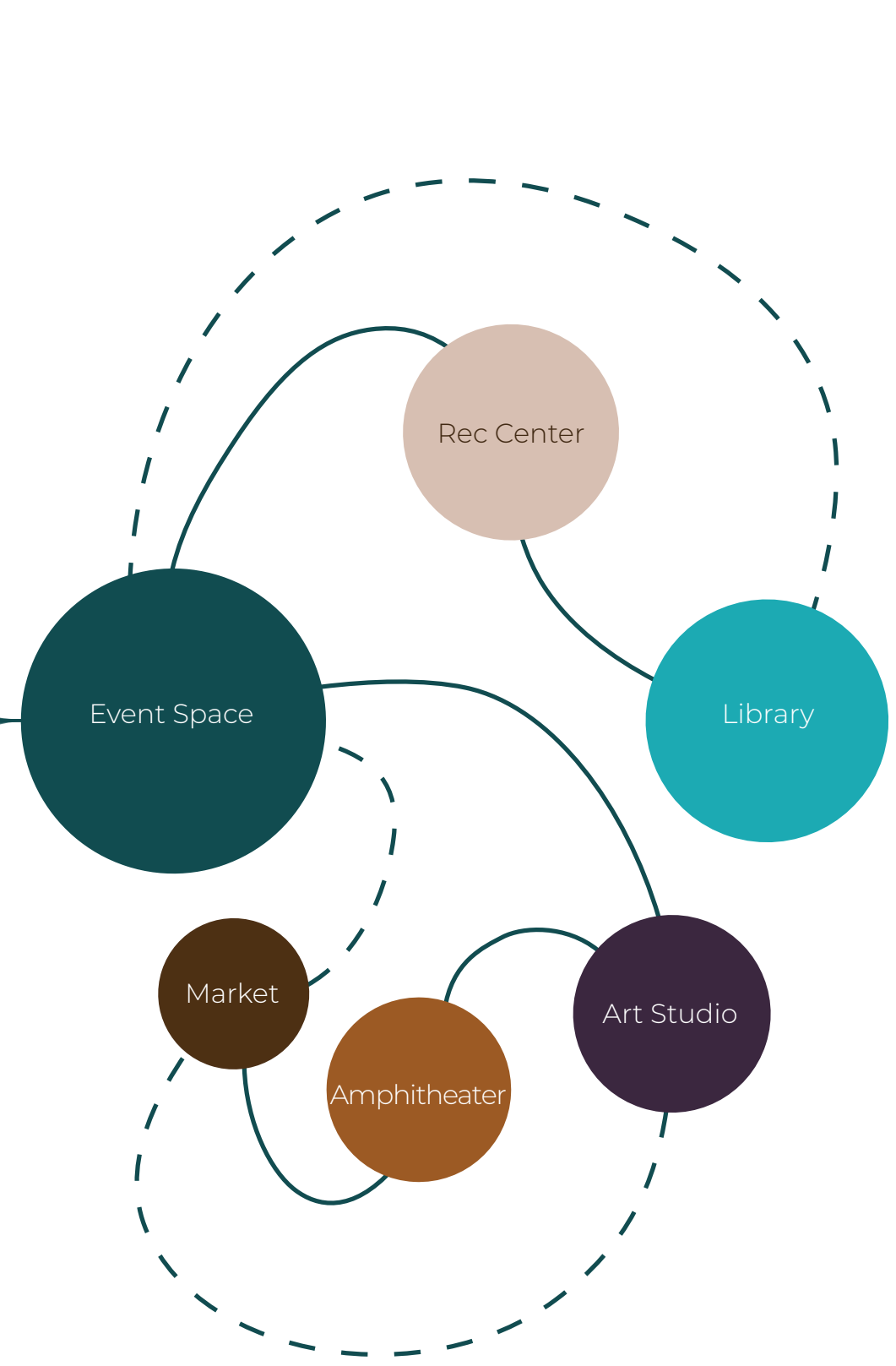
WHAT MAKES A CITY



CONCEPTS AND ACTIONS



RESULTING PROGRAMS



— Direct Connection
- - Visual Connection

DESIGN PROCESS

LAYOUT STRATEGY

Community has been a focal point throughout this process. So, the event space will be the epicenter of the proposed site with programs organized radially around it.



PROGRAM ORGANIZATION

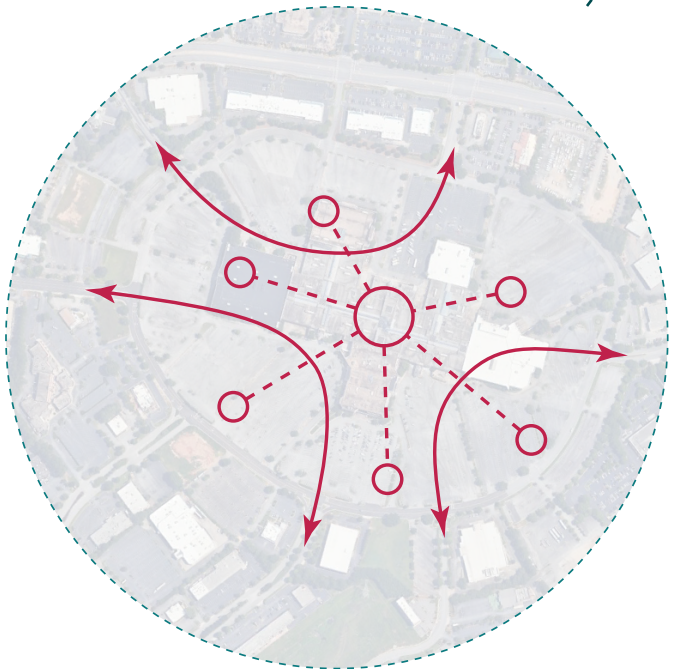
The program is organized around the nodes and fitting within the established paths.



NODES AND PATHS

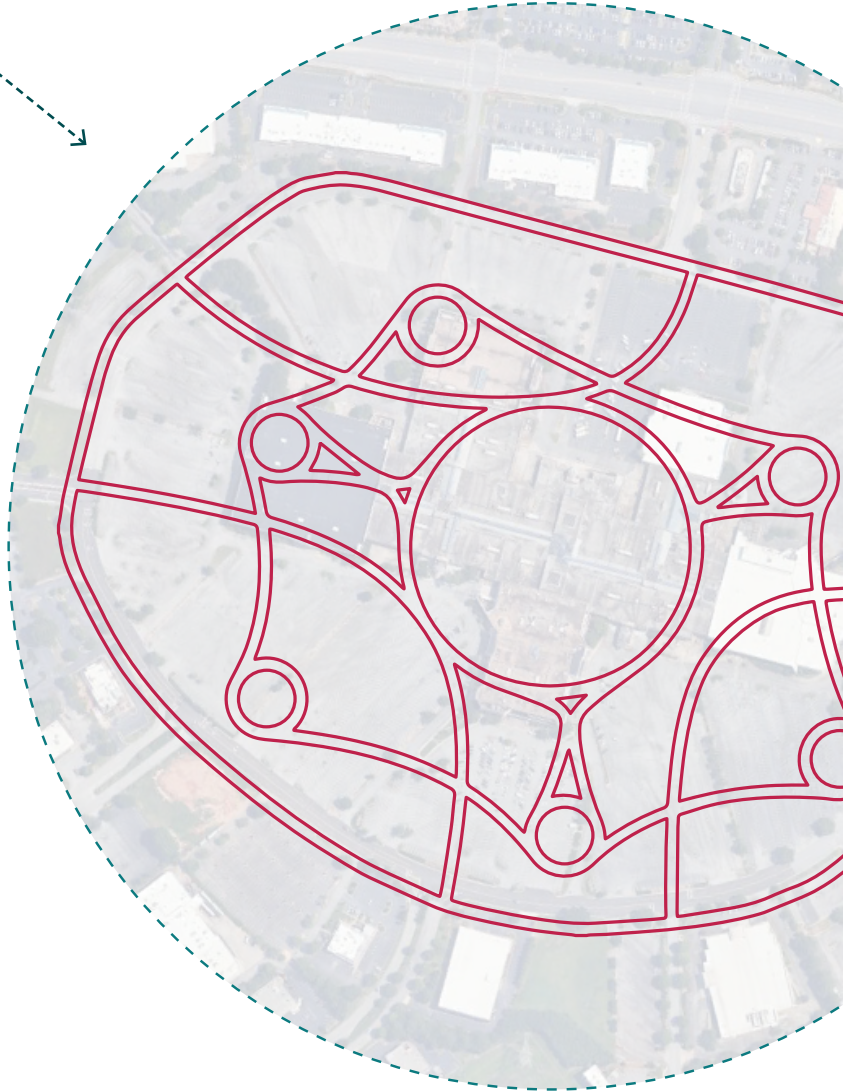
Major roads are connected which give various access points from the main road.

Based on the radial organization, nodes were established which designate different zones around the site.

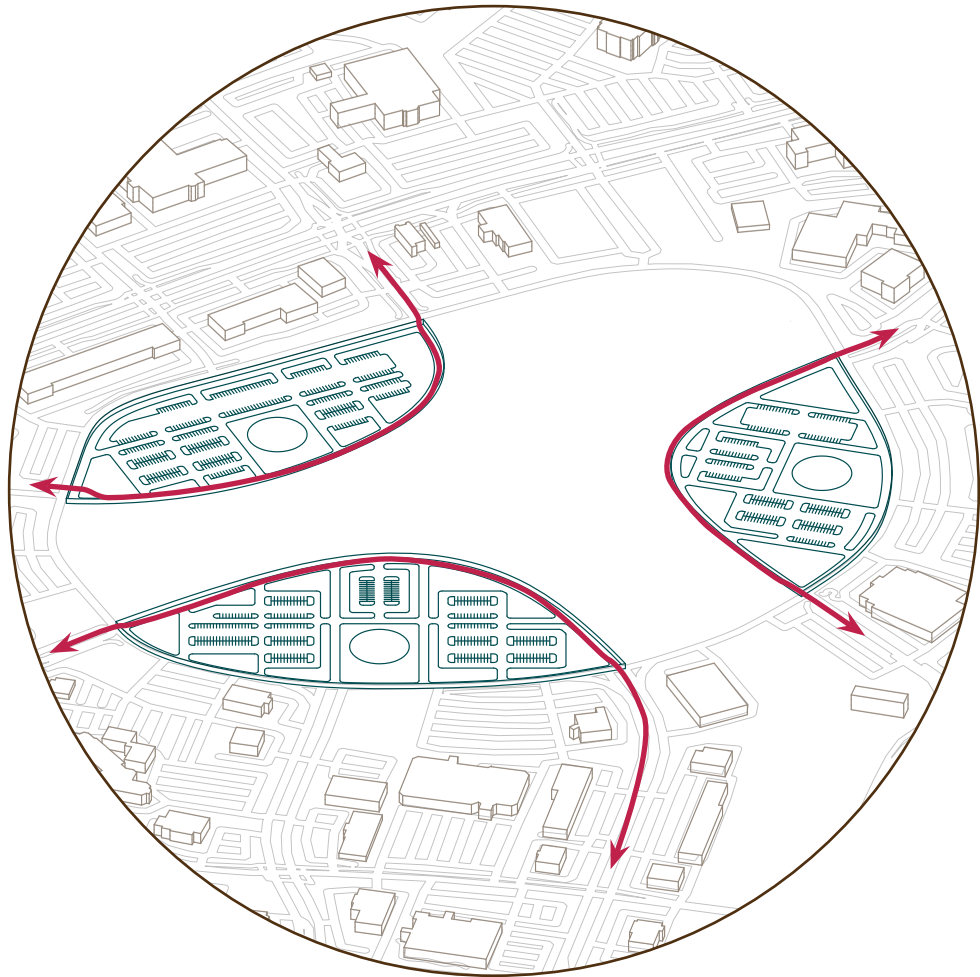


CIRCULATION

Based on the previous organization strategy, the site has evolved into a park-esc design. Using the pathways as guides, the voids will be used to establish districts within the site.

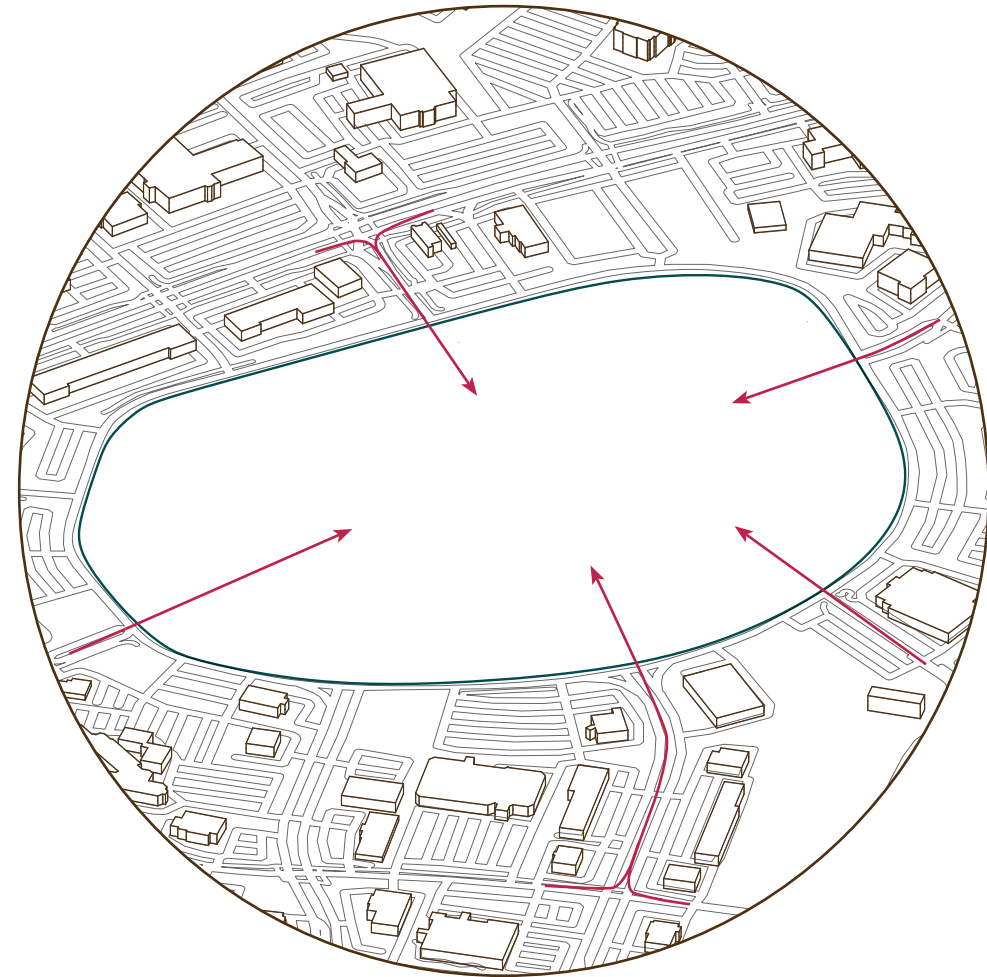


PROGRAM ANALYSIS



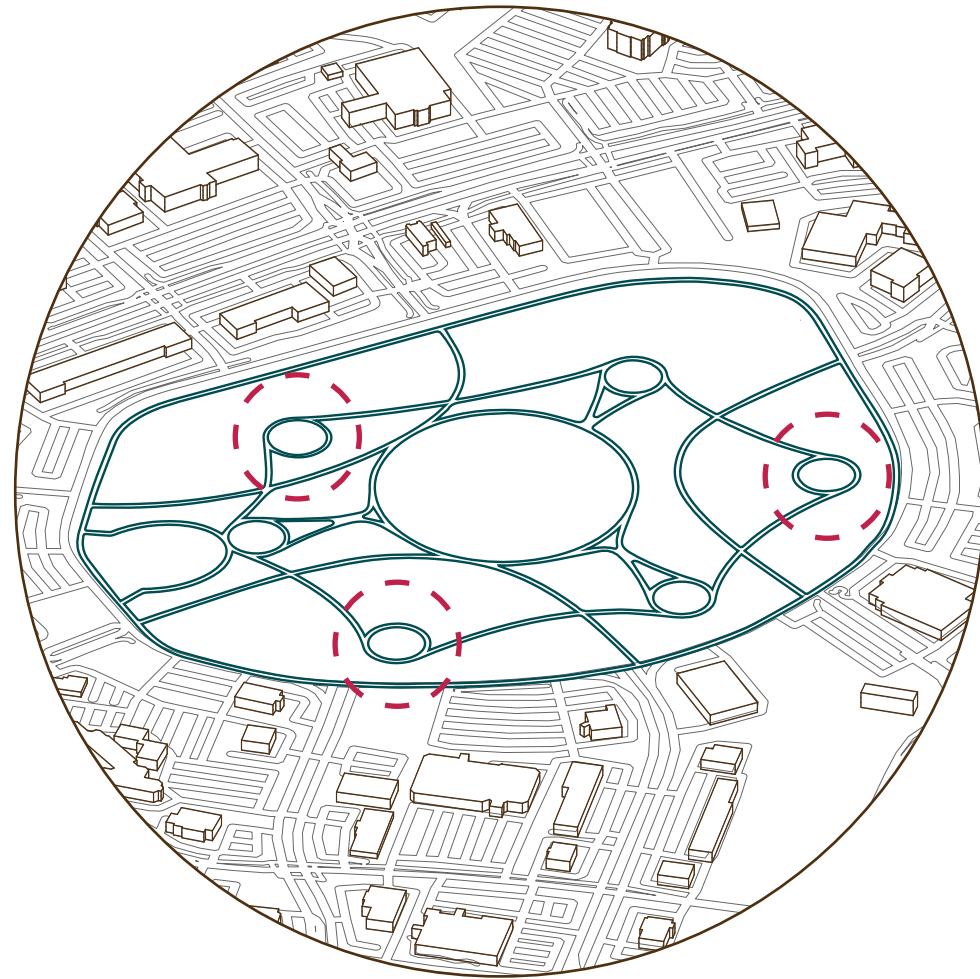
UNDERGROUND PARKING

A large proportion of Duluth's population use personal vehicles as their main mode of transportation. In response to this, parking has been moved underground which allows for greening and a significantly reduced heat-island effect. Each zone also has a central area which opens up to the upper park areas giving access to the site.



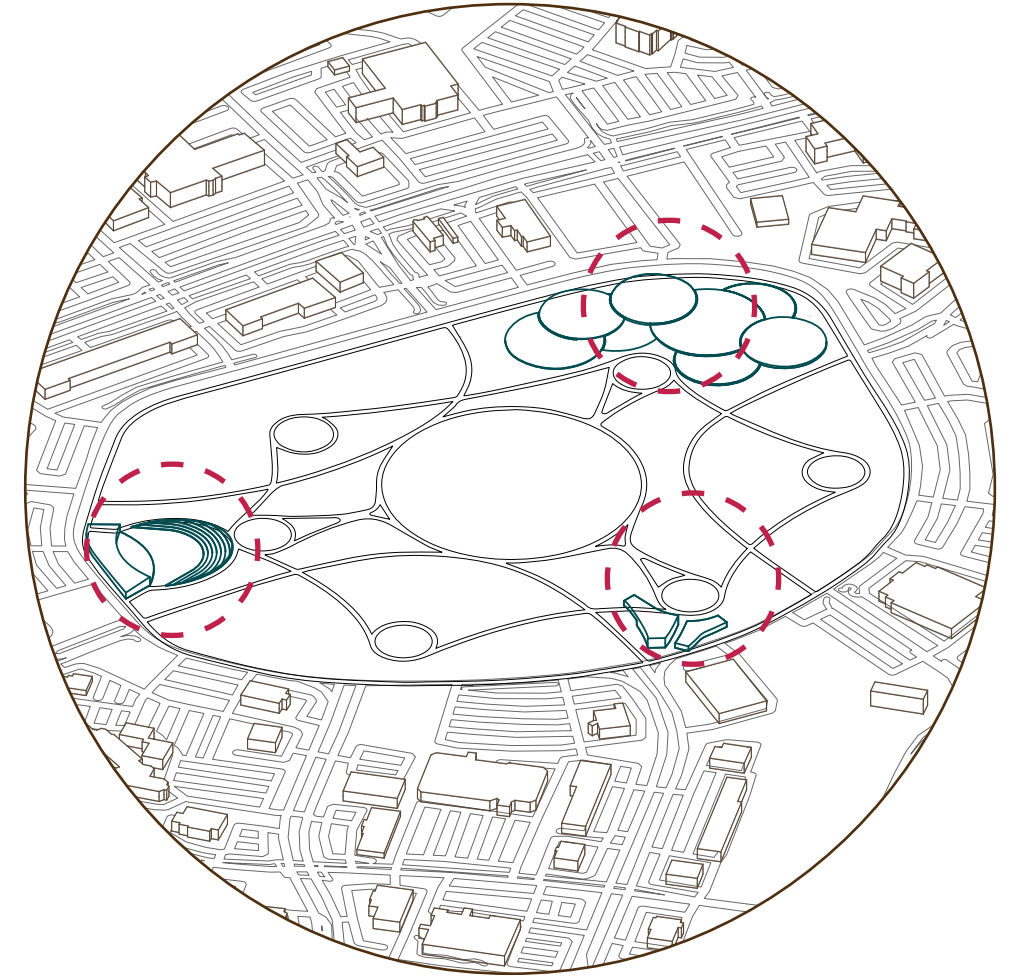
SURROUNDING CONTEXT

Maintaining the location of this abandoned hub for commerce was paramount for this design. By redesigning the site to focus on the community, a more meaningful and long lasting program can be established.



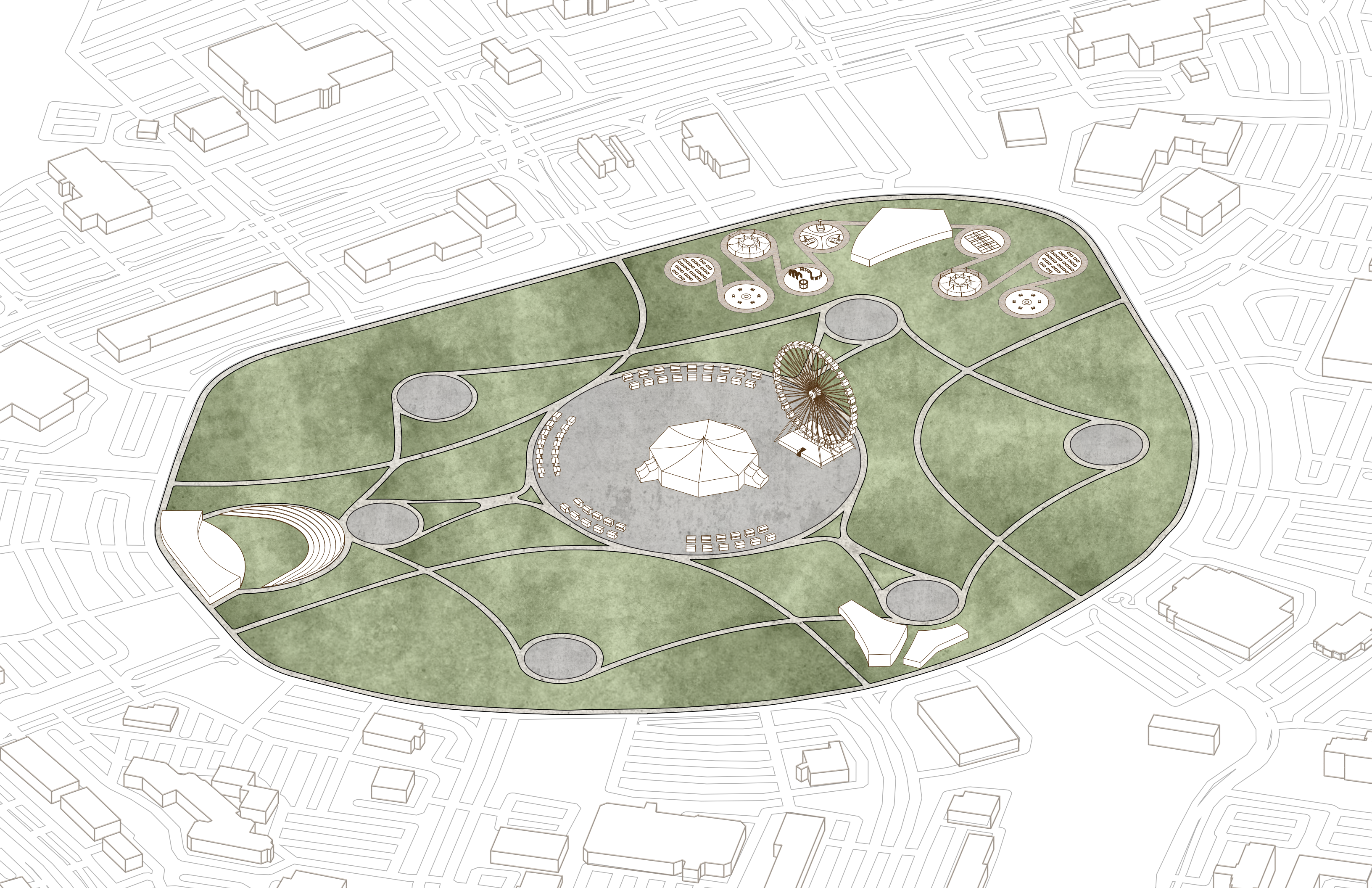
PARK LANDMARKS

Each park zone has a central location which serve as landmarks for visitors exploring the site and gives access to underground parking.

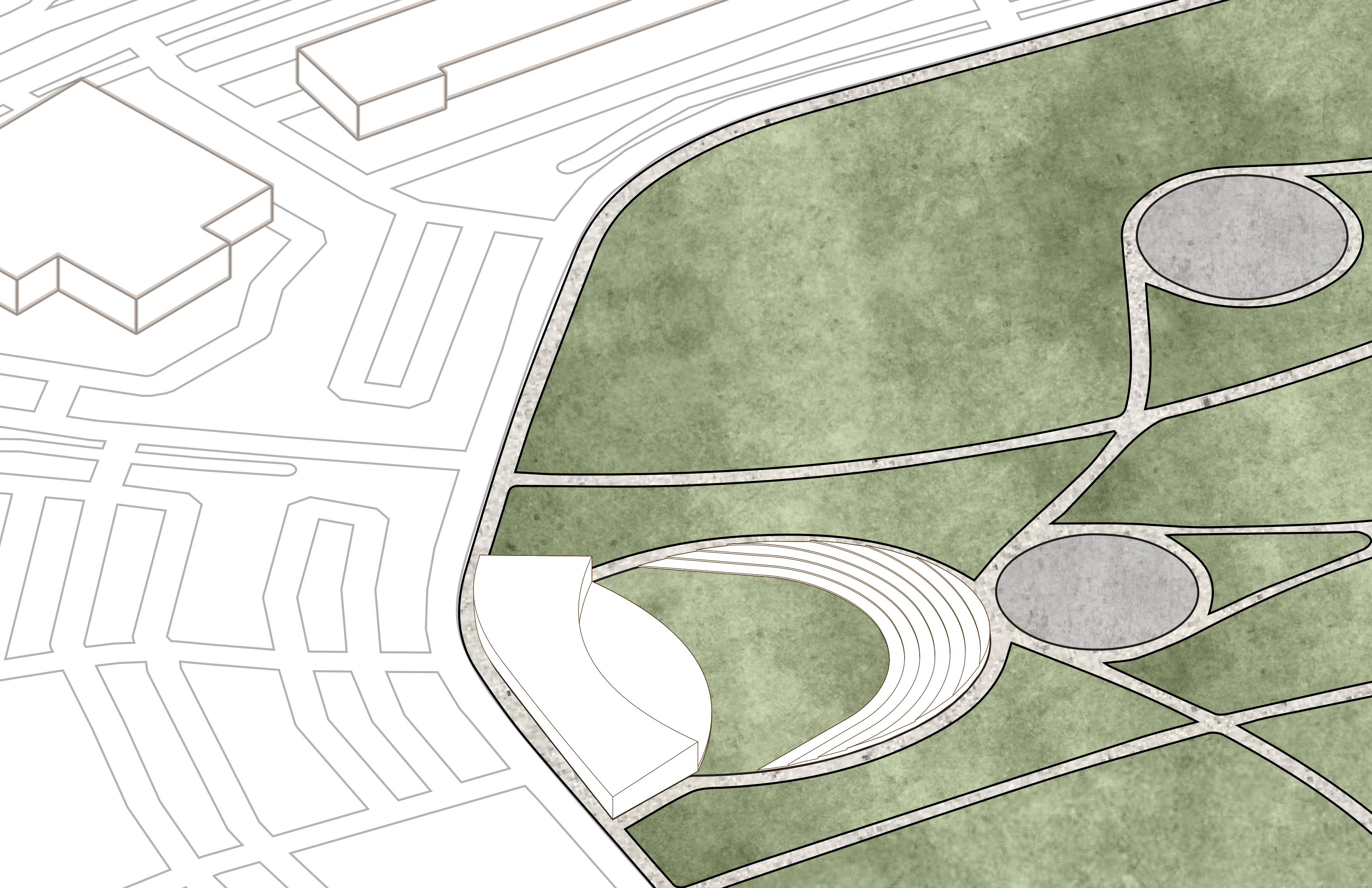


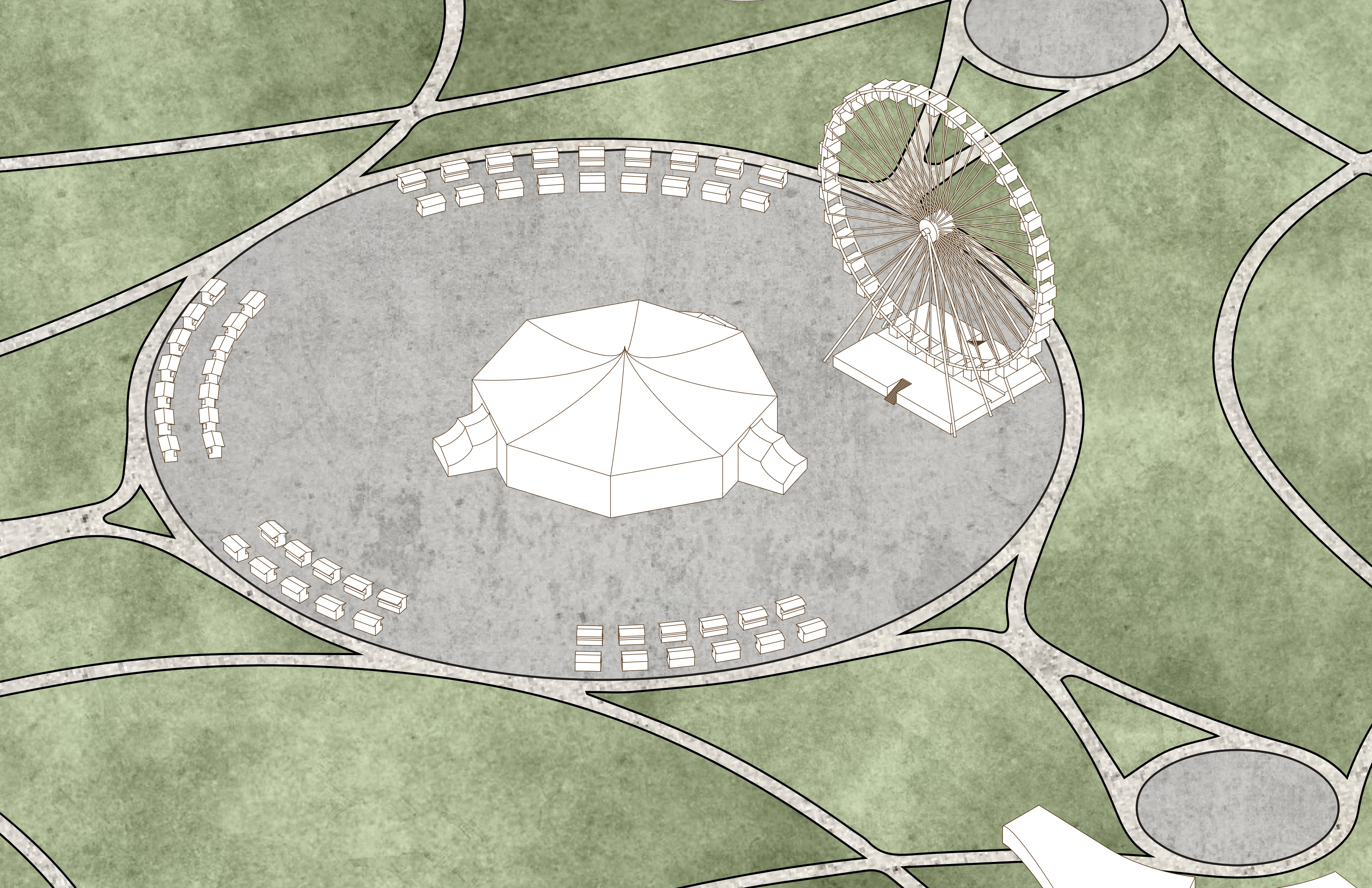
PROGRAMS

In contrast to the typical mall typology, the liminal nature of the park-inspired circulation is embraced. As a visitor walks around the site, the diverse programs encourage exploration. For this proposal, a determined destination is not required so that visitors may enjoy the experience of simply wandering.









APPENDIX

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