

Alexander von Branca Konrad-Martin Haus in Paderborn

Semesterarbeit von Magdalena Belavška
im Rahmen des Seminars

‘Architektur sammeln, dokumentieren und präsentieren
- Der Architekt Alexander von Branca
im Sommersemester 18/19

Prehistory of the Konrad-Martin Haus

The first building on the small cathedral square in Paderborn which is now the Konrad-Martin Haus was built between 1970 – 1977. The building was meant to become the new residence of the local bishop Lorenz Kardinal Jaeger. The bishop died before he could move in. His successor cardinal Degenhard refused to live there as he felt that this house was too splendid, pretentious and not suitable for a spiritual leader. That's why the building was furthermore used as an office.

Because it was not even usable very well for this purpose Alexander von Branca and his daughter Emanuela were entrusted to rebuild it and add new parts, for example a library and additional office rooms.

Urban planning concept

The area around the cathedral square, in particular the small cathedral square, is occupied by individual buildings with fenced gardens. The buildings are either facing the front or turn away from the rear part of the property. This results in a tense sequence of buildings and green paths of gardens.

The architectural complex of Konrad-Martin

Haus answers to this structure by allowing the space-limiting garden wall to dominate as an urban element. This situation allows the architect to keep the garden wall in the foreground of the urban boundary of the small cathedral square and to reach the urban development conclusion.

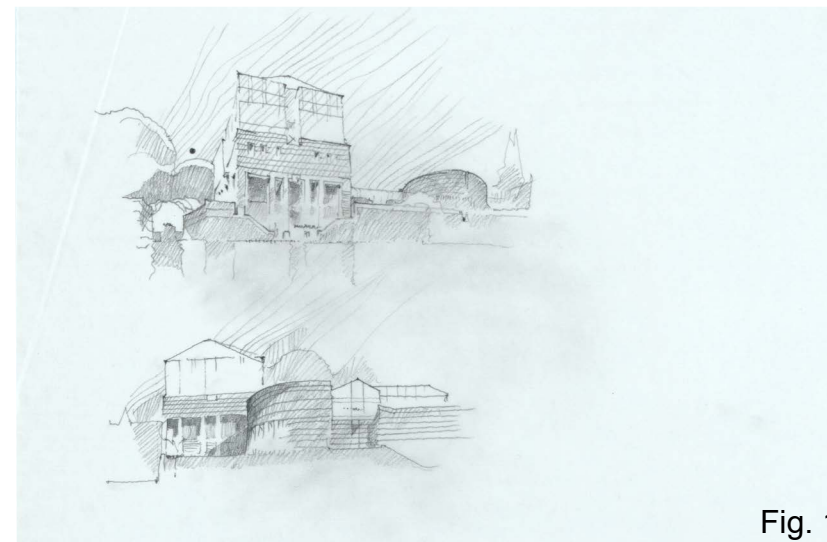


Fig. 1

Perspective view, Pencil on tracing paper.

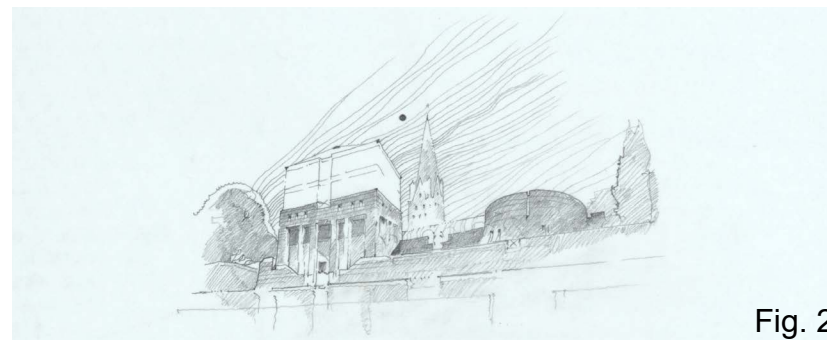


Fig. 2

Perspective view, Pencil on tracing paper.

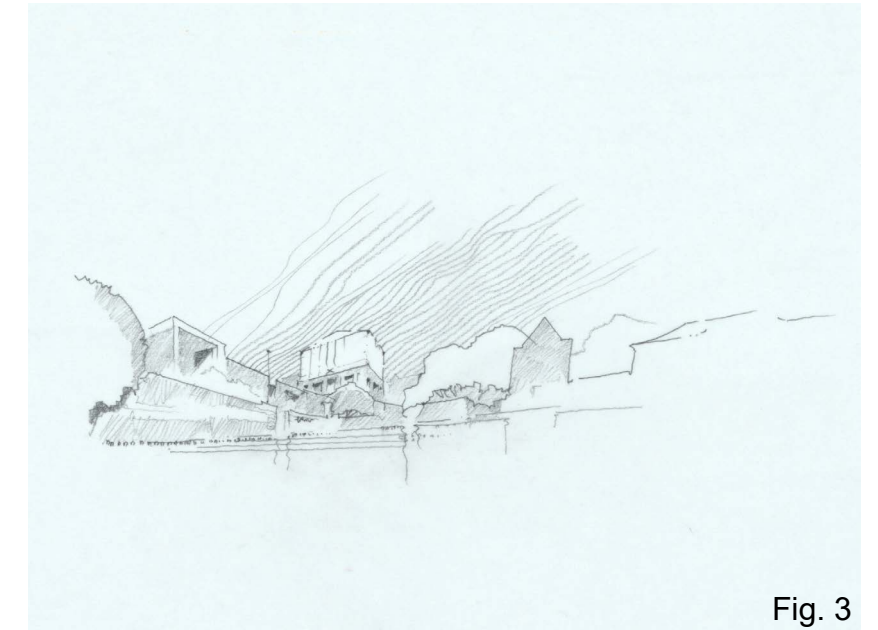


Fig. 3

Perspective view, Pencil on tracing paper.

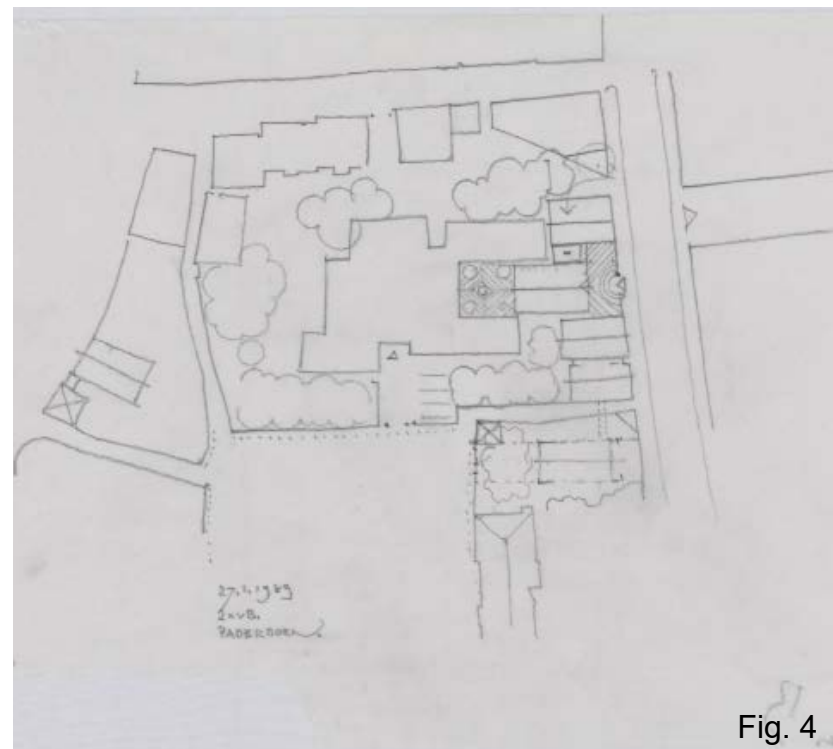
A comparable situation can be seen in the west and south, there the architect proposes a corresponding arrangement of the buildings, which suits the original development of the surroundings: a set of smaller geometrical volumes with little green paths in between. It was also important to allow a view of the cathedral tower in the west. That would be not guaranteed if the existing building was enlarged. There is a noticeable manner of developing an urban design: views on the one hand and urban space limitations on the other.

Architectural concept

The core of Konrad-Martin Haus has been developed in a style typical for 1970s. The buildings are accessible by a big hall, which is a transition area between outdoor and indoor space. The social zone forms the link between old and new and is oriented towards both the existing inner courtyard and the new hall.

First sketches

It is known, that Alexander von Branca started working on this project in 1989. An early sketch shows his first ideas about how buildings should be placed on the site. Early sketch (Fig. 4) shows a straight-angled geometric structure - the outline of the mass is made out of several rectangular shapes of different size.



Site plan (sketch), Pencil on tracing paper, 27.01.1989.

The second sketch (Fig. 5), according to the date, from 27.01.1989, shows a more detailed structure. The main core still remains rectangular, but there is an interesting pedestrian path added. It leads from south to north, to the half-circular library building. It has a radiant shape, which opens to the south and creates a narrowing perspective focusing on the library.

Specific colouring of the sketch brings a brief understanding of planned materiality: the mentioned path should be under a glass roof, there is a pyramidal glass dome on the top of the main core as well. On the northern side, behind the building, there are little stairs planned, so it should be placed lower than the rest of the site. There is also a little green courtyard (or patio) inside of a building.



Site plan (sketch), Markers on tracing paper, 1989.

Competition drawings

Drawings presented for the competition are much closer to the second sketch than to the first one. The general idea is the same: on the south-east there is a set of buildings, following the shape of the site. The administrative building almost touches the eastern wall. Between it and the main building there is a triangular passage under a glass roof. In the center of the site the main building appears. The site plan drawing (Fig. 6) shows the difference in the outline between the ground and the first levels. The architect decided to mark the shadows as well, so actual differences in height between buildings are more readable. On the north Konrad-Martin Haus is surrounded by smaller residential buildings, on the south it is facing the cathedral. The whole complex is planned to be surrounded by a lush vegetation. There is a small lawn on the western side. The border between outside and inside sometimes disappears: there is a lot of glass, visual corridors between interior and exterior, main entrance is emphasised by a garden wall going just to the main doors.

The ground floor plan (Fig. 7) is quite rational, rectangular rooms are placed around the big hall with the main staircase. A little green patio is placed between this hall and the social room becomes another way to disguise borders between building and garden. The social room, placed on the eastern wall, is facing the glass passage, which leads to the library.



Site plan (competition), Ink on tracing paper, 1989.

Fig. 6

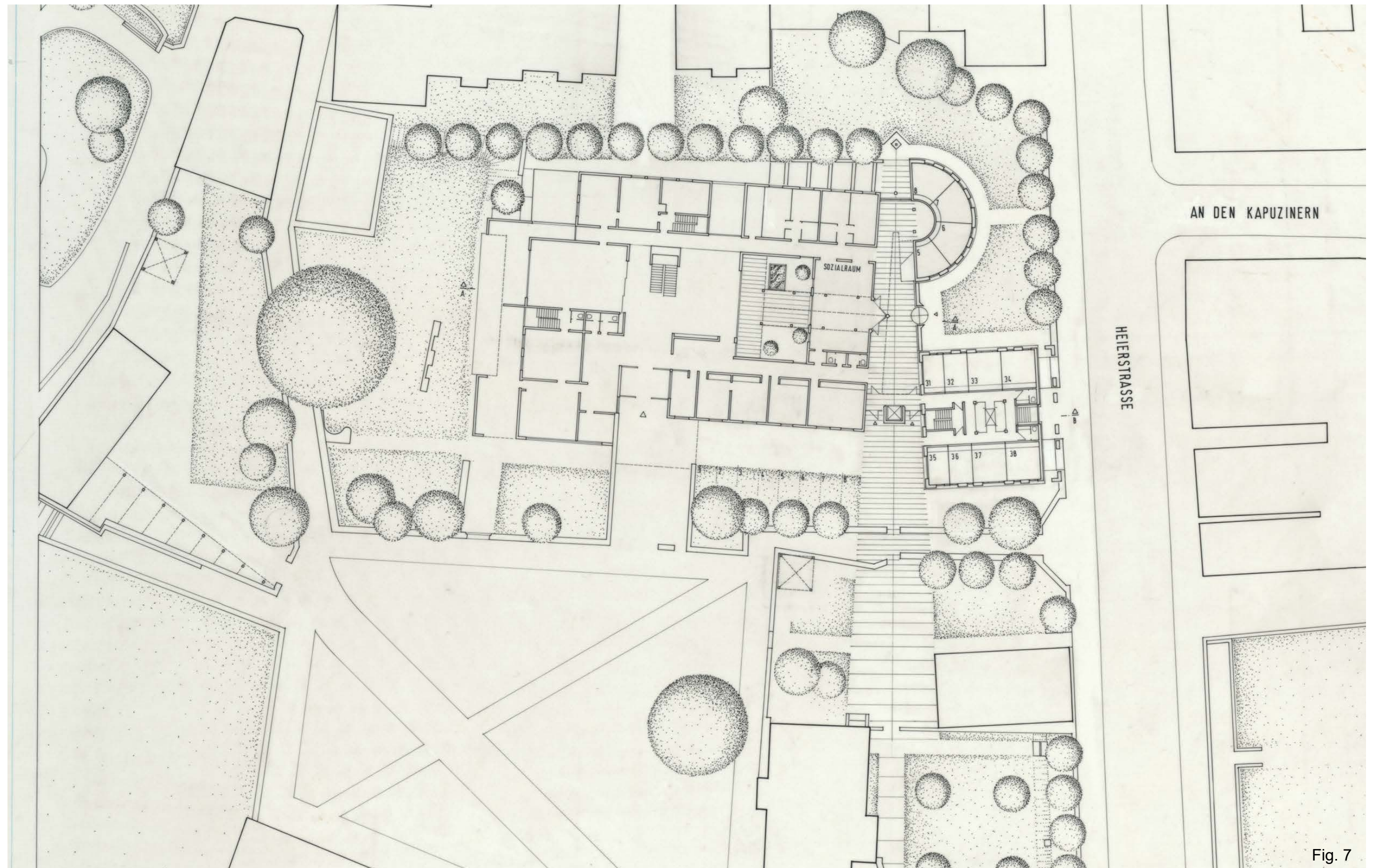


Fig. 7

Ground floor plan (competition), Ink on tracing paper.

The library itself is in a shape of semi-circle, arranged in a north-eastern part of the site. The first floor (Fig. 8) is smaller, but the rooms are bigger. On the eastern side there is a big green terrace on the roof. It is not clear, whether this terrace is accesible or has only a decorative function.

The first floor of the glass passage can be accessed both from the main building and administrative part. There is also an elevator connecting basement, ground and first levels.

The administrative building became an architectural dominant of the whole complex: it is the highest object (ground + 4 floors), it overlooks the Heierstraße (street) while the rest of the Konrad-Martin Haus is hidden behind the wall. The design of the interior spaces, however, is very simple: each floor has the same layout of rectangular rooms facing north and south with an elevator in the middle and a set of stairs on the west.

It is worth to mention, that Konrad-Martin Haus has a big basement with a parking lot under the library and passage. Under the main building there is a big storing and technical space (Fig. 9). The northern side of the site is lower than the ground floor level, so there are some offices placed in the basement with windows overlooking the backyard.

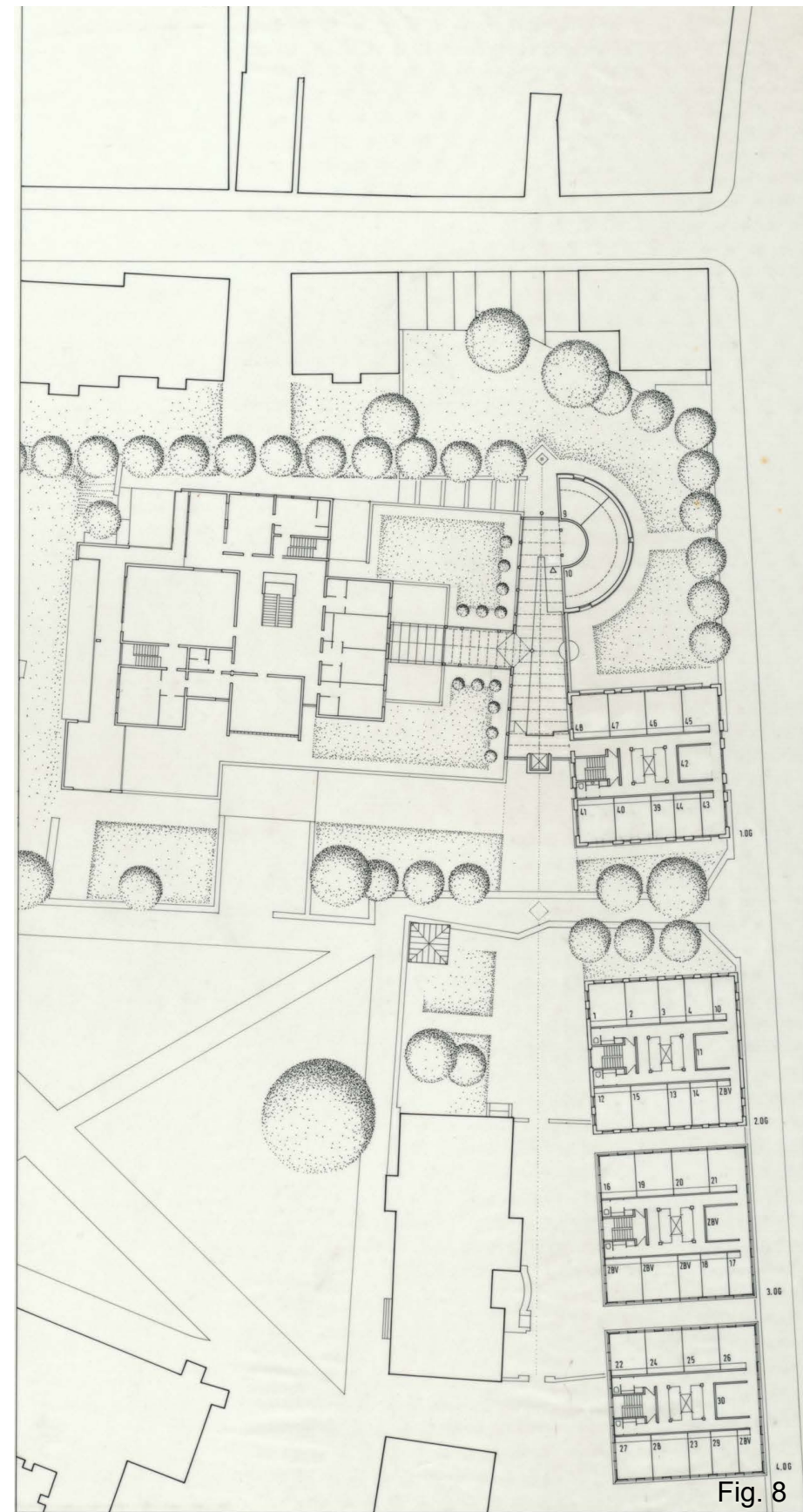


Fig. 8

First ground plan (competition), Ink on tracing paper.

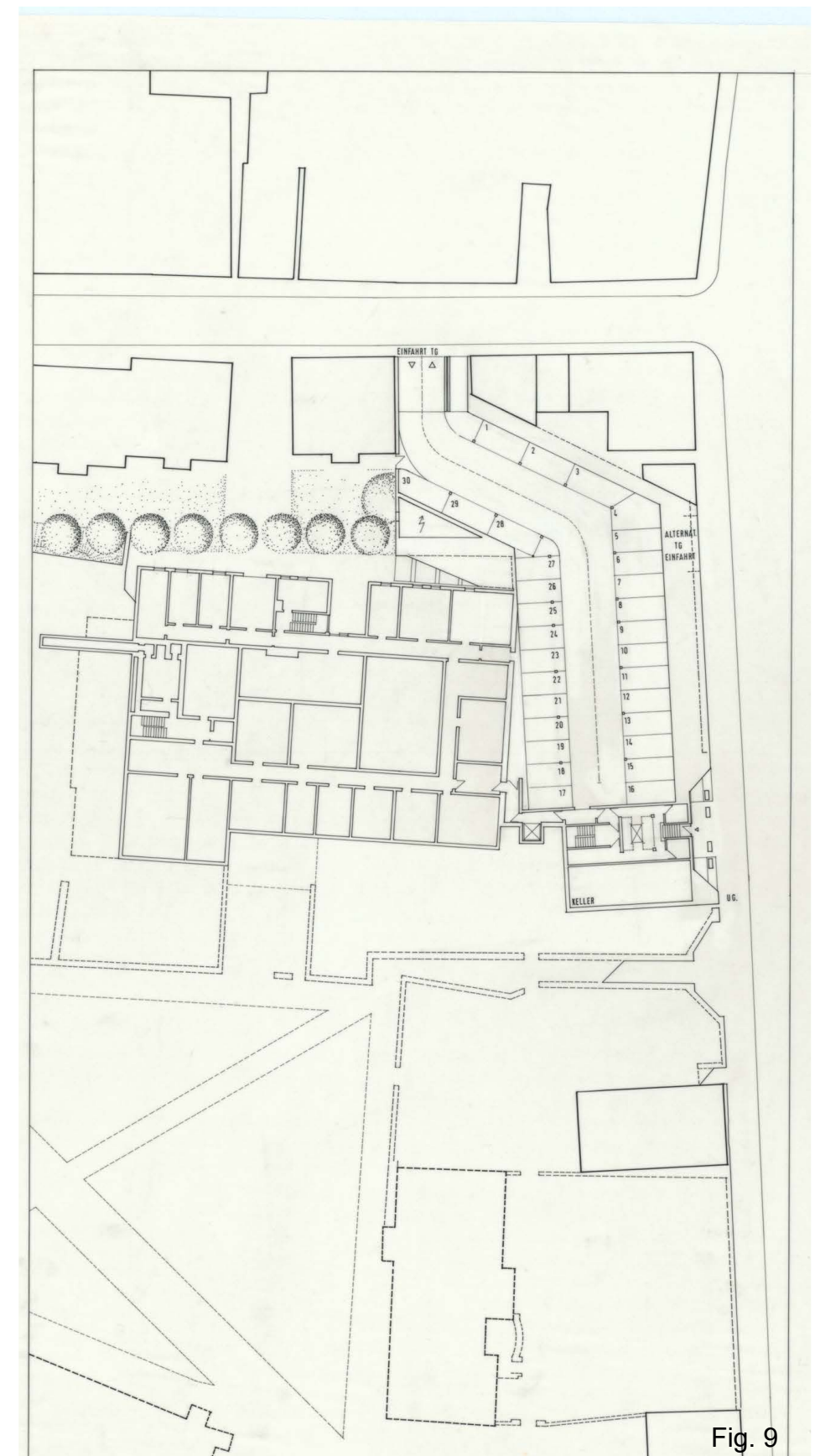


Fig. 9

Basement plan (competition), Ink on tracing paper.

Exploration of facades

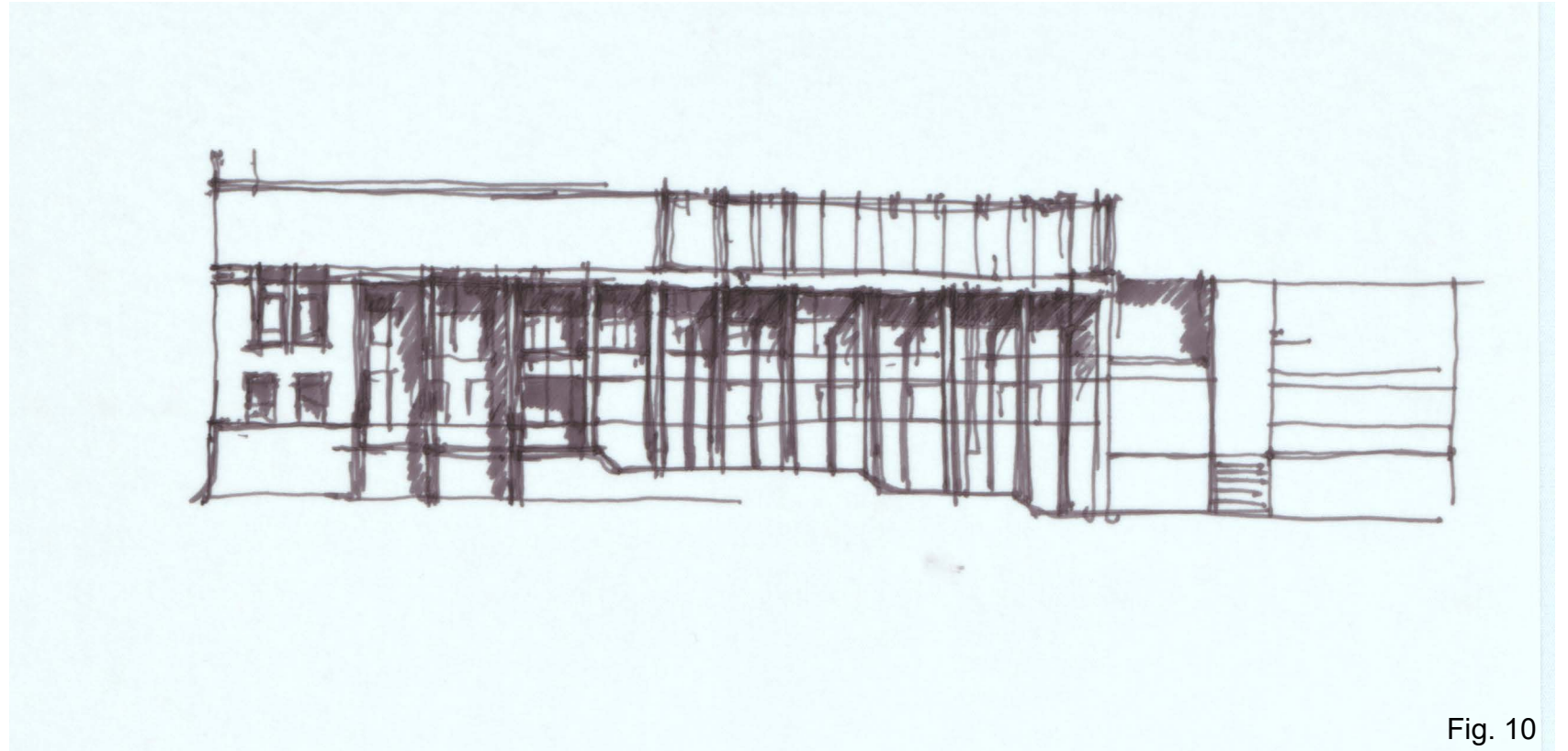
The sketches of facades show von Branca's early explorations (Fig. 10, Fig. 11). From the first sketches he was sure about the vertical patterns of windows and combining two contrasting materials: heavy brick and glass.

The drawings proposed for the competition represent much simpler facades than the sketched ones, but later on, for the final realisation, von Branca returned to some of his earlier ideas.

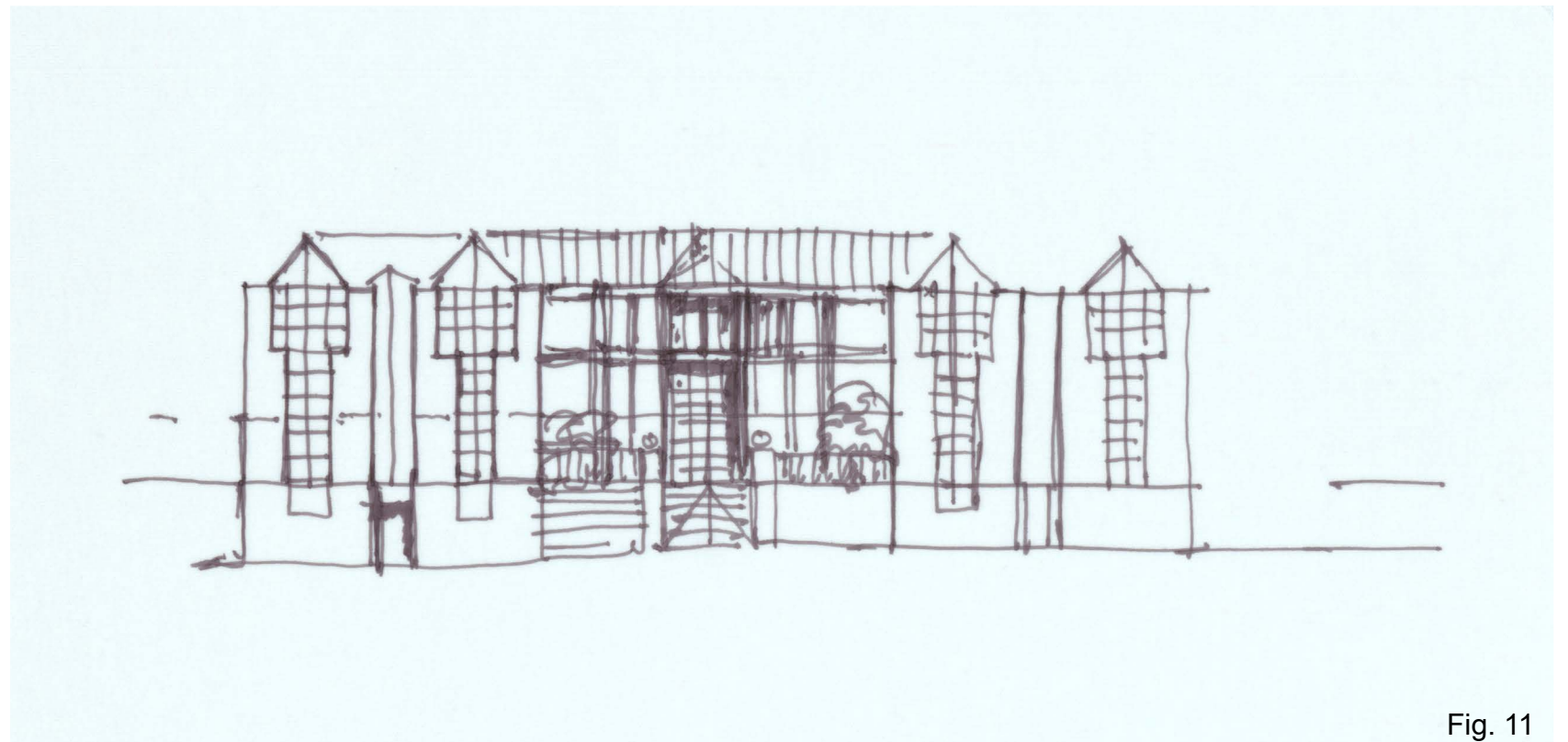
Elevations on the figures 12 and 13 are laconic, with a strong horizontal expression. Windows are simple, rather square than tall. Offices and smaller rooms are equipped with windows of the same shape and size, bigger spaces in the western part of the building and the main entrance have tall glass vitrines.

Only the administrative building stands out with some vertical patterns and larger contrast between glass and brick surfaces.

I would like to mention the hierarchy of proportions: ground and first floors are visually connected by a set of tall and relatively narrow windows, the openings on the third floor are much smaller, equal to the windows in the main building. The top floors are completely transparent, big surface of glass creates an illusion of dissolving in the surroundings, so the much heavier bottom part of the building stylistically matches the shorter objects. The part made of bricks is only slightly higher than the main core of the Konrad-Martin Haus, so the whole complex has a very horizontal expression, it rather sticks to the ground than tries to reach the sky.



Facade (sketch), Marker on tracing paper.



Facade (sketch), Marker on tracing paper.

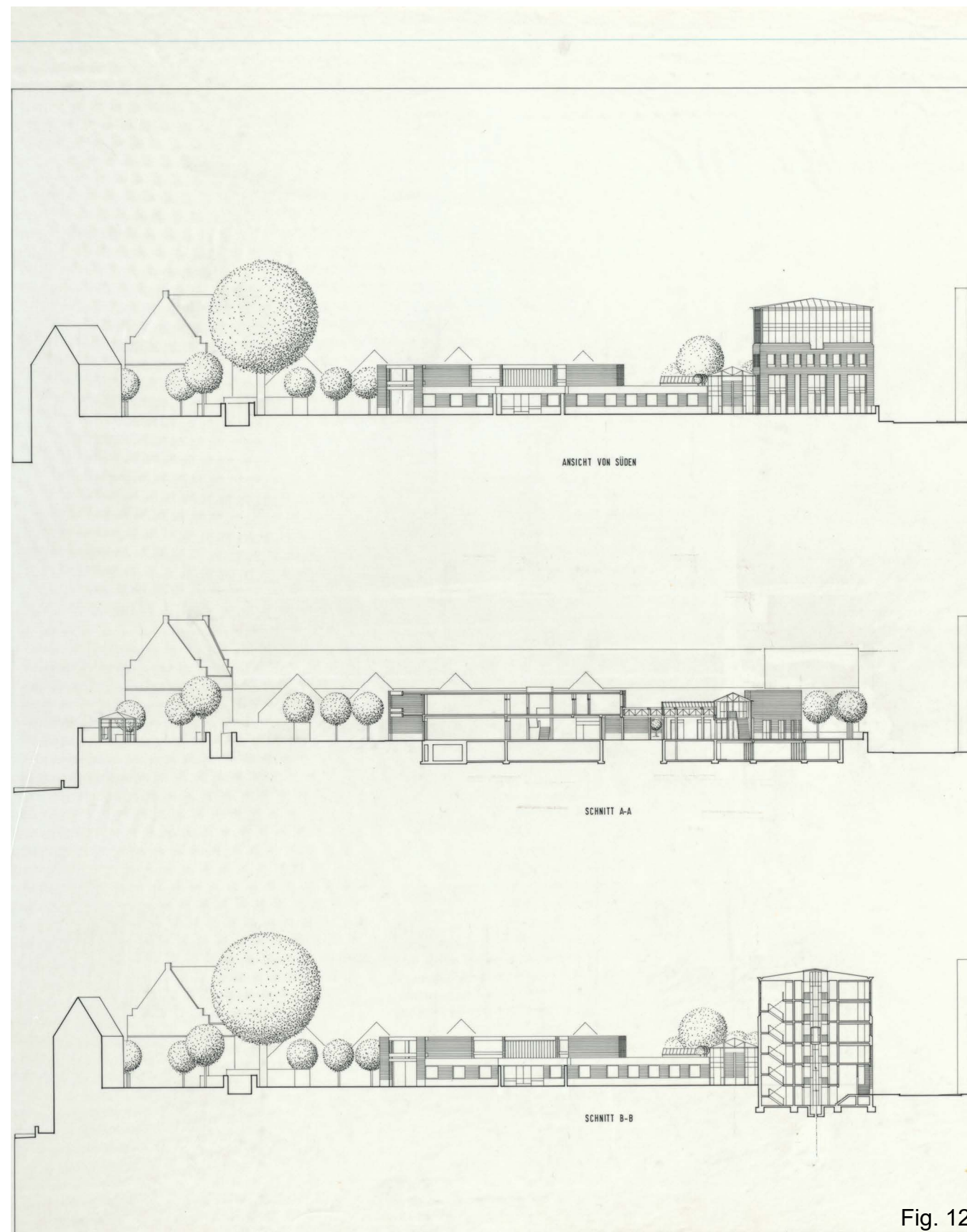


Fig. 12

Facades and sections (competition), Ink on tracing paper.

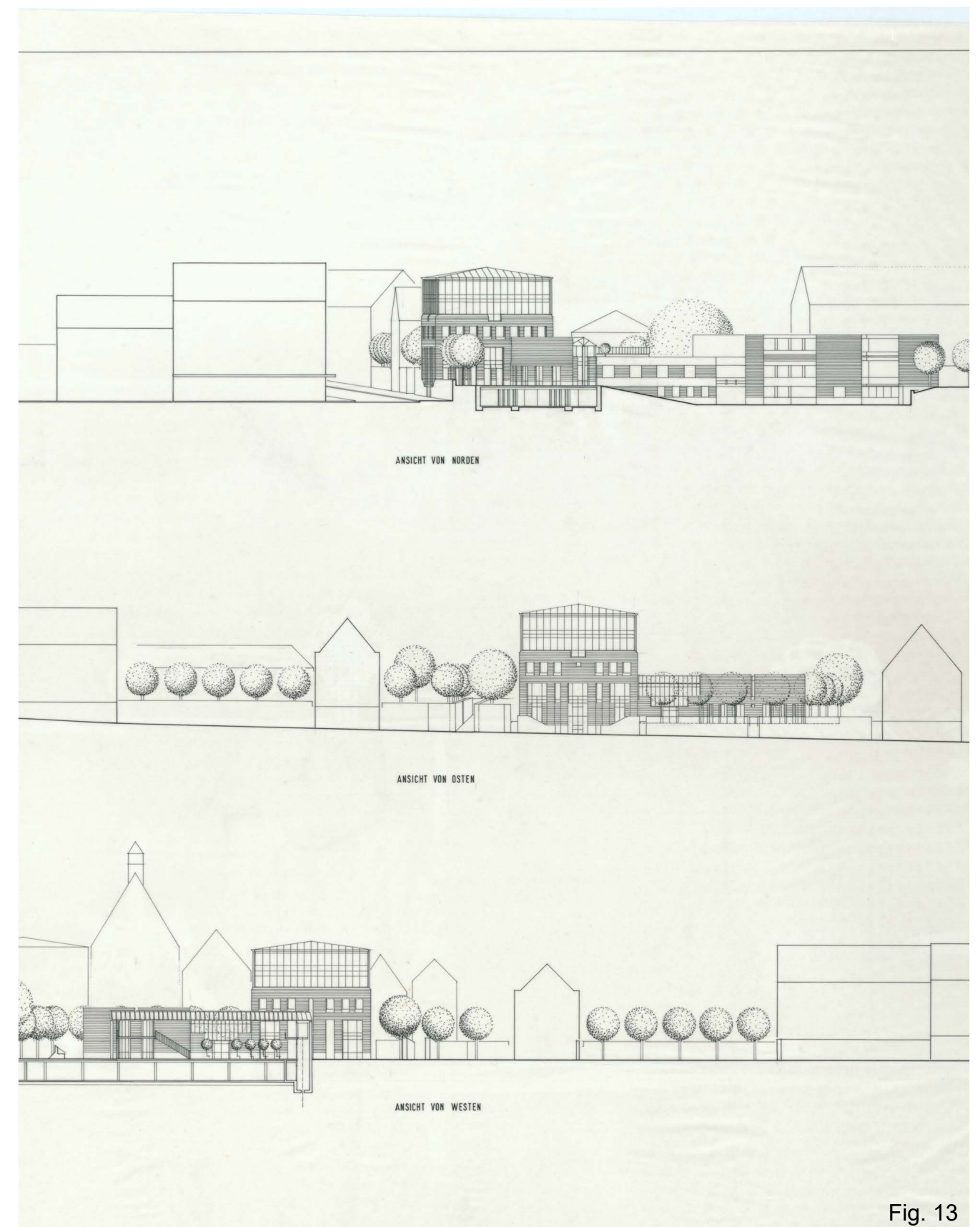


Fig. 13

Facades and sections (competition), Ink on tracing paper.

Final project

The final drawings, prepared for the realisation, slightly differ from the version submitted for the competition. First of all, the outline of the building is even more geometrical. The wide, triangular passage, which connected all of the three volumes, is narrowed and strictly rectangular now. The library is still semicircular. Now the plans are much more detailed, so it is possible to determine a purpose of each room.

The ground floor (Fig.14), for example, contains several conference rooms, a big auditorium, generously sized entrance hall, lots of smaller offices and the social room. Now it is connected to the inner patio, which can be transformed into a dining area. The social room has another big entrance on the eastern side, which opens to the passage. It is clearly the heart of the building.

The library can be accessed by three ways: from the north, by the passage from the south and directly from the main building. In the center of the library there is a set of spiral stairs. Bookshelves are also placed radially. Each element is placed according to the semicircular geometry of the library.

The first floor (Fig. 15), as previously, is still smaller than the ground level, but the layout seems to be more chaotic. The social room is double height. Other rooms are mostly used as offices, there are some smaller conference spaces.

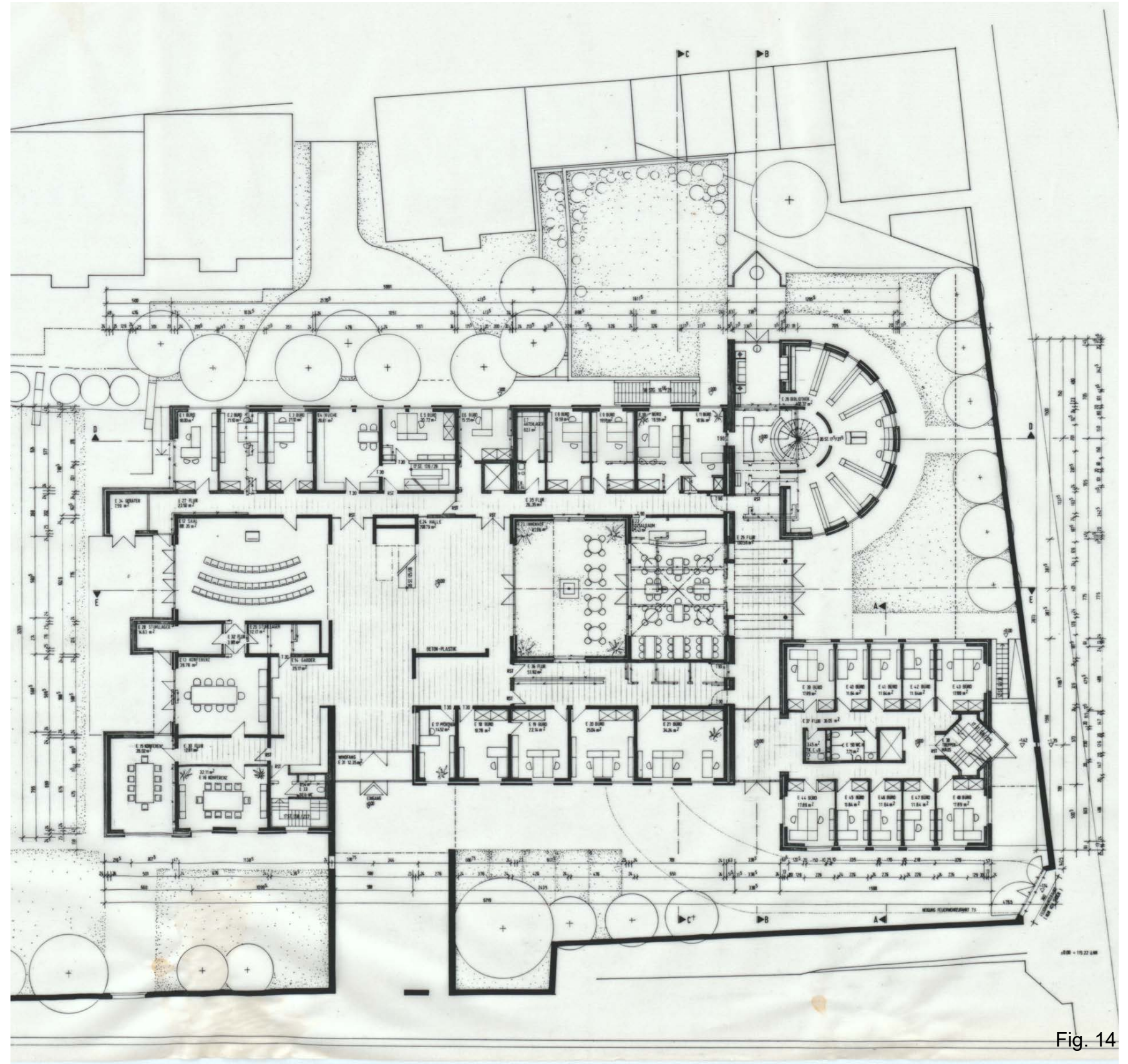


Fig. 14

Ground floor plan, Ink on tracing paper, 14.07.1991.

Unfortunately, there is no roof garden anymore and the glass passage, which was accessible from the first floor in the competition project, now is not possible to use. Even the basement (Fig. 16) is more rational: the parking lot has a strictly rectangular shape, but the technical rooms and offices facing the backyard remain the same.

The administrative building has slightly changed as well: offices are still facing south and north, the elevator is in the middle, with toilets behind. The staircase is now in the eastern part of the building, in a shape of a turned square. Each floor, starting from the first, now has a little balcony on the western side.

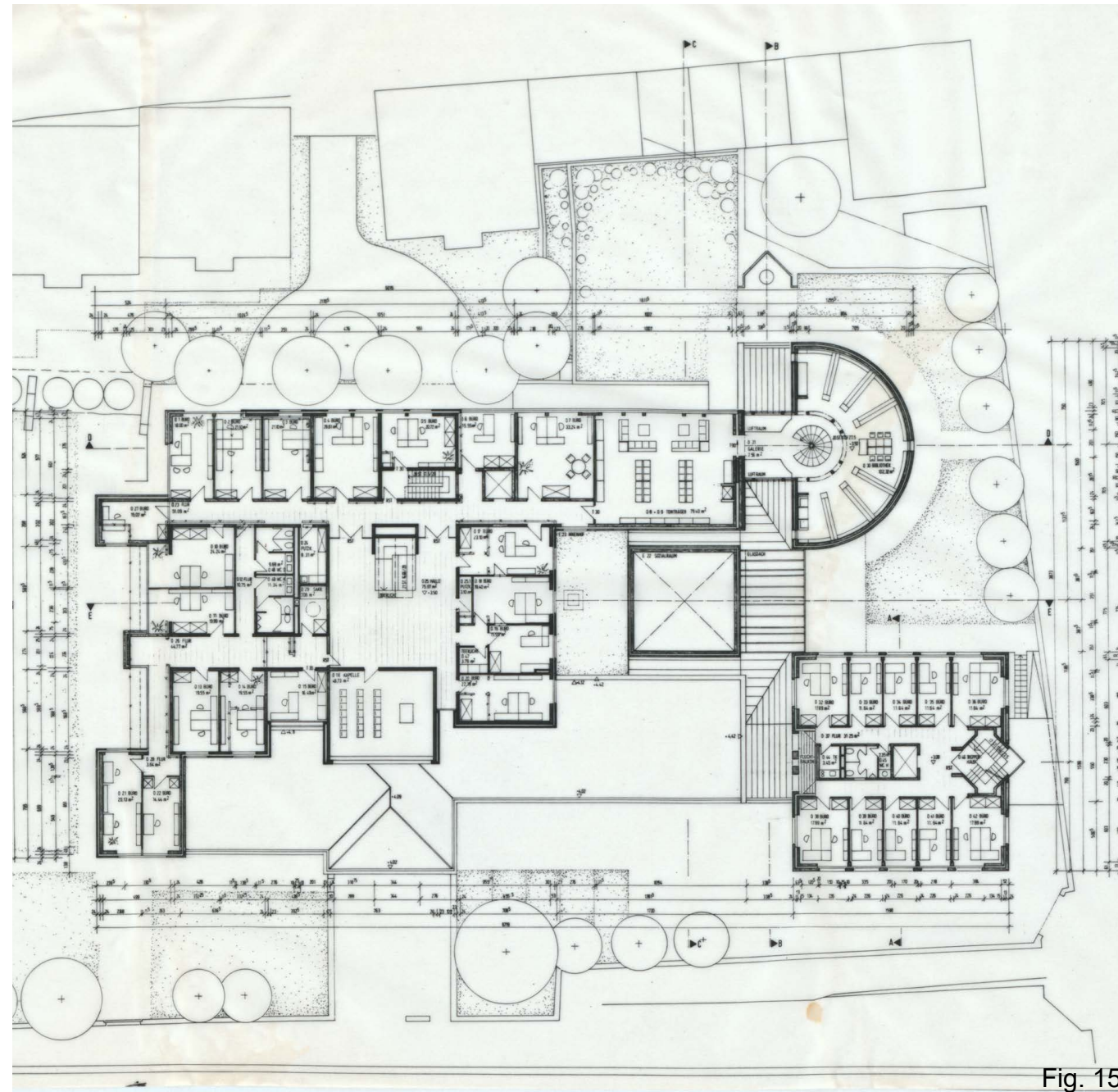


Fig. 15

First floor plan, Ink on tracing paper, 14.07.1991.

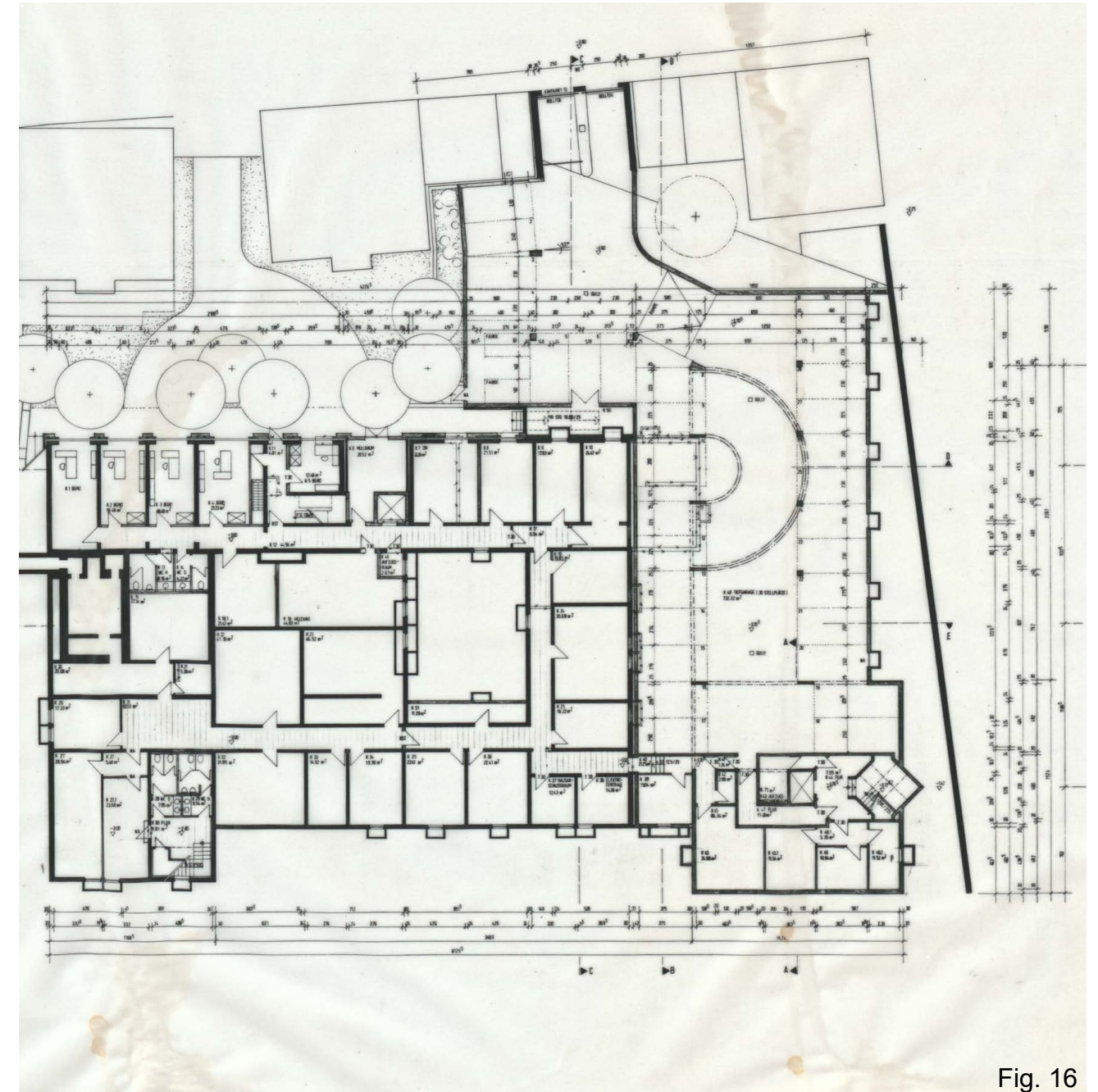


Fig. 16

Basement plan, Ink on tracing paper, 14.07.1991.

Final version of the facade

The latest Branca's drawings show the more detailed, even colored version of the northern facade. It has big, tall windows, which add more verticality to the long and relatively low facade. The combination of different colours and materials creates a sort of a layered expression. The northern side is also slightly lower, so there are two pairs of stairs connecting the basement level with the ground floor, and due to this situation, there are some offices arranged in the basement on the north side. The library has windows only on the ground floor.

There are two differently coloured drawings: with warmer, red colour palette (Fig.17), and the darker, black version (Fig.18). For the final project the red one was chosen.



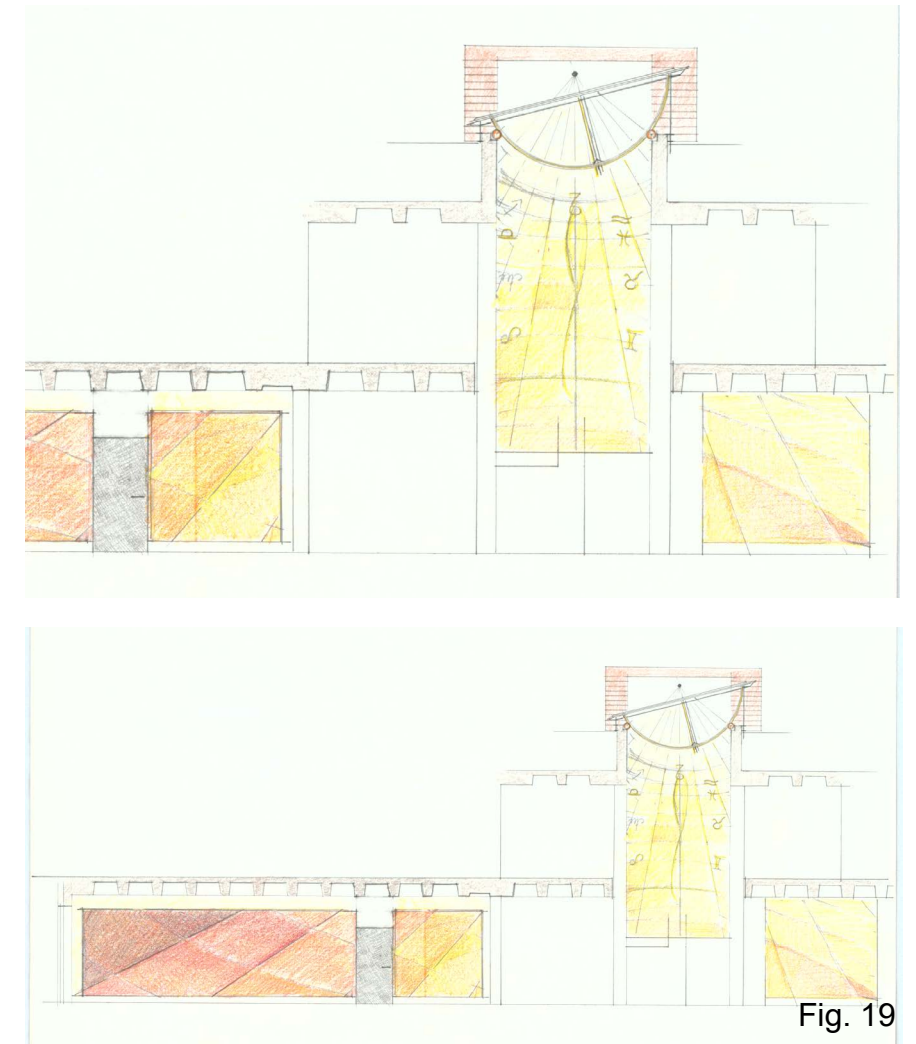
North facade, colored.

Branca's vision of the interior

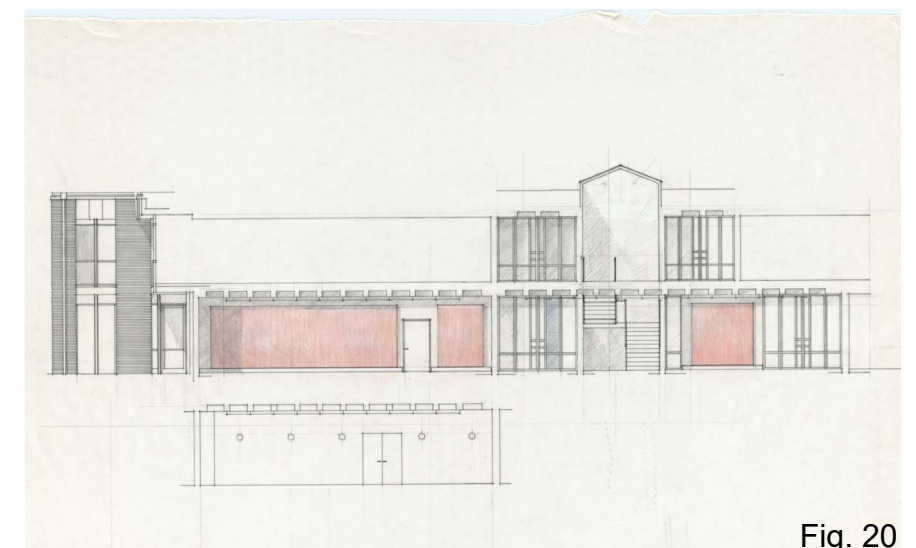
Some of Branca's sketches show colored sections of the building (Fig. 19, Fig. 20). In the architect's vision, the interior should have been arranged in warm colours. Some walls are painted red, some parts are hatched in a way which reminds a stained glass structure. It is quite unclear, which part of the building is showed on those sections, because drawings are quite abstract. One of the most interesting parts illustrates an idea of the sun watch: on top there is a mechanism which directs a light ray onto the wall. In that case the sun light would notificate the time of the day and also the position of the stars by pointing out the symbol of the current zodiac sign. It is possible, that this installation was designed for the circular staircase in the library.



North facade, colored.

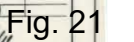


Idea of a sun watch (sketch). Pencils on paper.



Coloured section (sketch), Pencils on paper.

The plan of the landscape shows a very detailed placement of the vegetation. All existing and new trees are marked and named. There were fragments of the old fundaments left in the western part of the site, which are now exposed. Term „Altbau“ marks the previously existing building. The architect specifies different types of pavement and marks all differences in height.



Landscape plan, Ink and markers on transparent paper.

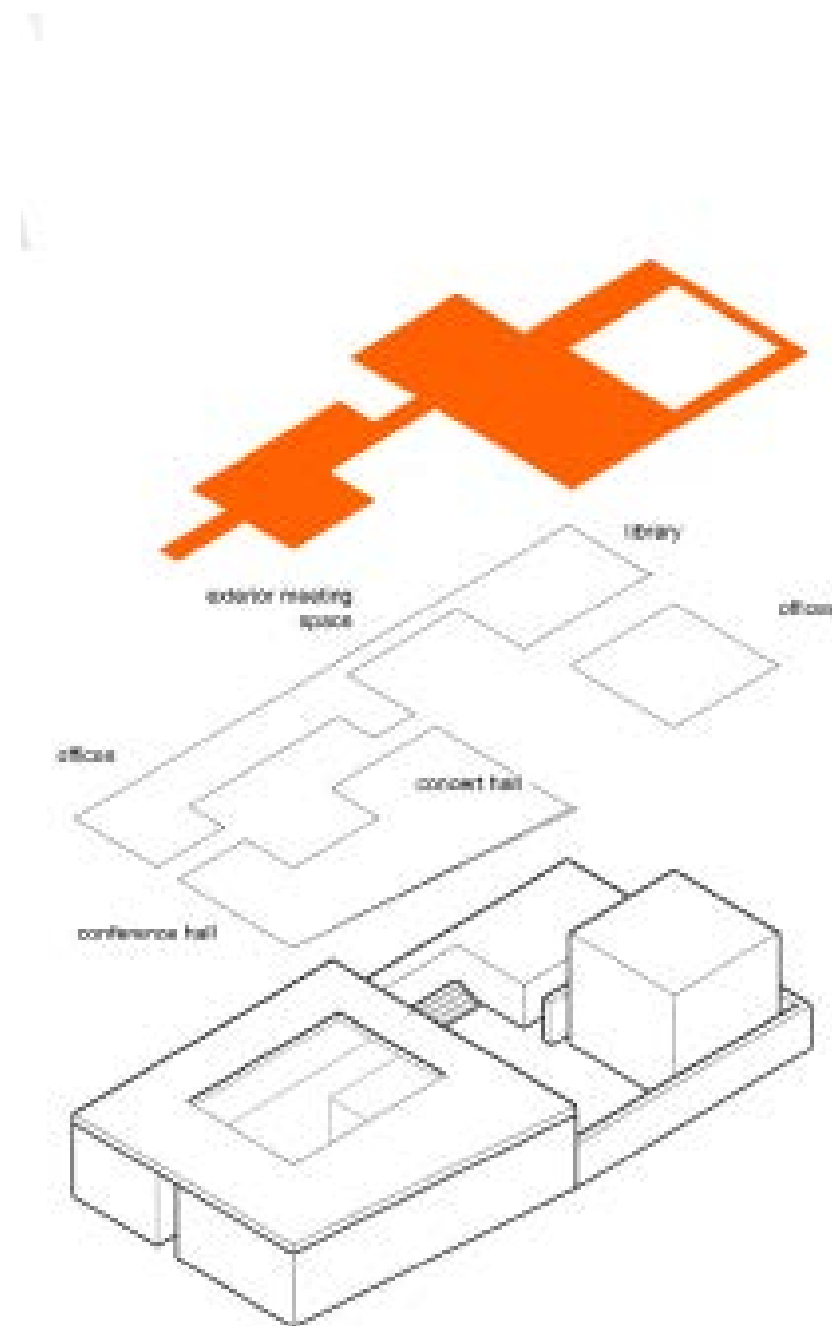
Proposed idea of Konrad-Martin Haus

The main functions served by the original building are administrative (offices) and public (social room, library and auditorium). Those functions are preserved in the proposed version of the building, though the organisation of the space differs: outdoor space is used as another platform for social gatherings. On the west-east axis there is a continuous passage with a bigger outside meeting space and outdoor arena, the existing building serves as an office space (as in original Branca's project), library have been placed in the north-east corner, in the southern part of the building entirely public spaces are placed. Even more space for public usage is provided by creating a functional roof terrace, which connects two main blocks of the Konrad-Martin Haus.



Site plan, 2019.

The placement of the buildings on the site reflects the original idea of a house with inner garden structure. It is possible to enter the site both from east and west, and walk through it (there are no fences or locked gates planned). The inner courtyard with a small arena can be used both for organized events and for spontaneous meetings of local community members.



Idea explaining diagrams, 2019.

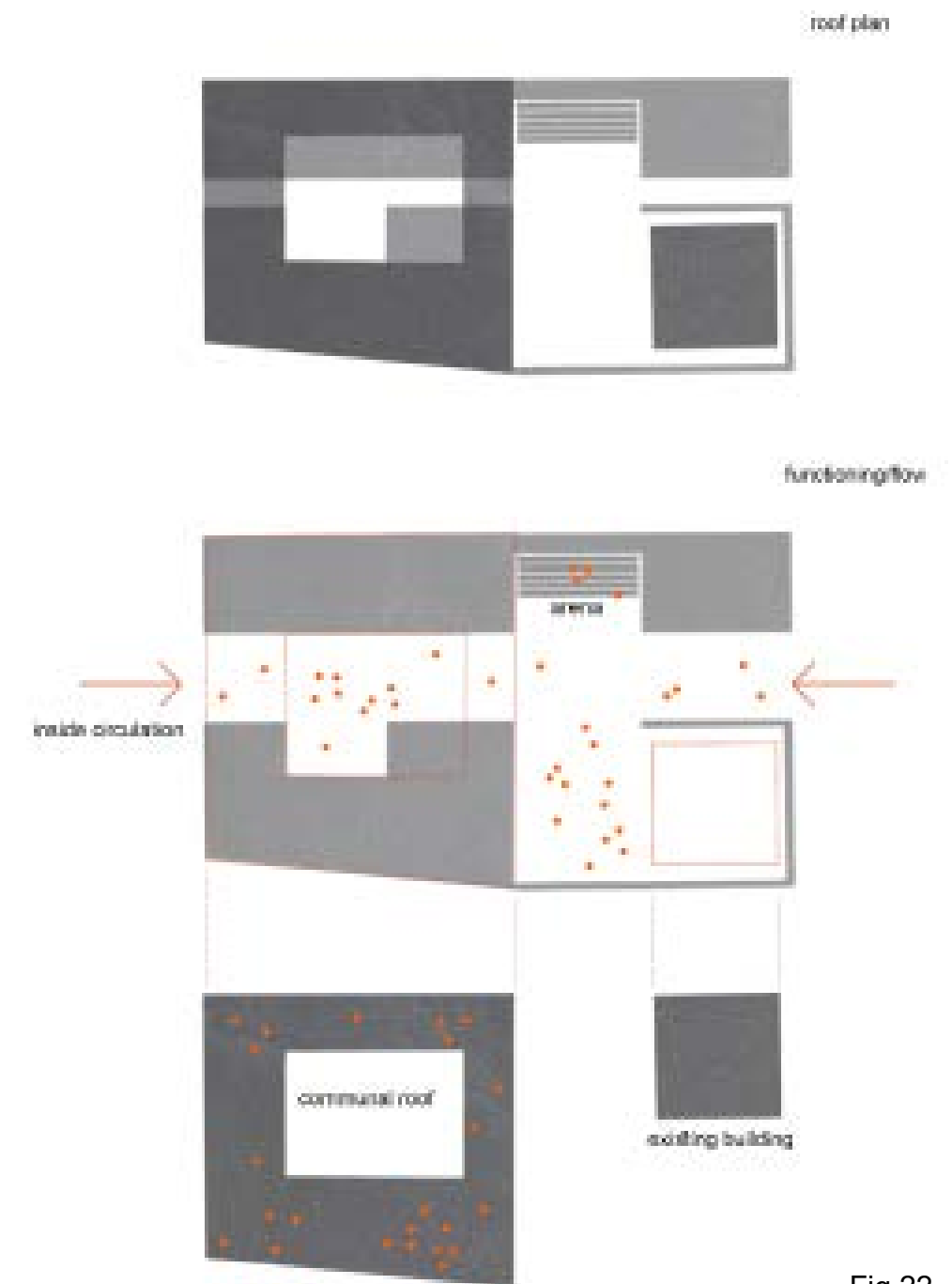


Fig.22

Signature: bra-323

Name of project: Konrad Martin Haus, Paderborn

416 drawings