

FROM DECIET TO FREEDOM

The project values the importance of history as that is the core aspect of our lives that aids to shape us, together with traditions and knowledge we aim to better versions of ourselves and we're then eager to share that knowledge with the younger generations, but what if a part of that history and knowledge was being concealed by a third party?

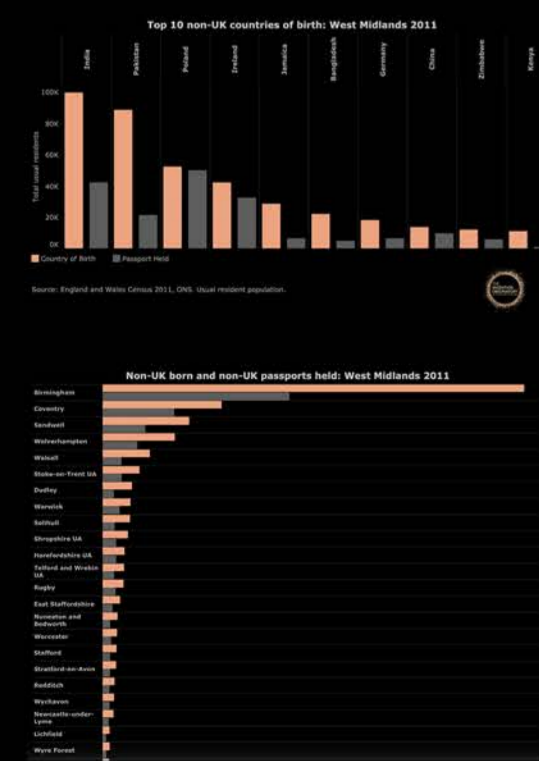
The Katyń Massacre of 1941 was a war crime committed by the Soviet army, it was a way of weakening the Polish people even more by eliminating their Military Elites. Polish Soldiers were transported in cattle carriages to Kozielsk in Russia, treated as prisoners of war they were tortured. In large groups then transported to the Katyń Forest where they would be shot in the back of the head and dumped into large mass graves.



BRIEF

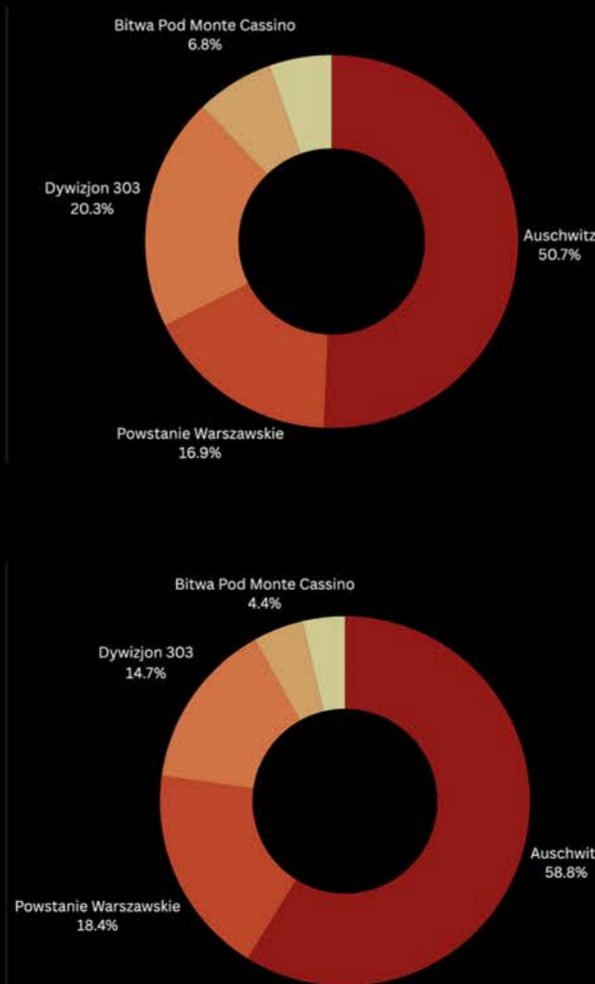


Due to a lack of heritage places for particular ethnic groups in the West Midlands, I made it my focus to determine the largest group that would benefit the most with a new or improved gathering space where I could infuse elements of culture, heritage and history into interior design to create an immersive and authentic experience for visitors.



Polish people made it 3rd in the size of social group, and with most of them located in Birmingham it was a no brainer to set my project site there, however after some in-depth research I noticed that there was only one site that existed, The Polish Millennium House.

It wasn't until April 1943, when German troops occupied that area of Russia came across 8 large mass graves containing thousands of Polish Military Soldiers buried there. When confronting the Soviets, everything was denied and instead they blamed the Germans as the crime act was carried out exactly the same as they treated prisoners at the Concentration Camps. It wasn't until 1990 when they finally admitted to the murders of nearly 22,000 officers.



To figure out what historical event to focus on, I visited a local Saturday Polish School and interviewed a couple dozen students, parents and teachers to determine which one is the least mentioned, and it was in fact, Katyń.

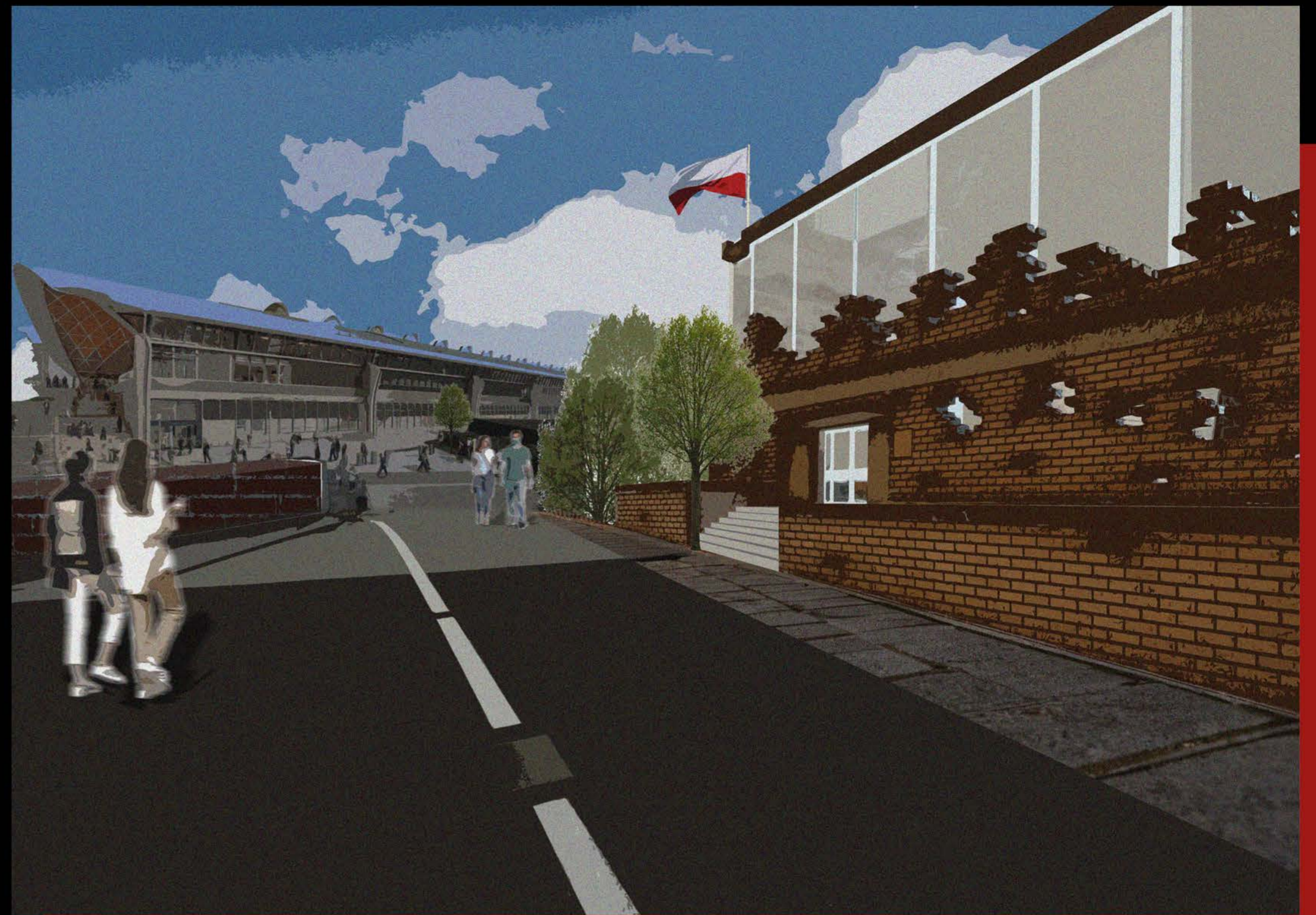


Figure 1.

Hero Image : "The Future Is Bright"

The image represents the future of Birmingham. The significance of the idea of history in the Polish Millennium House and the new Curzon St Station showcases a balance between old and new, they both accept their story and make peace with the past and revel in the new.



Figure 2.

Proposed Facade

The Elevations thoughtfully depicts the metaphor of the gradual "crumbling" of the truth .

USERS



People of all ages, not necessarily Polish, would be able to visit the place and experience the history unfold before them.



People working at the site, they will be responsible for the wellbeing of guests and the maintenance of the site.



The site currently holds events and meetings for the scouts (harczerze) in the region, Polish scouts have always played a large role throughout the Polish History, therefore I'd like them to remain as one of the users.

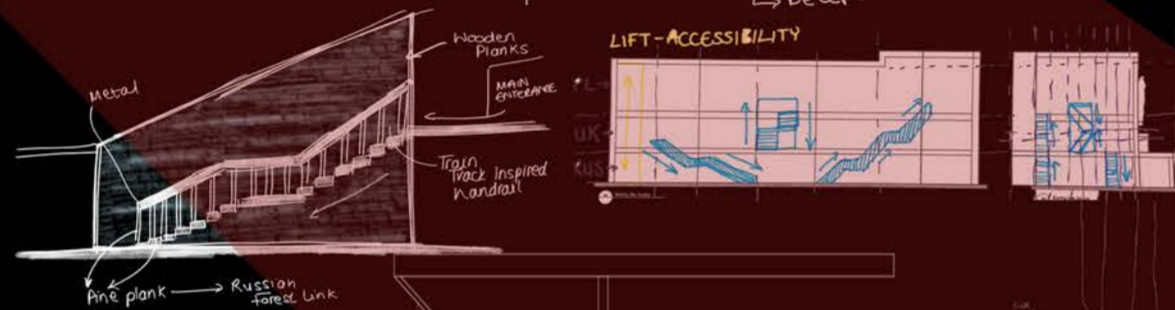
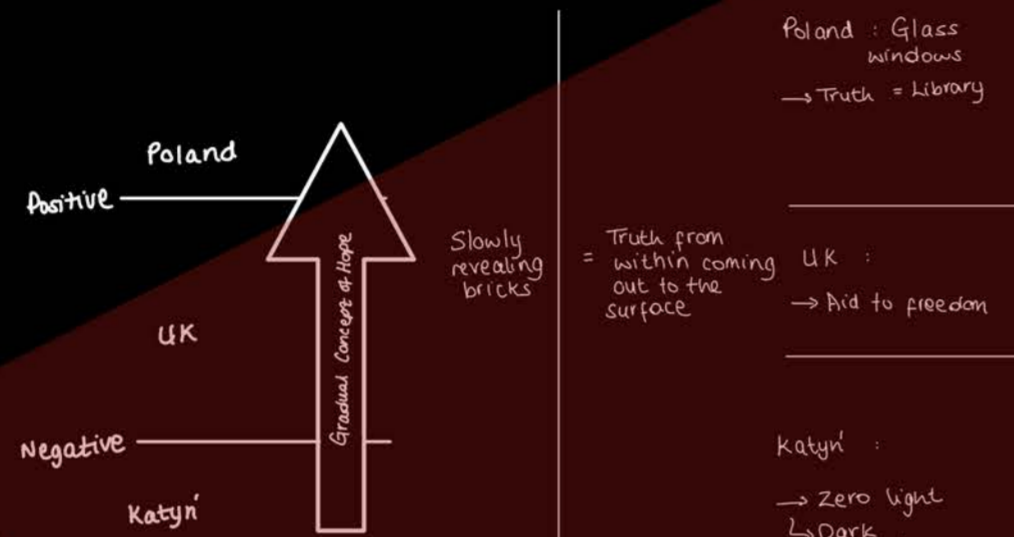


As the site also currently holds Folk Dance classes which are accessible to all ages, I wouldn't want to remove such a vital aspect of the Polish culture from the building as it adds to the aspect of tradition.

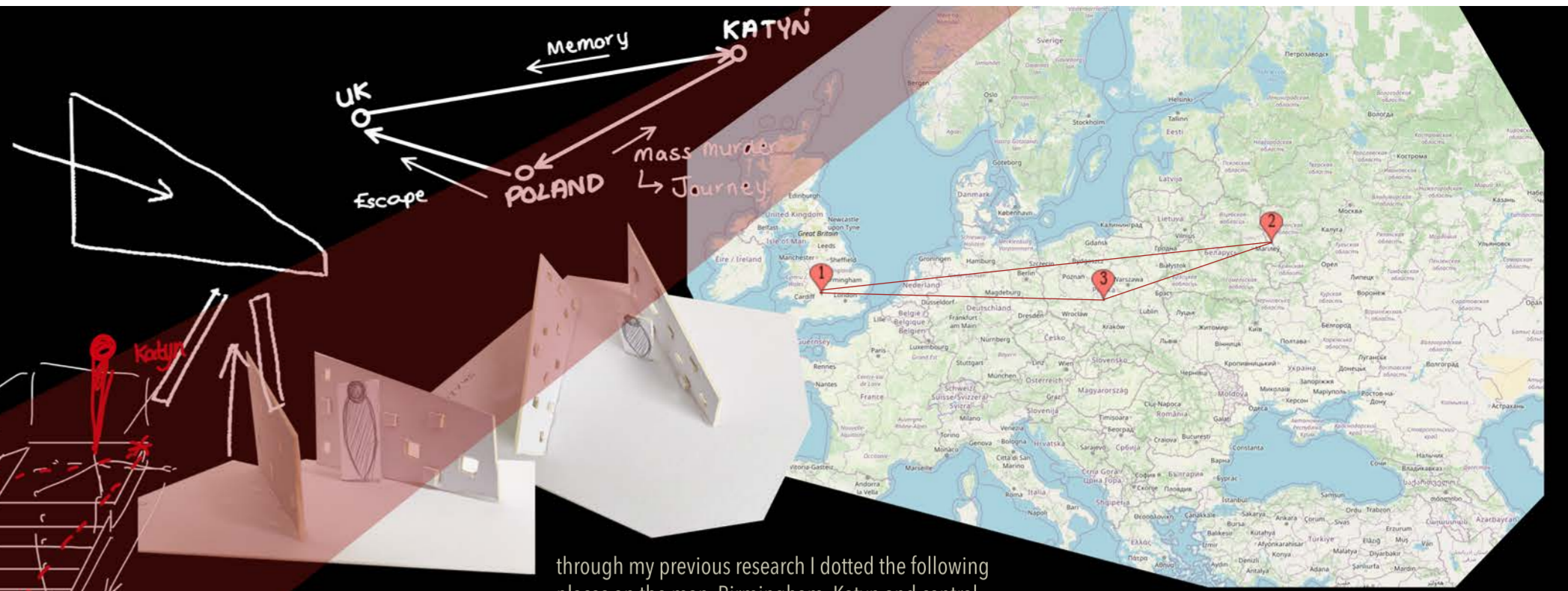
JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

"Symbolically, staircases can suggest a journey; A staircase could be a passageway that unites any two things: places, ideas, or states of being; If one ascends the stairs that journey is probably positive However, if one descends the stairs that journey might be negative, confusing, or depressing."

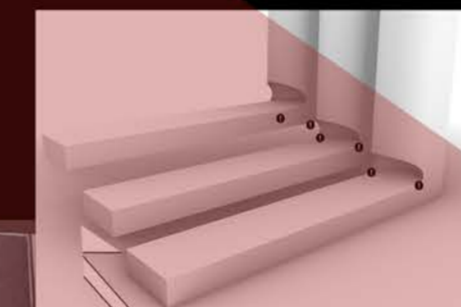
-Stannah, 2019



This model is only the section of the bottom of the staircase, the higher the user climbs the staircase the distance between the steps and the ceiling increases as well as that, visible vegetation grows from within the beams signifying perseverance and determination to achieve freedom.



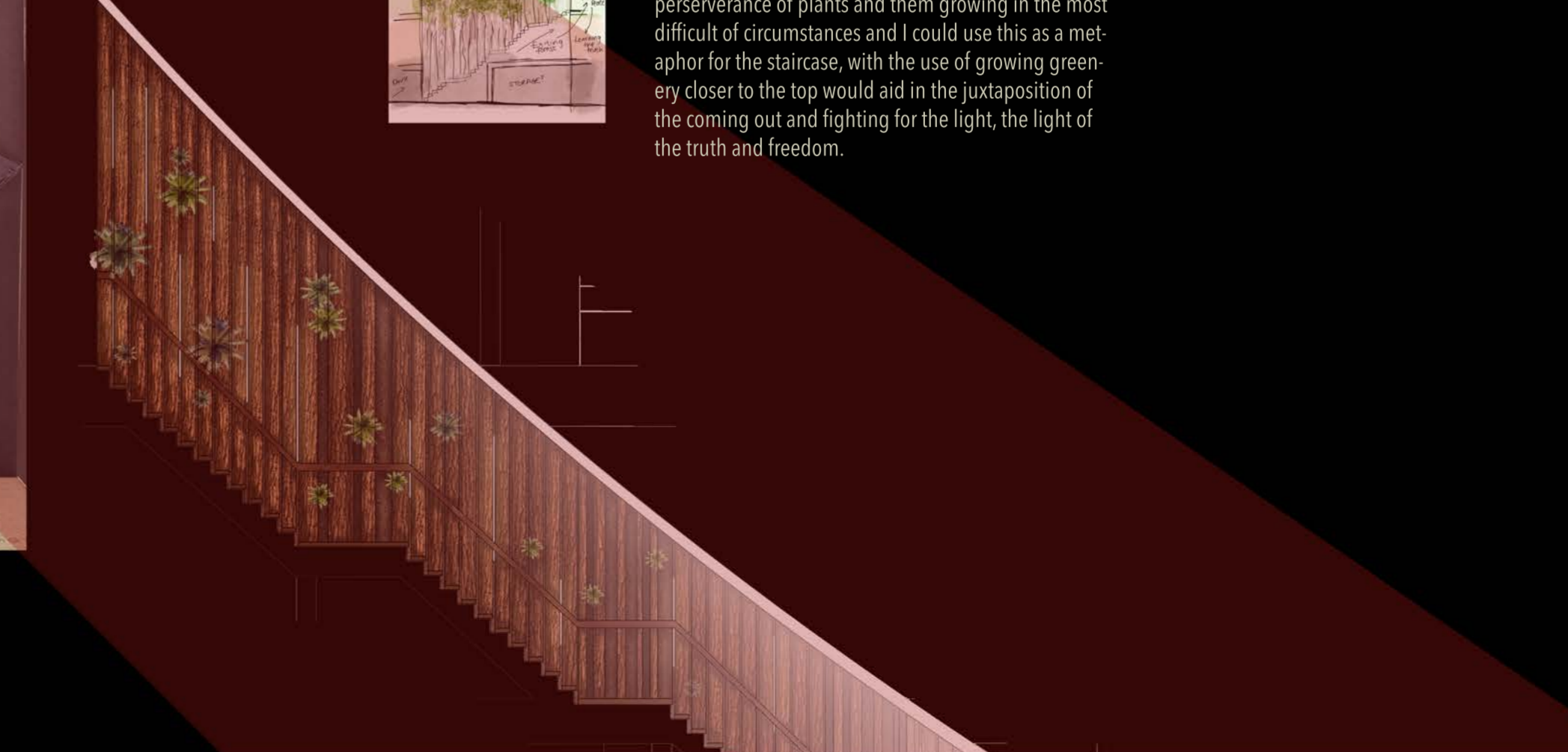
through my previous research I dotted the following places on the map, Birmingham, Katyn and central Poland. These coordinates gave me a shape which I used as a base to produce concept models and further sketches.



This model also links to a popular tourist attraction, "The Crooked Forest", located in Poland is a strange phenomenon which I believe helps to create the link with the idea of culture and heritage, it is something Polish people could pick up on when visiting the site.



I have always been amazed at the determination and perseverance of plants and them growing in the most difficult of circumstances and I could use this as a metaphor for the staircase, with the use of growing greenery closer to the top would aid in the juxtaposition of the coming out and fighting for the light, the light of the truth and freedom.





TOP FLOOR

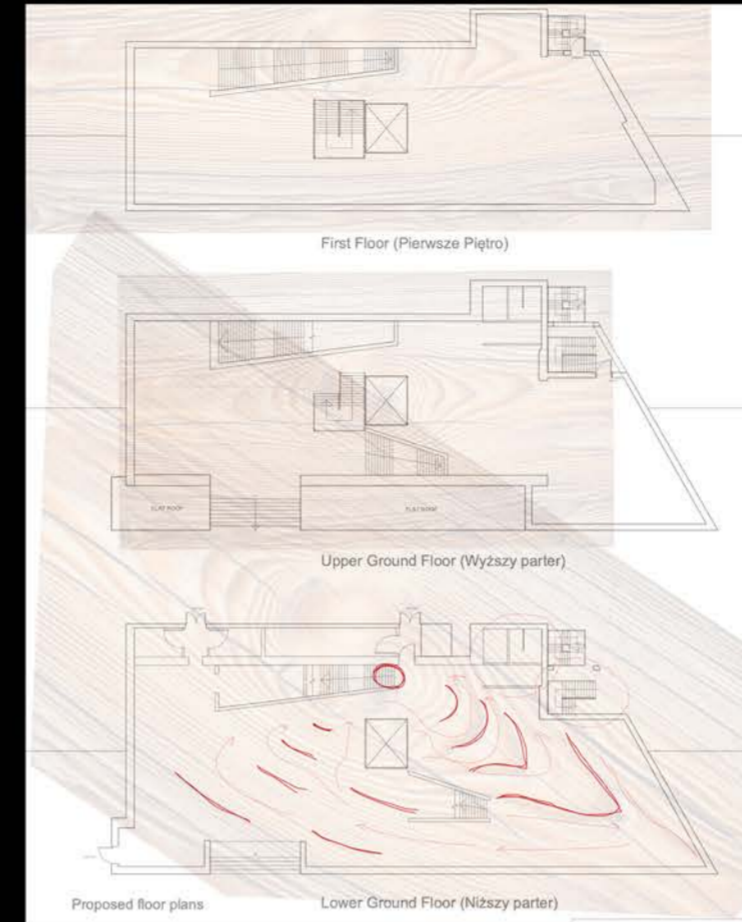


UPPER GROUND FLOOR



CIRCULATION

As the project is so focused on natural materials, especially wood due to the location of the mass murders, it is wise to use a form of wood as the base for the circulation of the Lower Ground Floor which would act as a memorial space. With the staircase being the central "awakening" point.



Wood rings in the trunk allowed for the perfect layout of the separation walls, it allows users to move around the entire showcase without missing anything and leads towards the feature staircase, or the lift for people with accessibility issues.

The partition walls are there to mimic the Katyn Forest feel and make the experience more immersive, it also allows for the users to feel the history and that makes it more memorable.



LOWER GROUND FLOOR





The ground floor space would be accessorized with curved sofas to match the "circular" movement of the space.

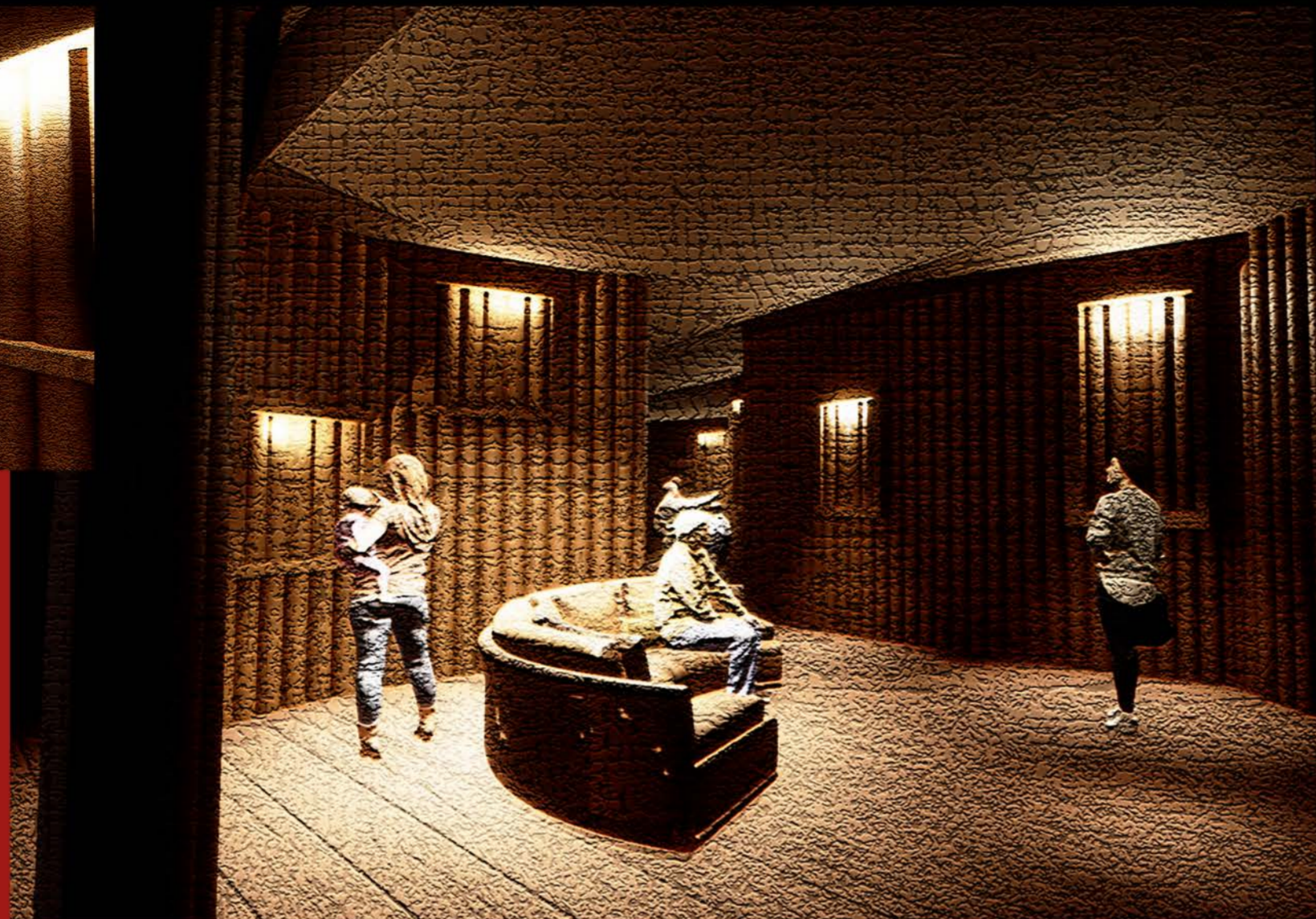


Figure 3 & 4.
Proposed Rendered Section
The section presents what the interior of the space would look like and the gradual increase in light through each of the floor levels.

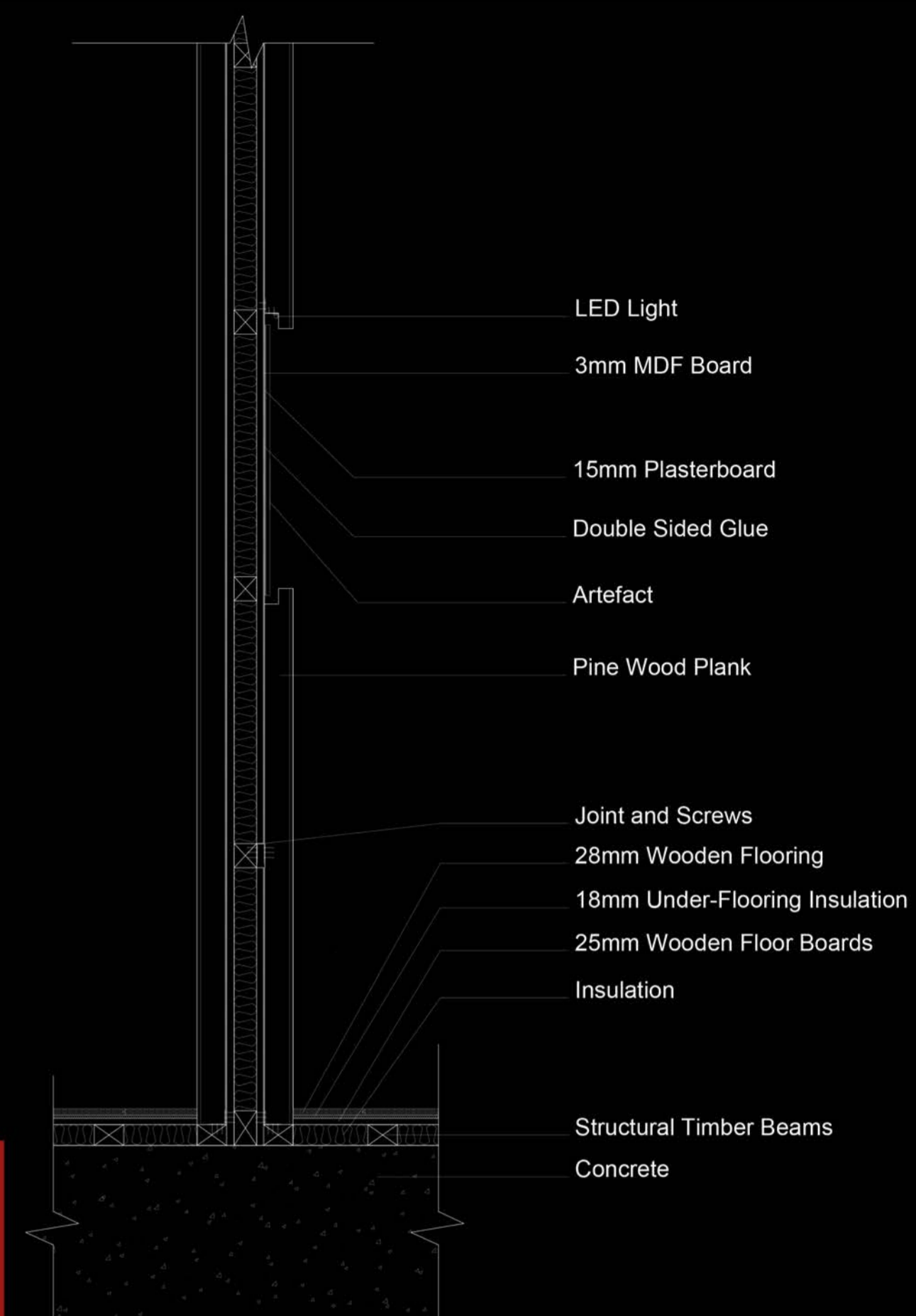


Figure 5.
Detail Drawing of Partition Wall

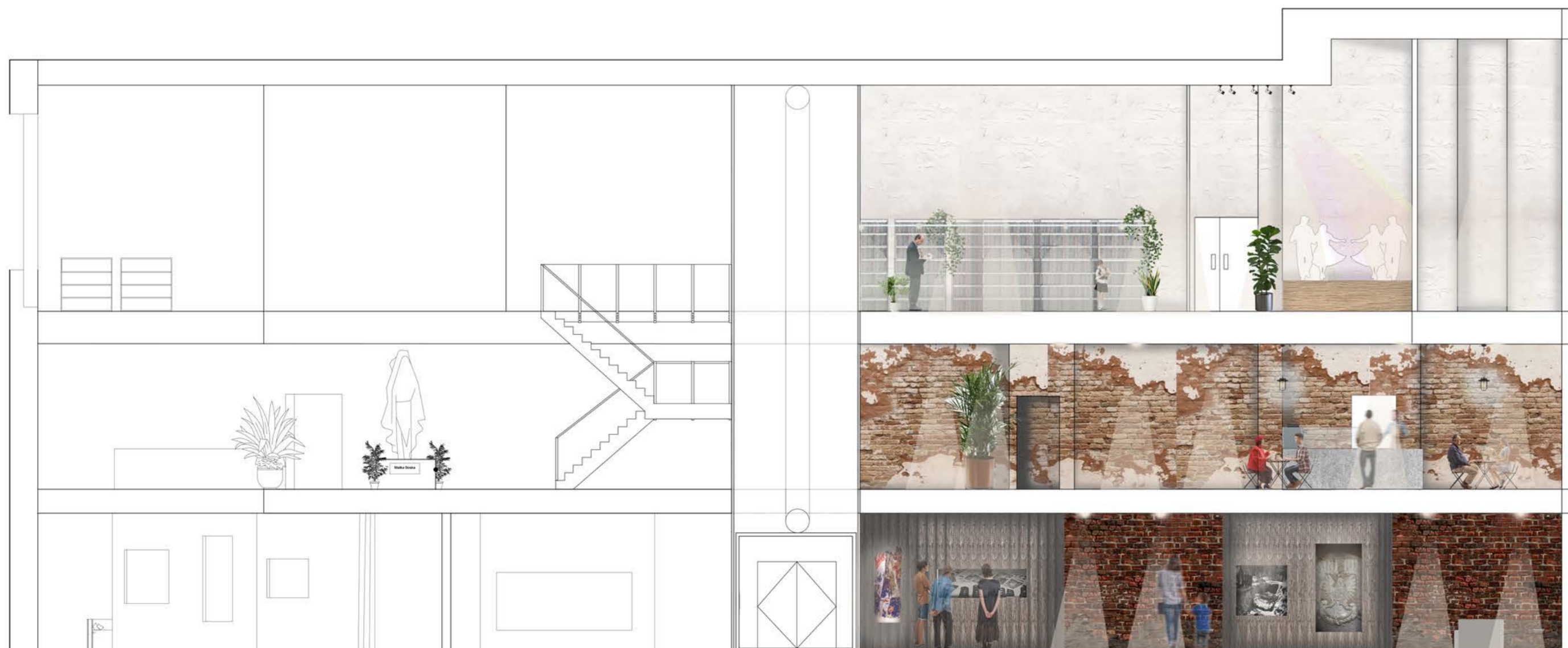
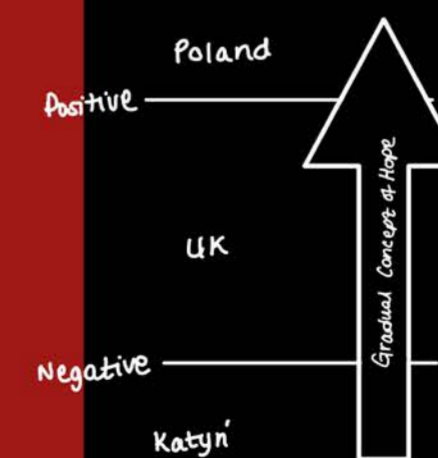


Figure 6.
Proposed Rendered Section
The section presents what the interior of the space would look like and the gradual increase in light through each of the floor levels.





Why do I believe that this project is worthy for the Social Justice theme?
It represents my personal beliefs, but it can also be used a form of hope for those that have been recently touched by war, but also that the truth will always find its way out to the surface.

As a Polish person myself, World War II was a horrible time and I myself have heard stories about relatives who had been killed by German or Russian soldiers.
We all know the saying that "history likes to repeat itself", therefore, I want to use this project as a reminder that murders this size are unforgivable.

But that is when we should stand united, there is always light on the other side of the tunnel, or forest rather?
Society, culture, traditions and history are key aspects to rebuild a broken community.



Figure 7.
Rendered Model Photograph :
Journey to Freedom
The section shows the textures
and atmospheric features
which bring out that story of
travelling towards peace.