

DIGITAL ENCOUNTERS

Strengthening Direct Democracy

Marilyn Brühlmann
Gaël Tuchschnid
& Roberto Trivelli

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MANIFESTO



The School of Athens
by Raphael

In a world whereby humans are becoming increasingly interconnected, architecture needs to encourage the diverse possibilities of human relationships.

Architecture has always revolved around human interactions, with each other and the space around us. Technology is fundamentally changing the way we communicate and one important thing we have to preserve are the chance-encounters that architecture and urbanism have for as long as we can remember helped create.

Many studies have shown the benefits of these unplanned encounters, how they help communities, groups, and companies innovate. Offices are no longer designed through rigid enclosed grid systems but as a blend of different types of spaces to harbor different types of interactions. Some architects have started shaping their interiors as exterior spaces to maximize the probability of these social encounters found in the urban realm.

In the Seattle library by Rem Koolhaas, the circulation is treated as a route that the visitor takes, and along the route, the visitor can exit the path on to their desired destination. An interesting observation with the library is that great importance is placed on escalators, ramps, and stairs. The lift is deliberately less accessible cementing Koolhaas' idea that the circulation should be more than merely for movement, but also as a field of encounter.

Today these chance-encounters are unfortunately becoming increasingly rarer.

The digitalization of the workspace has proven to be successful and even though it shows many benefits it lacks the randomness most of us have taken for granted.

«While working from home brings efficiency gains in the short run, the danger is that it will imperil innovation in the long run. Indeed efficiency is the enemy of innovation, which is fundamentally about exploration. Having everybody working by themselves makes it hard for people to interact and explore new possibilities. Companies must get employees to “collide”. Before the pandemic, this was achieved through open-plan architecture that encouraged “water cooler” moments. Companies will have to find another way to facilitate these kinds of random interactions.»

– The Wired World In 2021



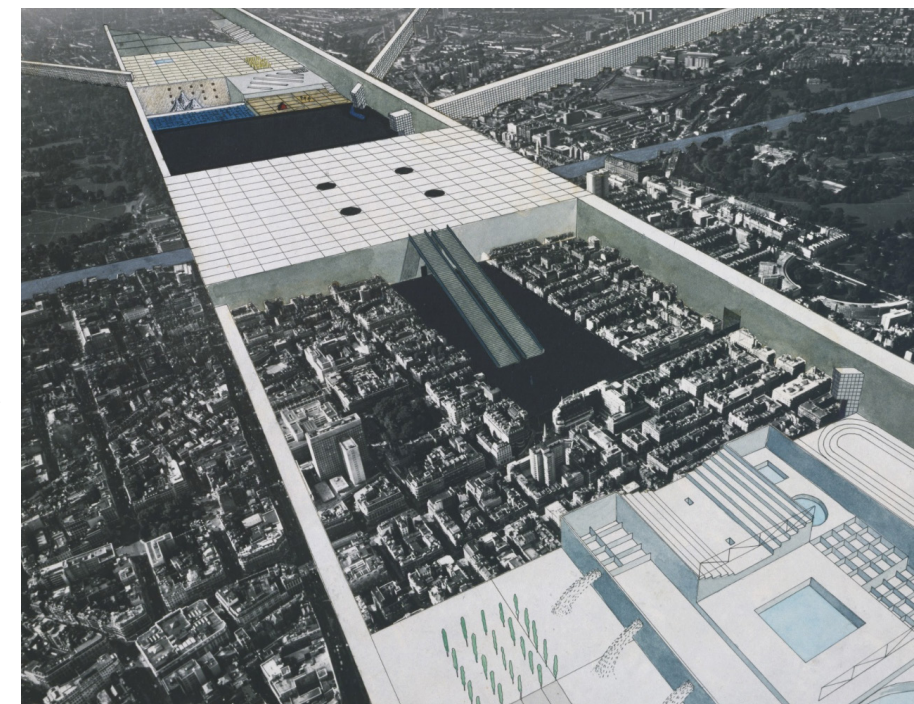
Seattle Public Library
OMA

The Strip, Rem Koolhaas

Koolhaas' architecture is "strongly ordered by the trajectories of movement through the building". (Dovey, 2010:104) His work seeks to resist the constraints of rigid planning and his interiors are often designed as exteriors to maximise the probabilities of these social encounters found in the urban realm.

Koolhaas' architecture is concerned with the urban condition of the contemporary metropolis through an architecture that celebrates permeability, lexibility and fluid hierarchies.

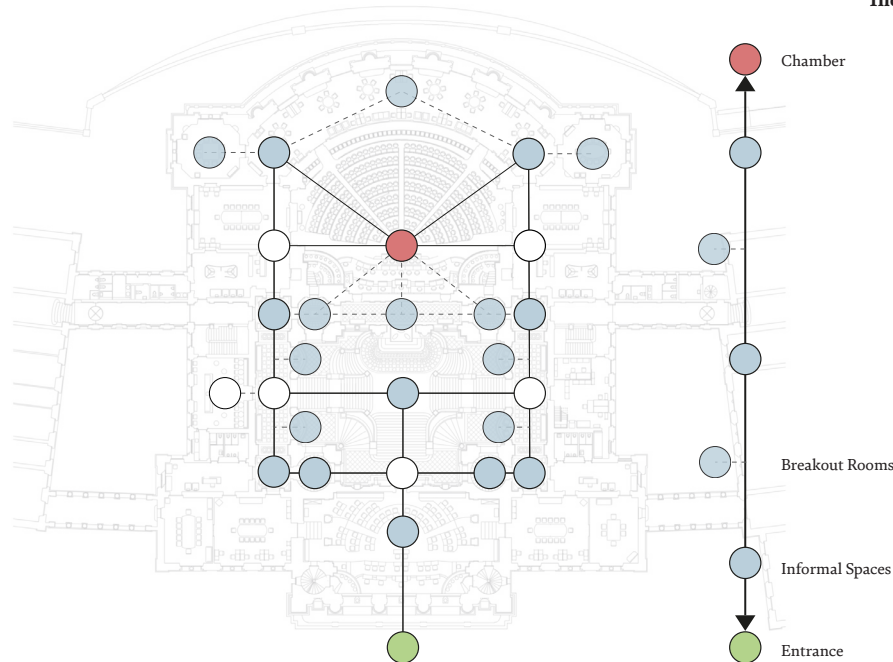
– Qaqane, *A Chance Encounter*



ARCHITECTURE OF THE PARLIAMENT



The Swiss Parliament



A Web of Connections
Informal Spaces inside the
Parliament

In parliaments, great deals of information flow through informal spaces, some of the most important discussions occur at entrances, hallways, cafeterias, and even bathrooms. Politicians walk through a range of different types of spaces in which they can stumble upon colleagues and meet and greet people. Additionally, along the main path, one can find several openings that lead us to more intimate spaces.

The Parliament's layout also enables encounters with people from the outside. The Wandelhalle for example due to its location serves as one of the entrances to the main chamber, here the media and citizens can interact with politicians before and after important votes.

These spaces enable vast numbers of distinct types of encounters, to remove them completely would mean to hinder democracy.



Wandelhalle

The Wandelhalle is a multipurpose space where members of parliament can meet and greet during parliamentary sessions, answer interviews and receive lobbyists. It also serves as the official reception room for the government where the members of the Federal Council can welcome heads of state on official visits or where the ceremony for the presentation of New Year's is initiated by the President of the Confederation.

Its interior is heavily decorated with different materials, wooden flooring, and marble pilasters as well as friezes that guide us through the room. The vaulted ceiling embraces a number of paintings telling us stories of our past. On the two ends fireplaces can be found, heating up the room, this element naturally attracts our eye and serves as gathering places.

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PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

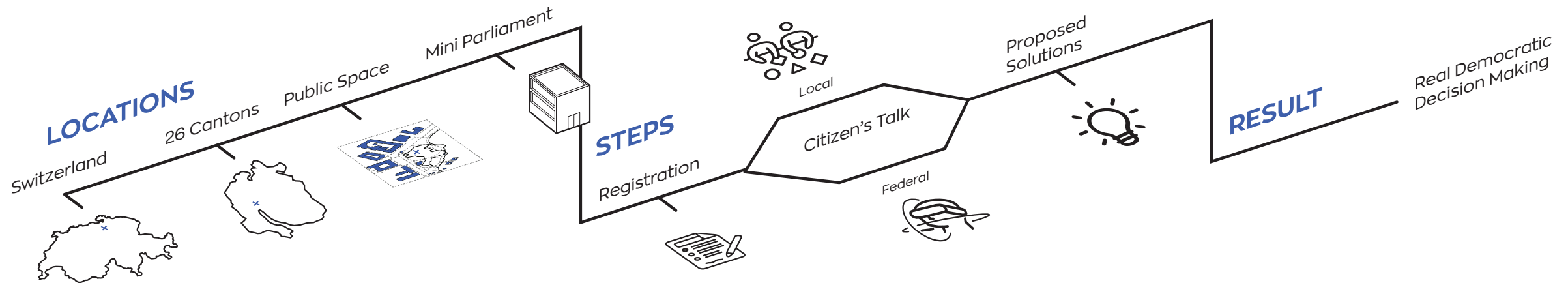


Forum Citoyen Geneve
Group of citizens gathered
together to discuss political
topics

How can politics meet the complex demands of our time when it comes to decision-making?

How can spaces be created where differences lead to new insights and solutions?

Switzerland has a unique political system, direct democracy. A system in which Swiss citizens can decide on policy initiatives directly as well as vote in elections and referendums. Nevertheless, many are disappointed by the way decisions are ultimately made, although expressing a rather deep trust in politics many believe we can strengthen our direct democracy. Today several organizations are attempting to improve our system through citizen meetings engaging them in the decision-making process. Since the distance between the population and the administration/government is greater at the federal and cantonal level than on the communal scale, “public” meeting spaces are needed to highlight the current needs and opinions of the population.



The New Citizen's Talk
Scattered around switzerland
citizen's can be part of the
decision making process.

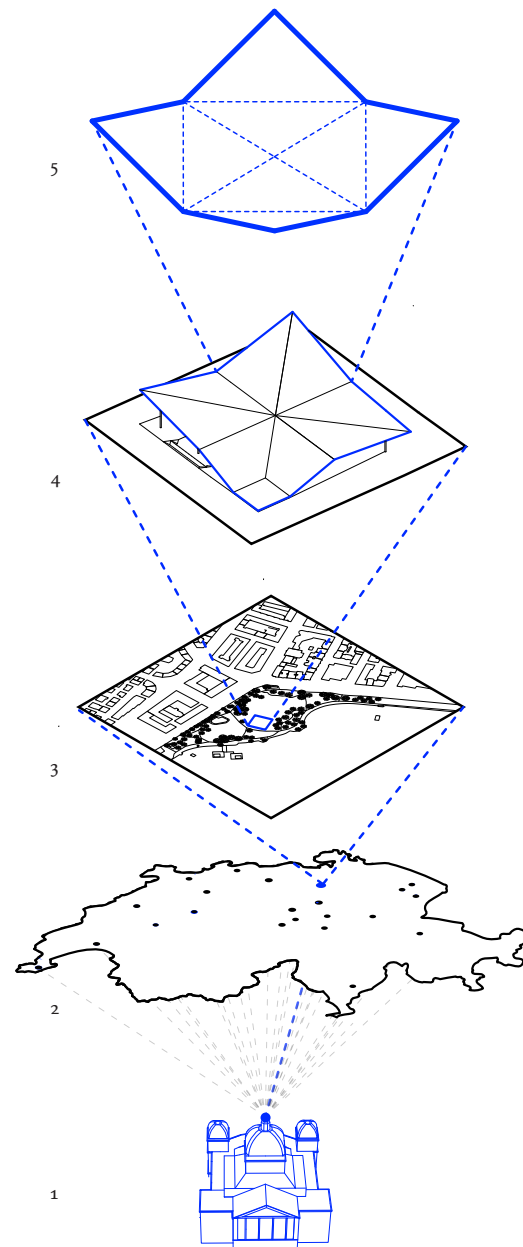
Authorities can also bring up topics to be discussed by or with citizens to find win-win outcomes.

The task of citizens is to take a critical look at various topics in order to participate alongside politicians in the decision-making process. The transparency and its neutrality are guaranteed by the impartiality of moderators.

Although these steps bring us closer to a more contemporary version of our democratic system we must take it one more step further. With most of the world undergoing a health crisis, an increasing number of people now work from home. Switzerland

is obviously no exception to this and by taking advantage of the digitalization of the workplace we can offer a solution that can once again bring us closer, with and without a crisis at our door through virtual reality.

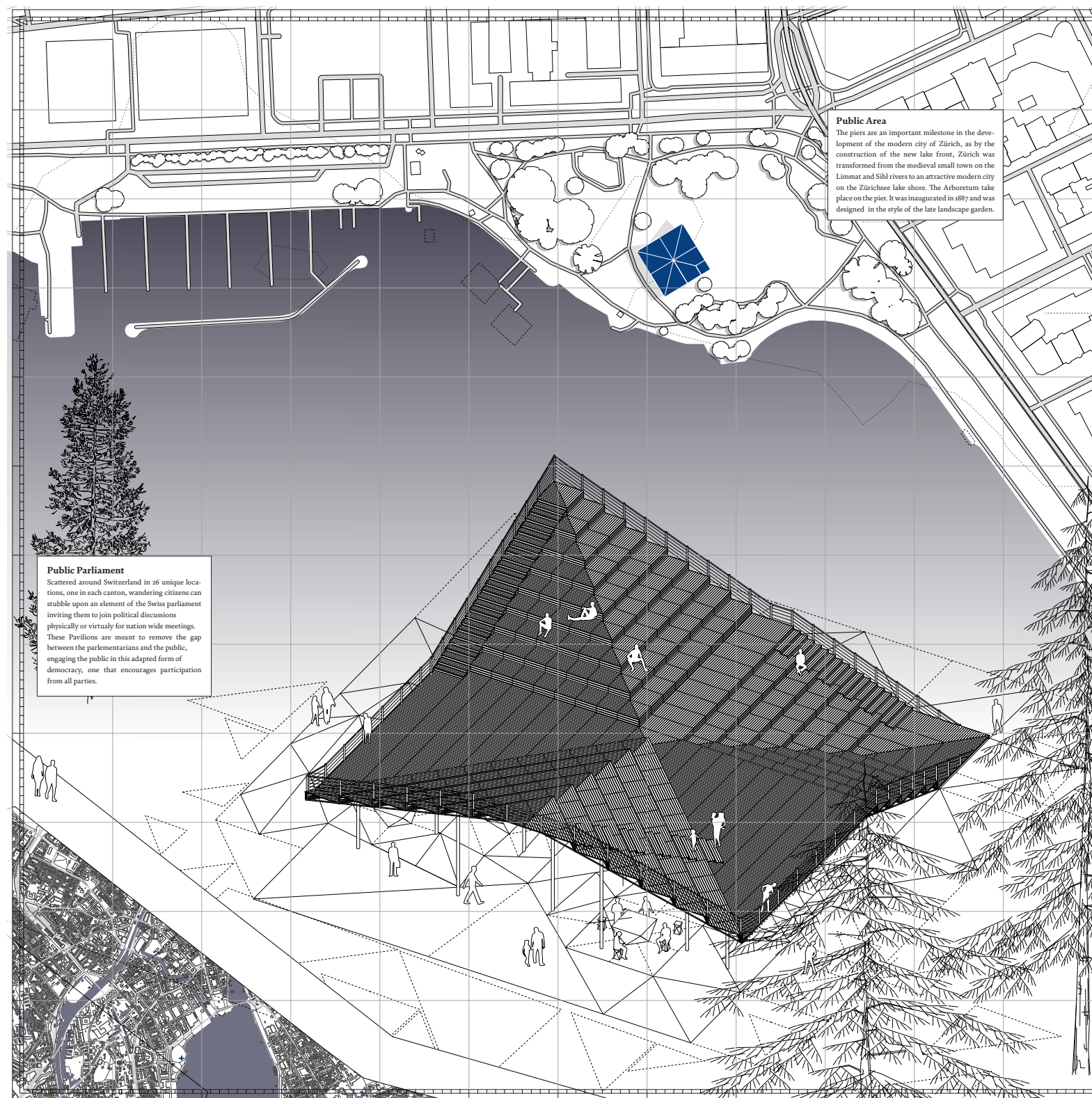
THE PUBLIC PARLIAMENTS



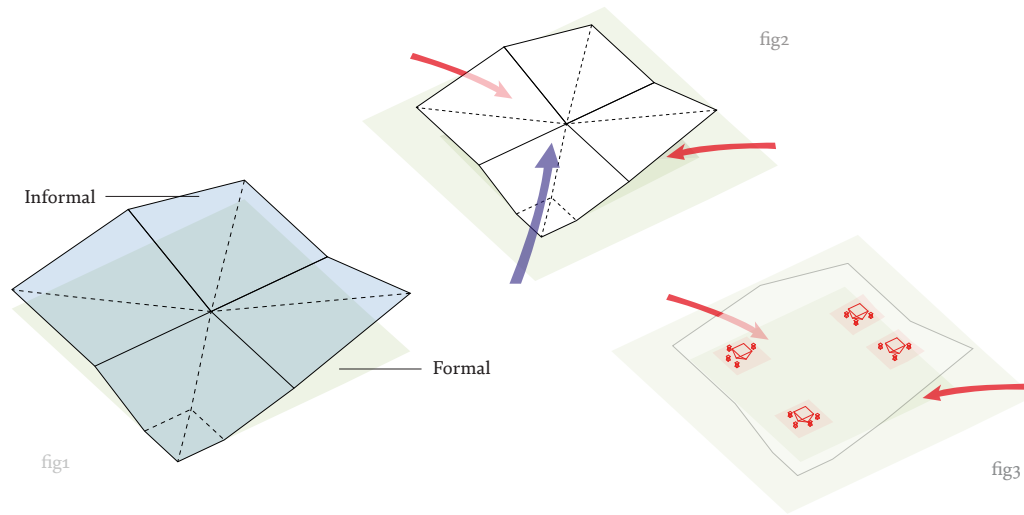
Layers
From the Parliament to the people.
1 The Parliament
2 The 26 Cantons
3 Public Area
4 Public Parliament
5 The Virtual Parliament

Scattered around Switzerland in 26 unique locations, one in each "chef-lieu" of every canton, wandering citizens can stumble upon an element of the Swiss parliament inviting them to join political discussions physically or virtually for nationwide meetings.

These Pavilions are meant to remove the gap between the parliamentarians and the public, engaging the public in this adapted form of democracy, one that encourages participation from all parties.



Zurich's Public Parliament
The piers are an important milestone in the development of the modern city of Zürich, as by the construction of the new lake front, Zürich was transformed from the medieval small town on the Limmat and Sihl rivers to an attractive modern city on the Zürichsee lake shore. The Arboretum is located on the pier. It was inaugurated in 1887 and was designed in the style of the former landscape garden.

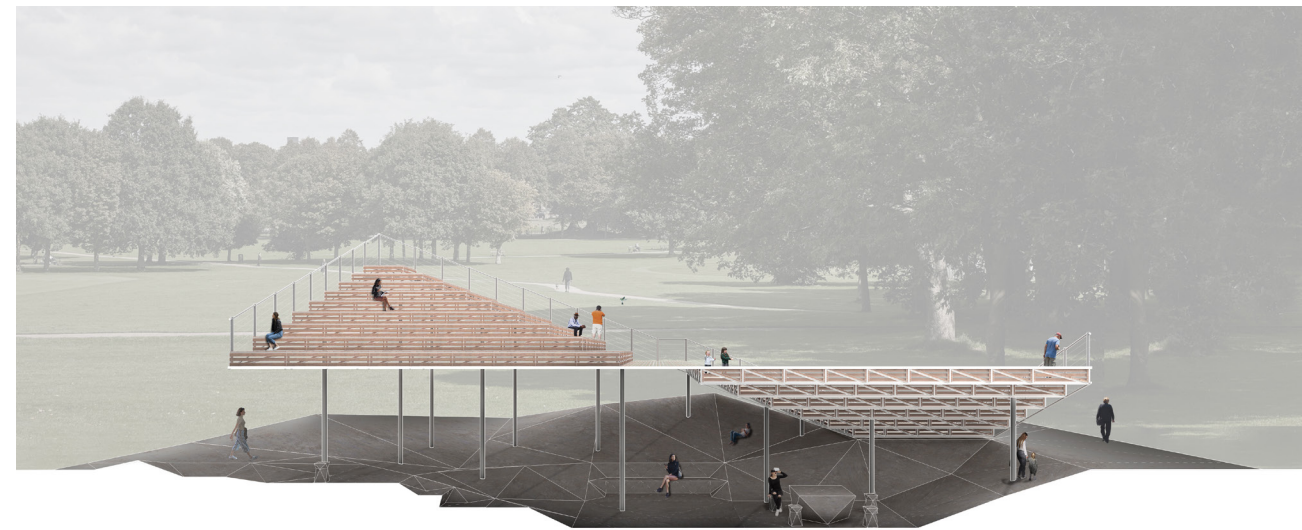


By closing the gap between the formal and the informal a new realm is created, one that can be observed and experienced through Virtual Reality.

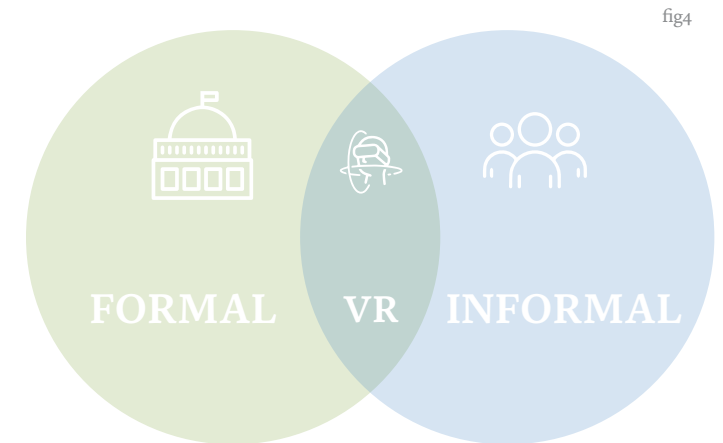
Ideally positioned in public areas such as parks, the pavilion is meant to be visited by all. Adults and children alike can visit the panoramic structure to enjoy the view and the sun.

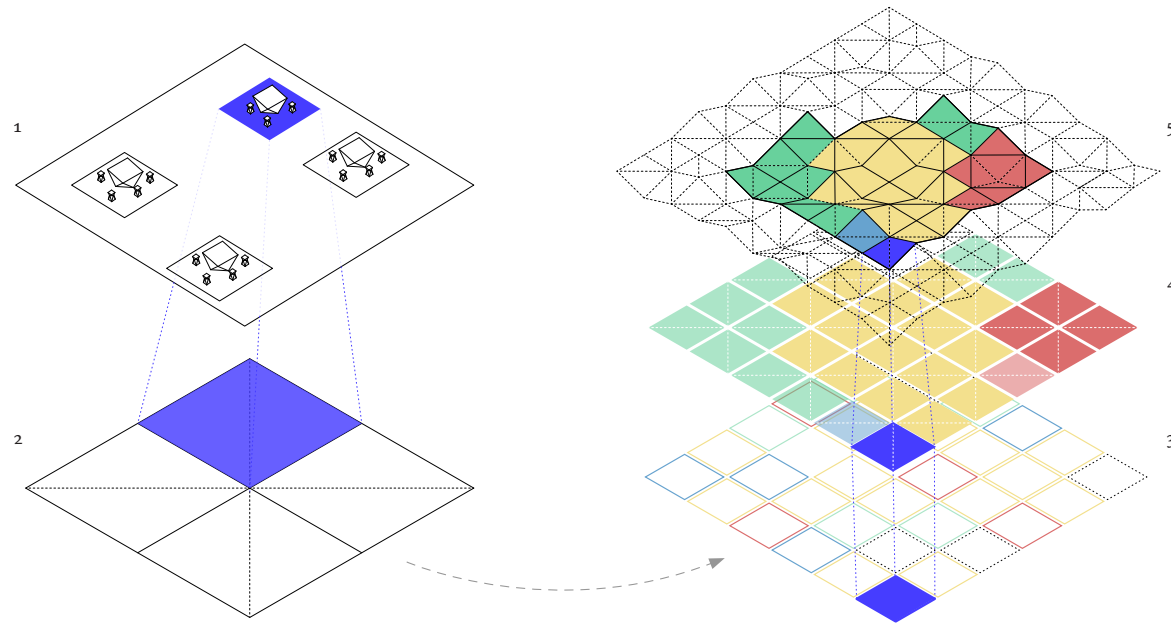
Those that came to partake in political discussions gently walk down the mountainous topography and may choose one of several meeting areas. Once settled if any organized discussions are being held, discussions would be conducted physically for the communal or cantonal ones or virtually for the ones held nationwide.

Diagrams
 1 formal & informal areas
 2 main access points
 3 meeting areas
 4 virtual reality connecting the parliamentarians and the people



Elevation
 Cross section perspective highlighting materials and the two spaces





Linking topics to VR
Topics are translated to a specific color, once re-arranged with other live topics across several cantons similar ones are merged together to form larger meeting spaces in the virtual realm.

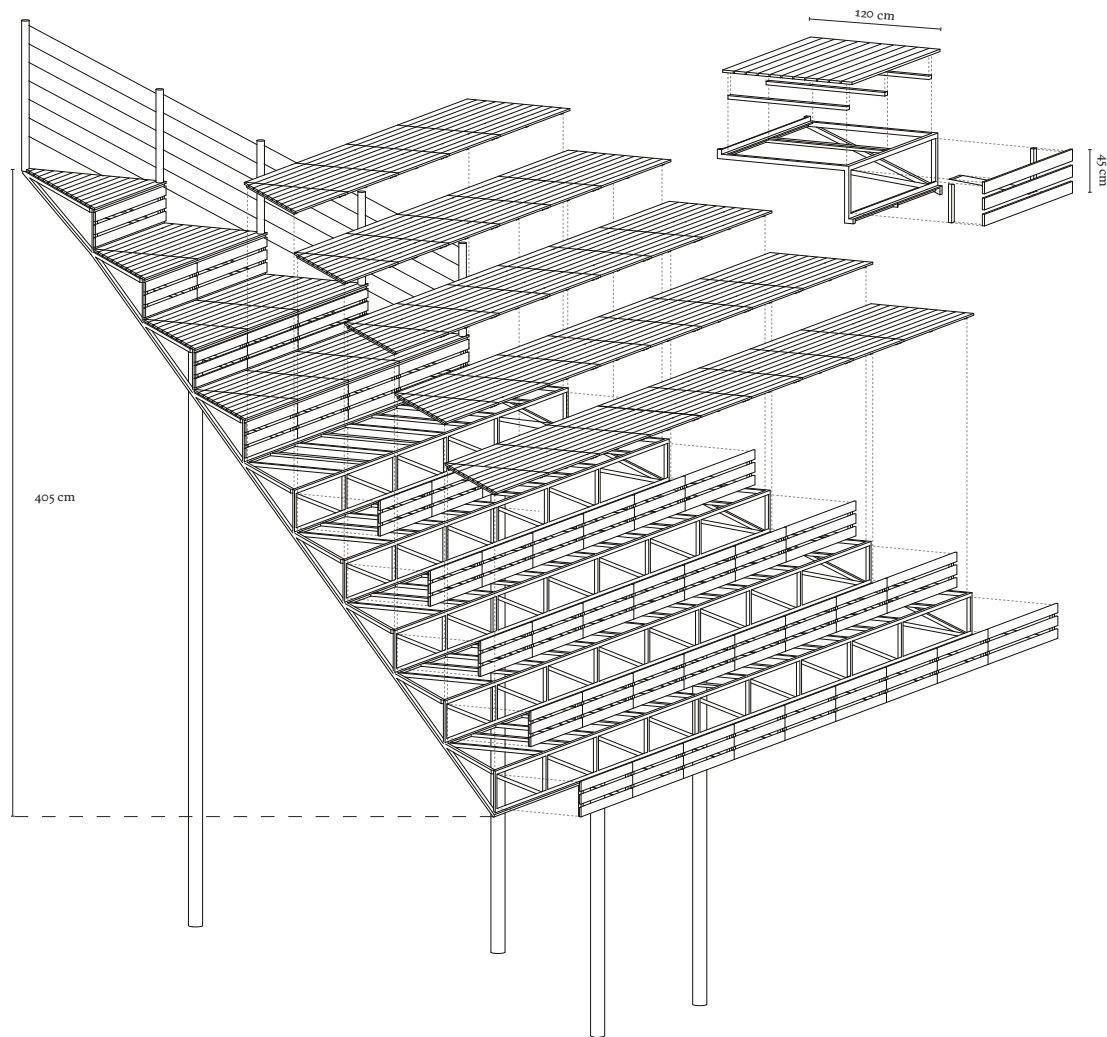
The VR realm shares a similar form but at a different scale, here opinionated and motivated citizens get assigned a meeting space depending on their topic of choice. Similar topics are positioned next to each other to form a larger and more adapted space.

The ever-changing topography takes different forms depending on the number of meetings and topics taking place, frequent users will experience the space around them differently at each visit, it would be highly unlikely to see the same landscape twice.

Inside, our citizens can use the slopes around them as digital whiteboards, connected to the internet, users can attach various documents, images, text, and so on. Sketches and documents can be saved for later use, and the finalized folder summarizing the meeting will be sent to the appropriate parliamentarian serving as a guide for the democratic decision-making process.

Occasionally, parliamentarians can pop up and decide to roam the virtual realm and join in on discussions with civilians on the topics of their choice.

Structure

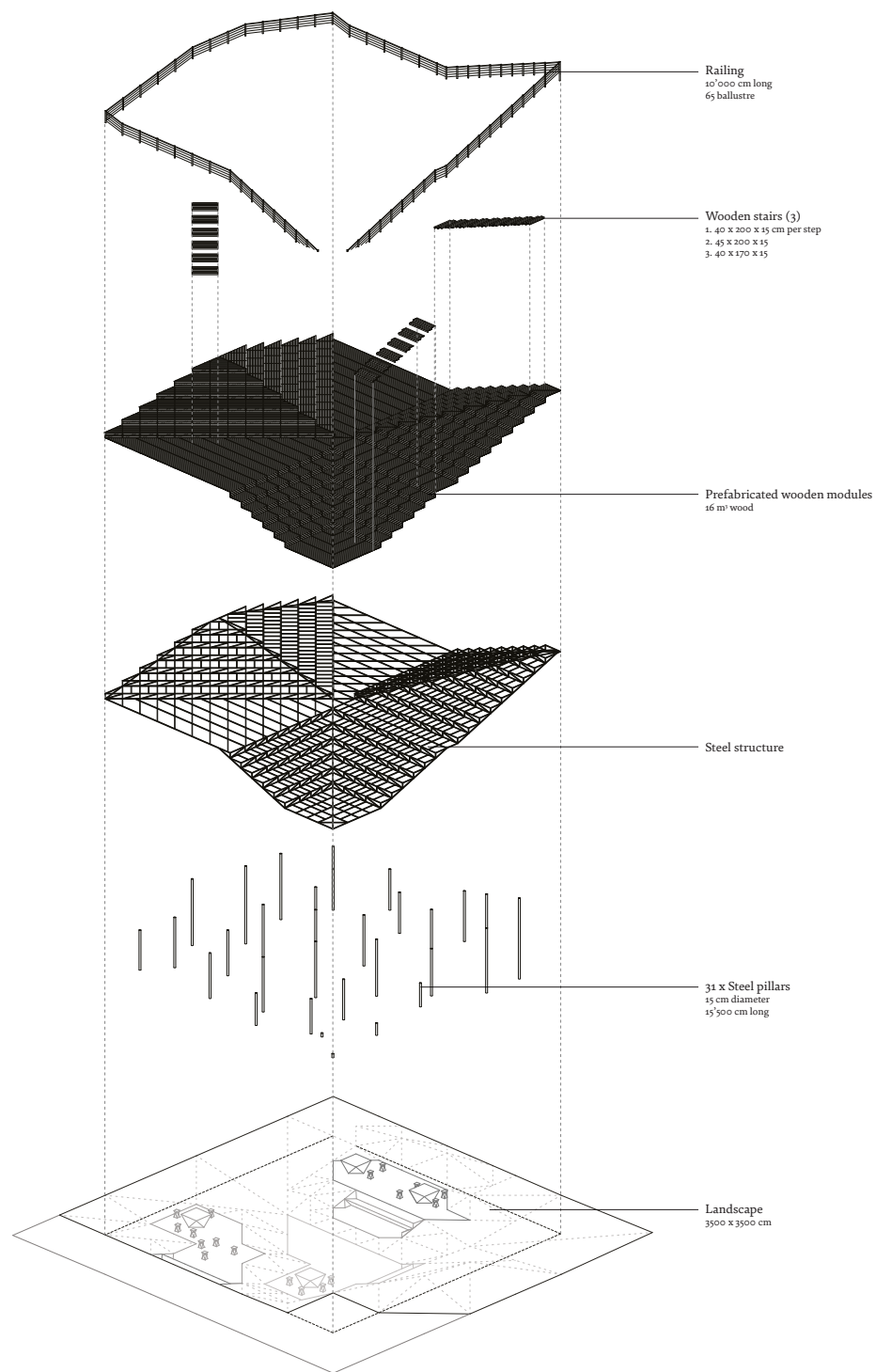


Exploded Axonometry
Fragment 1/8 of the proto-structure hosting 90 prefabricated panels.

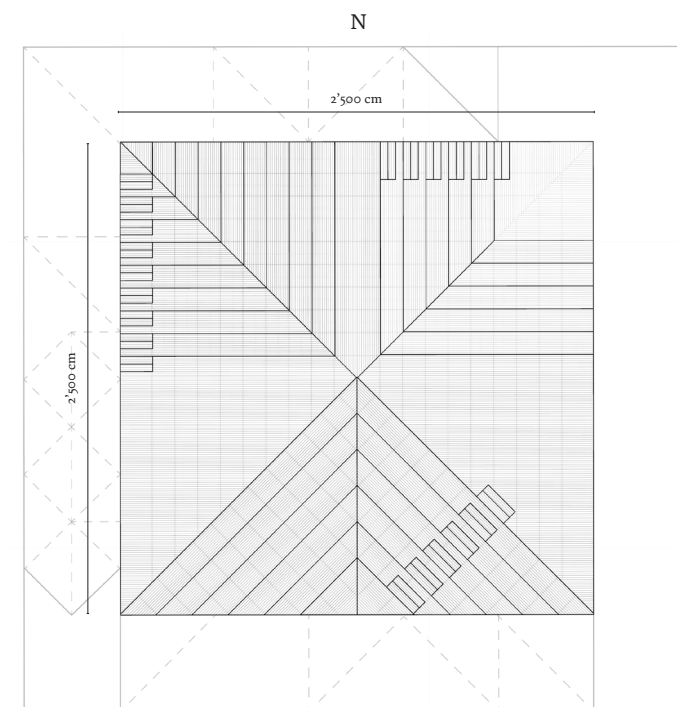
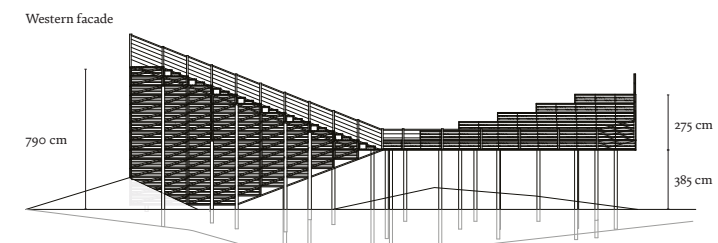
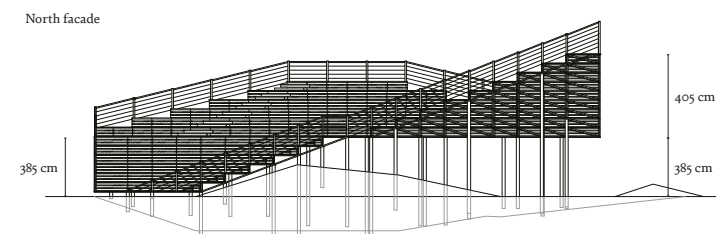
The pavilion is has four sides with two faces each. Above the pillars, the metallic structure is welled in order to hold the prefabricated wooden elements on their respective modules.

Strategically positioned for good structural distribution on the ground of the pavilion, the pillars intentionally seem to be randomly positioned into place to resemble the trees around it.

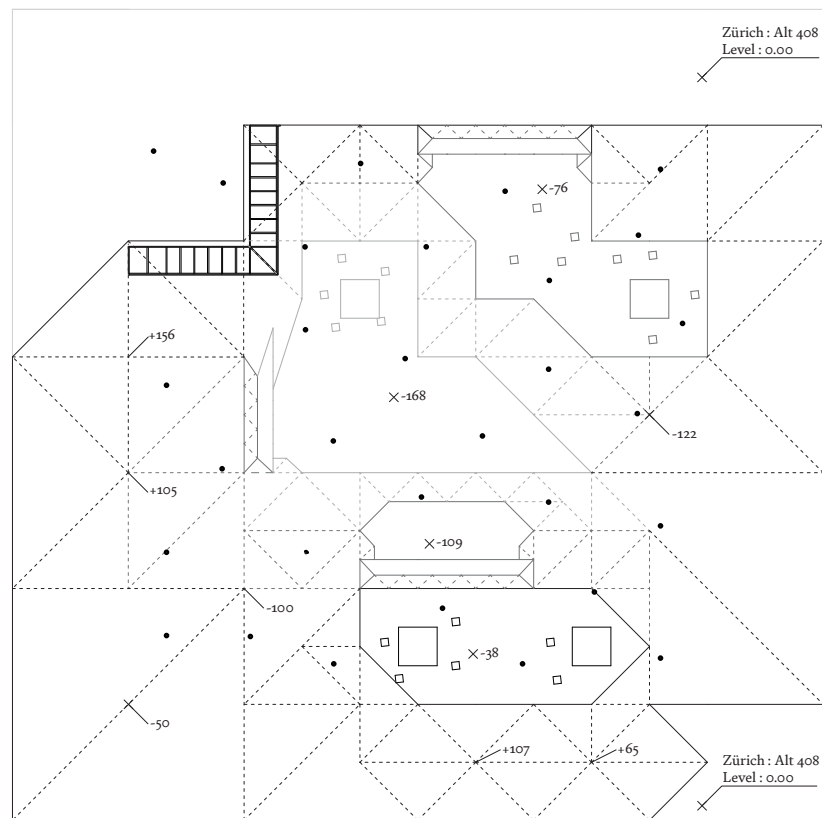
The Public Parliaments are composed of 8 bleachers covered with wooden flooring, vertically these panels are more widely spaced allowing light to cross through it giving the formal space beneath it an enjoyable shaded area.



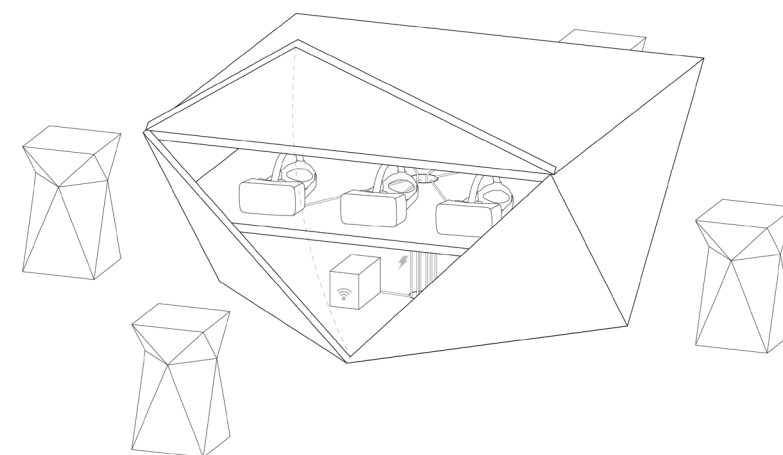
Exploded Axonometry
5 layer Pavilion



Elevation and Plan
North/West Elevation
Aerial Plan



**Ground Floor
Heights**



Conclusion



Arboretum
View of Lake Zürich from
the park

Emerging technologies are rapidly shaping the world we live in, and with it the way we interact with one another. As businesses and institutions learn to adapt to an ever-changing society, it not only necessary to re-evaluate the way we conduct democracy in order to improve it but also strengthen the ties between those in power and the people, direct democracy depends on it.

To meet the complex demands of our time, several communities have started adopting a new form of discussion, one that allows citizens to participate more actively in the political process again. Public Parliaments would serve as an architectural solution for these political gatherings at every scale, inviting the public to join in and lessening the gap between parliamentarians and the people. Besides the aforementioned, the pavilion also happens to serve as a delightful location to enjoy picnics under the sun.



SANAA Field Party

The work and practice of architecture firm SANAA explores the concept of a "relational" architecture.

offered one type of food and drink. Inhabitants of the suburb wandered through the field, unrestrained by a visible ordering system.

Kazuyo Sejima's "Field Party" involved constructing a field of 12x12 meters of hundred of barbecues set in a large field in the outskirts of suburban Tokyo. Each barbecue only

Although the party appeared disconnected. The chance encounters that occurred between people transformed the field into a meaningful social event. By viewing archi-

itecture as an open framework, the architect is no longer the creator of space, but rather the organizer.

– Rosmarin, *An Architecture of Encounters*.

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