ATLAS OF
€UNITY

Dominik Stoschek

AN ICONOGRAPHIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE REALMS OF CONSENSUSLAND

Atlas of €unity

An iconographic journey through the realms of consensusland

Deciphering the mediatised architecture of spaces of dissent and consent based on the European Union's parliamentary architecture

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11 April 2022

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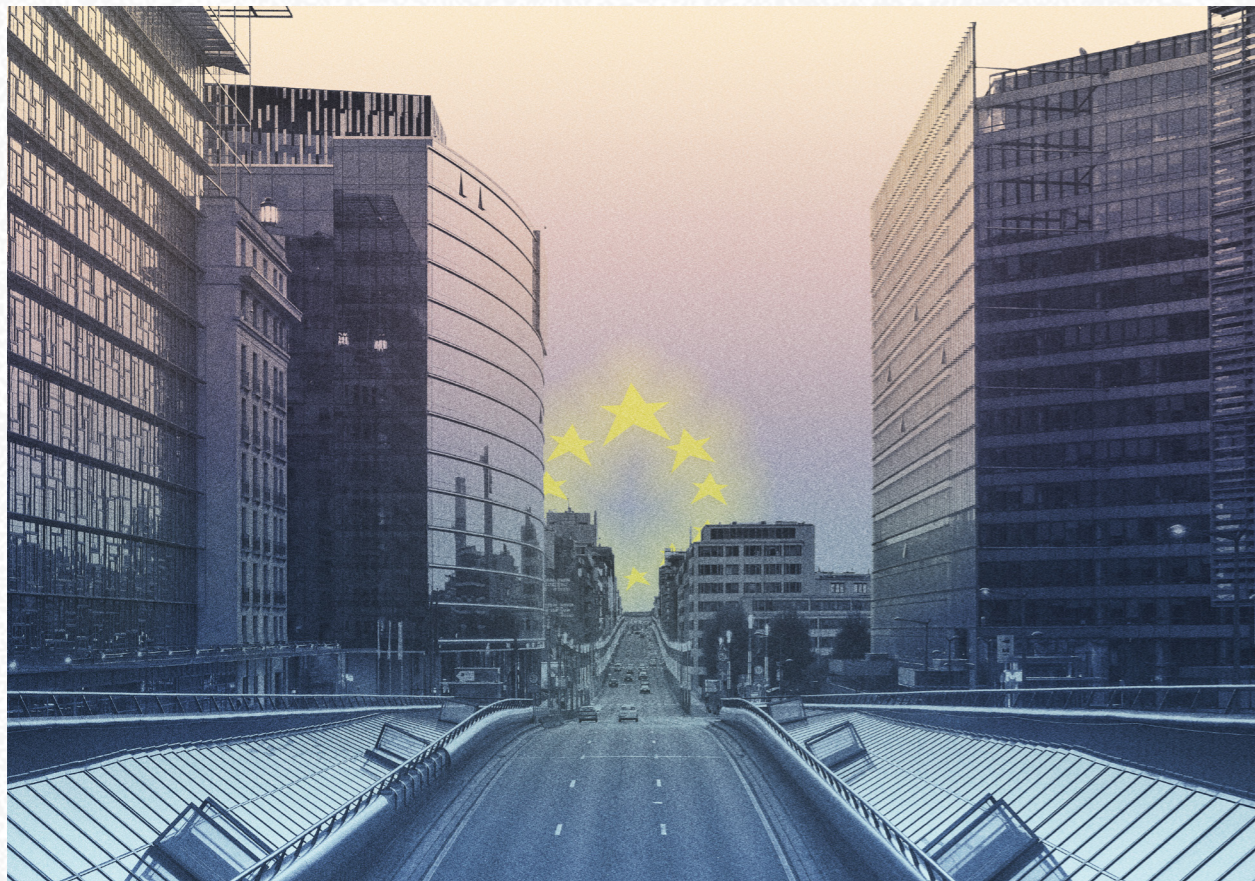
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The EU is rising over Brussels (Brummer, 2018; modified by Stoschek, 2022)   **Fig. 01.2**

Abstract

As often as the political decision-making process of the European Union is disdained as a bureaucratic consensus machine, as often are its built manifestation denounced as an architecture of stringent unity that lacks the necessary space for dissent and opposition. While on a semantic level, the EU tries to embed this plurality of opinion with its self-imposed slogan *United in Diversity* in a construct of unity, the architectural translation of that ambition is executed very inconsistently.

Previous research in the field of EU-related architecture and its representational capacity has focused to a large extent on the real constitution of the built form in the context of its historical embedding and neglected the aspect of public perception. However, for a representative building, such as the EU Parliament, this is a crucial parameter for the evaluation of its iconographic potential.

Therefore, this research relies on visual data gathered from various Social Media platforms to generate an extensive visual overview of spaces of dissent and consent based on the European Union's parliamentary architecture. By decoding and contextualising the mediatised depiction through a comparative image analysis the complex iconographic network of an architecture of consent becomes visible.

It is expected that through this study, the hypothesis of the EU's parliamentary architecture building the framework for establishing a so-called consensusland will be confirmed. Furthermore, by deciphering this network, I hope to be able to answer questions about the architecture and iconography of spaces of dissent. What is the EU's ambition to manifest spaces of dissent in its architecture? Which design parameters are crucial to create spaces that provide room for diversity and dissent? In what field of tension should public and non-public spaces be situated? I assume that the research will show that in order to create space for lived, tangible dissent, a predetermined design should be avoided. To design for the still ambiguous concept of European democracy, architecture must offer a certain room for interpretation, spatially as well as symbolically.

ENTERING

CONSENSUSLAND

PART 01

We need to ask what symbols and images, what events and ideas, will shape our thinking about the Europe of the future. I say the future, though in fact we are here asking for its contours and shape to be known already today.

Speech delivered by the then Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, at the Copernicus Centre, Warsaw, on 11 July 2013

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Atlas of €Unity

Donald Tusk (Charlier, 2017) Fig. 01.3

1.1.   Problematization

Since its creation in the 1950s, one of the European Union's (EU) greatest challenges has been the process of integrating its to date 27 different nations and cultures. With its self-imposed slogan United in diversity (cf. Fig. 01.4), the EU offers a solutions for this aspiration by elegantly combining the seemingly contradicting semantic paradox of diversity and unity in a common denominator (Curti Gialdino, 2005).

Despite this auspicious ambition, however, this complex political construct of the EU, mainly governed by diverse national interests, is rather known as a consensus machine, where an outdated "permissive consensus" prevents criticism and dissatisfaction from being properly channelled and voiced, thus suppressing genuine dissent (Müller, 2014).

But dissent as an inherent "specificity of pluralist democracy" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 17) becomes particularly significant in the context of the EU's parliamentary architecture. A typology whose primary task of representation is inextricably linked to the challenge of forming an iconographic projection surface, must manage to create a spatial and visual framework that allows for the discussion and examination of the plurality of opinions situated in the space between dissent and consent.

However, as clearly as the EU' slogan incorporates the plurality of opinion on a semantic level, as inconclusive and ambiguous is this concept reflected in the EU's parliamentary architecture. It is not only Rem Koolhaas, in his typically cynical and populist manner, who has attested to the EU's "iconographic deficit" (OMA and Koolhaas, 2004). Also scholars like Carola Hein see the EU lacking a "common understanding of the various European communities' symbolism" (Hein, 2006a, p. 73).

In fact, the built manifestations of the EU are a product of chance made up of an obscure involvement of the private sector together with local authorities and an impenetrable

★ Atlas of €unity ★

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I Part 01 Entering Consensusland

bureaucratic process (Fabbrini, 2020, p. 103). The consequence is a viscous mélange of European consensus architecture that has been cast in the form of a supranational citizens' representation in Brussels and Strasbourg respectively. Therefore, I argue that a genuine depiction of the diversity of those represented by these buildings and of their diverging interests and opinions, does not manifest itself in these buildings.

There, an architectural and iconographical representation of dissent is displaced by an exuberant imagery of consent.

There, entering the premises of the EU means entering consensusland.

Fig. 01.5 The Future is Europe? (Stoschek, 2022)

Culture and cultural production draw their strength

from the fact that they are understandable only in

their own right. And if we don't accept that from

culture and cultural production, if we try to define

either in scientific ways, if we try to formulate their

'historical' possibilities for Europe, then I think

we're missing the point and falling prey to a mistake,

since European culture is the name we have for an

accumulation of artefacts, concepts and ideas that were

never quite understood when they were first introduced.

Contribution by Kersten Geers during a round table discussion of the
New Narrative for Europe at the Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels, on 21 May 2014

1.2.   Research approach

In the same way that European culture is an "accumulation of artefacts, concepts and ideas that were never quite understood" (European Commission, 2014, p. 138) according to Kersten Geers, the materialization of consensusland is an equally ambiguous, intangible and multi-layered phenomenon. Originating from the fundamental problem of the EU's representational deficit, a European visual language embedded in precisely this viscous mélange of European consensus architecture needs above all more systematic classification and deciphering before a more differentiated positioning in the space between dissent and consent and a concluding assessment can be undertaken.
Therefore, this research aims at decoding and contextualising the mediatised depiction of dissent and consent at the European Union's parliamentary architecture in order to find out about the constitution of an architecture of dissent. The research will encompass the EU's two parliamentary complexes situated in Brussels and Strasbourg and will evaluate them in a comparative analysis based on their iconographic ambitions towards the EU's self-imposed slogan United in Diversity.

For this venture, this research utilizes publicly available visual content from Social Media networks such as Instagram and Twitter depicting the architecture of the two parliaments as well as televised content from broadcasting companies. This type of image analysis makes use of the dual identity of the images' creators: With the help of the so-called "produsers" (Bernholz, Landemore and Reich, 2020, p. 4), a term that refers both to the users of the network and to the producers of content, it is possible to not only analyse what is shown in the image but also to take into account the type of presentation and its accompanying framing. The possibility of quantifying elements in terms of their accumulation allows thematic focal points to be identified which are then placed in a wider context in a subsequent qualitative architectural analysis. This method will enable to draw conclusions about the mediatised representation of the building through the eyes of the public and will further allow to answer the following research (sub-)questions:

Fig. 01.6 Kerstin Geers (OFFICE KGDVS, 2020)

To what extent are spaces of dissent and consent spatially and iconographically reflected in the EU's parliamentary architecture?

- What definition for spaces of dissent and consent can be derived from the EU's design ambitions for its built manifestations?
- In what relation do the spatial constitution and the iconographical depiction of spaces of dissent and consent stand?
- What conscious and unconscious use of visual language manifested in the parliamentary architecture does the EU deploy to represent its slogan *United in Diversity*?

1.3.   Hypothesis

In contrast to the Parliament building in Strasbourg, Brussels' Espace Léopold was never the official site of the European Parliament and thus also excluded from the EU's influence on the building's design (Hein, 2004, pp. 152–153). Therefore, I assume that the comparative analysis reveals this bureaucratic difference in the iconographic depiction of the building's spaces of dissent and consent. Based on the EU's greater involvement in the design process, I suppose, that there, a European iconography of dissent is especially more visible and apparent in terms of creating an iconic, visual silhouette, symbolising dissent and through implementing more informal spaces of exchange, thus nourishing an environment of dissent.

I therefore also assume that, in the example of the parliament building in Strasbourg, a mediatised European iconography of dissent is better and more subtly constituted in its built space. In a later step, this conclusion will consequently lead to question of how these iconographic artefacts are translated into actual, tangible spaces of dissent. How can we design for spaces of dissent in the context of European democracy? Looking at the preliminary results, I assume in order to create space for lived dissent, a predetermined design should be avoided. To represent the still ambiguous and complex concept of European democracy, architecture must offer a certain room for interpretation to its viewers, spatially as well as symbolically, to fulfil its self-imposed ambition of uniting in diversity.

# CONSENSUSLAND

DECODING

PART 02
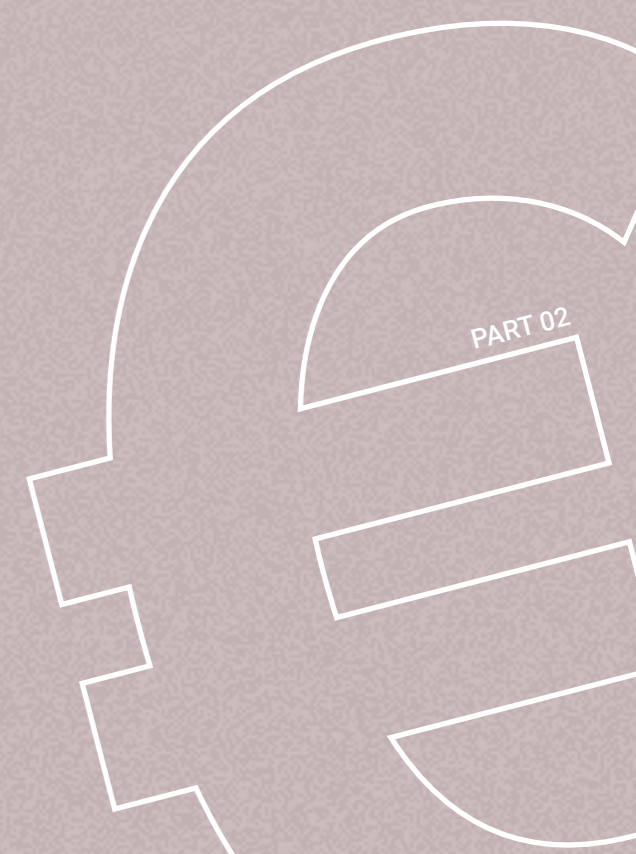
2.1.   Theoretical Framework

As early as 1986, with the report of the ad hoc committee A People's Europe (European Commission, 1986), chaired by Italian politician Pietro Adonnino, the EU began to initiate a large-scale debate on a more effective self-representation of Europe. Further high-profile discourses on the EU's cultural self-image followed, such as *A New Narrative for Europe* (cf. Fig. 02.1) (European Commission, 2014), *Brussels - A Manifesto* (cf. Fig. 02.3) (Patteeuw et al., 2006) or *The Image of Europe* (cf. Fig. 02.2) (OMA and Koolhaas, 2004) developed by Rem Koolhaas and OMA for the Netherland's 2004 council presidency. In the course of this development, the representative significance of its own built manifestations also became increasingly prominent when in 2009, Siim Kallas, the then Vice-President of the European Commission (EC), published a report entitled *The Commission's buildings policy in Brussels* (European Commission, 2009), in which a newly acquired architectural ambition of the EU becomes clearly visible.

The importance of iconographic architecture for a self-confident representation of the EU is therefore the subject of many scholars, above all Carola Hein, who has dealt extensively with the built structure of the EU and its iconographic potential in *The Capital of Europe* (Hein, 2004) and *In search of Icons for a United Europe* (Hein, 2006a). Her proposal of "polycentric capitals" (Hein, 2006b) already indicates that the slogan *United in Diversity* can only be reflected in a polycentrically organised and built pan-European structure. The work of other scholars, such as Dennis Pohl or Sebastiano Fabbrini, examine the topic of European self-representation primarily in the field of tension between the European integration process and its implicit expression on a technological-symbolic micro-level, such as the interpretation of the EU banknote design or the development of media communication technologies in the EU institutions.

Atlas of Europe (OMA, 2004) **Fig. 02.2**

Brussels - A Manifesto (Berlage Instituut, 2006) **Fig. 02.3**
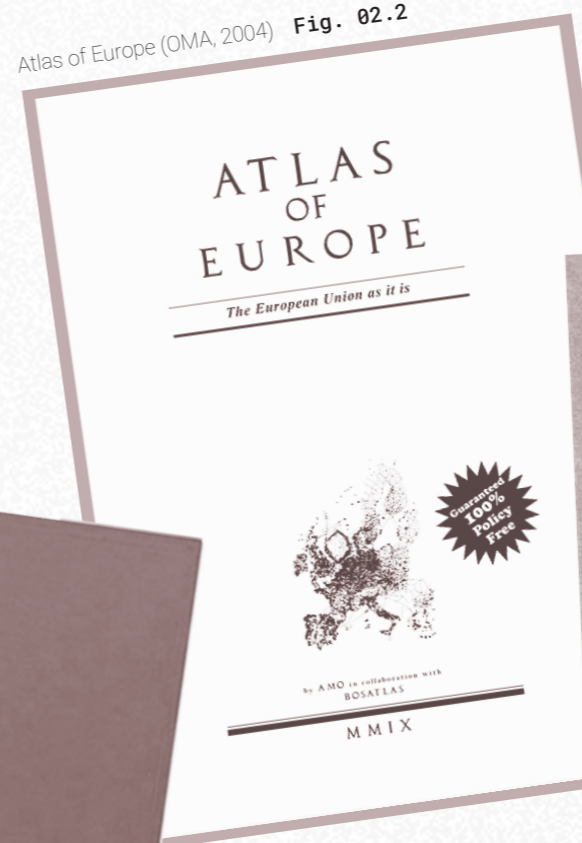
A New Narrative for Europe (Leftloft, 2016) **Fig. 02.1**

The research presented here attempts to link to this micro-level by examining singular iconographic artefacts of dissent and consent. By doing so, it relates to several aspects of the previously mentioned literature, above all, it ties in with the ongoing mass multimediatisation of the EU's built structure.

The iconographic aspect of this technological development is informed in this research by the conception of imageability, established in Kevin Lynch's Image of the City, where he uses the sum of very personal perceptions of a city to draw conclusions about the "quality of an image in the mind" (Lynch, 1960, p. 116) of its observers. Consequently, the image of dissent, which arguably cannot be delineated any longer today without mentioning Chantal Mouffe's *Agonistics* (Mouffe, 2013), will also be examined in a similar way, which I describe in the following chapter.

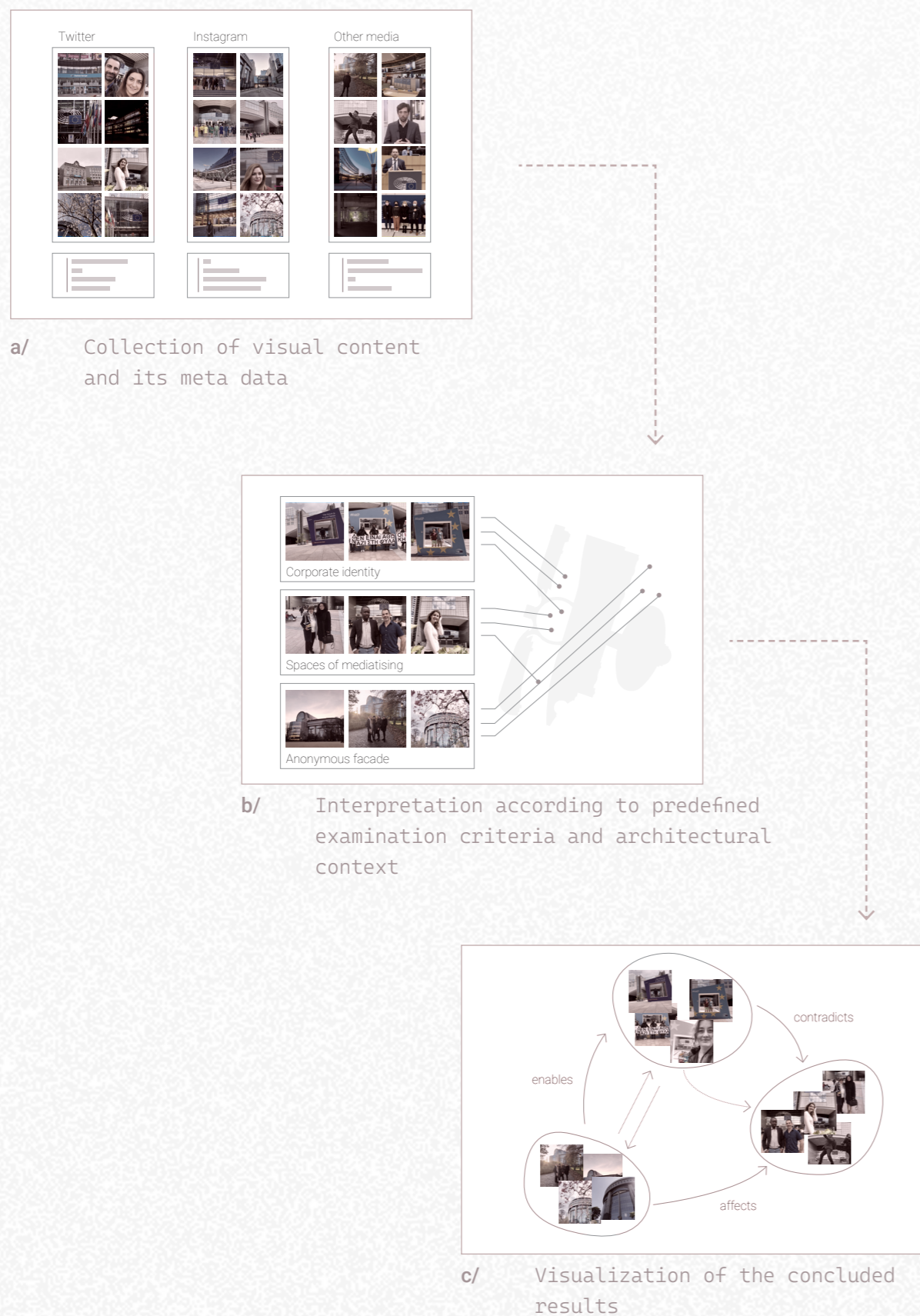Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2020)* **Fig. 02.4**

Atlas of €unity *(Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2020; modified by Stoschek, 2022)* **Fig. 02.5**

2.2.   Methodology

In order to find out about the embedded iconography of consent and dissent in the EU's parliamentary architecture, I will execute a systematic analysis and examination of publicly available visual content from Social Media networks and broadcasting companies. This approach takes Aby Warburg's image atlas *Mnemosyne*[1] (cf. Fig. 02.4) as a reference and uses the collected images and videos to develop an *Atlas of €unity* (cf. Fig. 02.5) that identifies and addresses recurring patterns and themes in the iconography of EU architecture, structures them and then places them in an overarching context.

In order to decide whether these findings rather constitute spaces of dissent or consent, I make use of Charles Jencks guidelines presented in the book *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture* (Jencks, Bunt and Broadbent, 1981). There, he argues that in order to symbolize diversity, a building needs to give room for interpretation. Jencks claims that the answer on who interprets and defines a building's conveyed message should always be the viewer and must not already be determined from the start. The perception of a building will therefore develop over its time of existence, eventually resulting in representing plural identities (Jones, 2011, p. 149).

Methodologically, this approach is a hybrid of a small-scale quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative investigation of the preliminary findings. This process will be divided into three main stages: Systematically collecting visual content (quantitative part), mapping and interpreting them according to predefined examination criteria (qualitative part) and eventually visualizing the results. I will explain these steps in the following paragraphs (Fig. 02.6).

1   German Art historian, Aby Warburg (1866-1929) is considered the founder of art-historical iconography, which was later developed further by Erwin Panofsky, among others. Warburg perfected this method above all in his image atlas *Mnemosyne*, which traces recurring visual themes and patterns from antiquity through the Renaissance to contemporary culture. It is compiled of 40 wooden panels arranged according to different themes, on which were pinned nearly 1,000 pictures from "books, magazines, newspaper and other daily life sources". His approach is seen as an inspiration for today's visually and digitally dominated world. (Warburg et al., 2020, p. 9)

a/   Collection of visual content
and its meta data

b/   Interpretation according to predefined
examination criteria and architectural
context

c/   Visualization of the concluded
results

Research process (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 02.6**

a.   Systematic collection of visual content and
extraction of metadata

In order to gain the broadest possible insight into the depiction of spaces of consent and dissent, I will choose the following three main sources for collecting visual content: The social media platforms Instagram and Twitter as well as freely accessible media libraries of major European broadcasting companies such as France1 from France or ARD/ZDF from Germany.

On the base of these sources, I will specifically search for visual depictions that explicitly show the architectures of both parliament buildings allowing valid conclusions about how consensusland is architecturally and visually depicted.

The audio-visual network Instagram, with its focus on video and photo sharing, will help me above all in analysing the external image of the buildings, since both premises usually represent highly frequented public spaces that are often visited by passers-by and whose images are thus also frequently found on Instagram. For this purpose, I will specifically search for these images under distinctive hashtags such as #europeanparliament, #euparliament, #europeanparliamentbrussels and #europeanparliamentstrasbourg.

Since the short message service Twitter is a popular platform, especially among those professionally involved and interested in politics, I will primarily use this network as a source for the investigation of the interior representation of both parliament buildings. I will take advantage of the fact that a large number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have accounts on this platform thus allowing more intimate, visual insights into the interior of the Parliament (e.g., offices, conference rooms, corridors, etc.), which are normally hidden from a larger public.

As a third source, I will examine EU-related content from freely accessible media libraries of major European broadcasting companies, which, by their very nature as broadcasting media, strive for a representative presentation of their content. Therefore, I hope that the iconography of consensusland is depicted in a concentrated form in this source.

I will extract roughly the same number of elements from the first two sources mentioned, Instagram and Twitter, in order to be able to establish a certain comparability between them. I

assume that a sample size of about 100-150 elements per source is large enough to cover as many aspects of consensusland as possible and yet small enough to execute this research in the given time frame. The media libraries of the broadcasting companies will mainly be used as a supplementary source to fill any visual gaps in the depictions of both parliaments.

Parallel to the collection process, I will extract relevant metadata such as geotags and dates from the images and videos, in order to be able to draw certain conclusions, for example from the location data. Clustering at specific locations might be a qualitative indicator of iconographic settings since images, especially on Instagram, tend to show the particular picturesque perspectives of a building.

b.   Interpretation according to predefined examination criteria

Making use of Erwin Panofsky's Iconographic-Iconological method (Panofsky, 1955), I will analyse the images based on predefined themes referring to single aspects of iconographical architecture. This will allow a comparison of the two building complexes, whose histories of development differ fundamentally from one another.

First, an exemplary collection of images will be objectively described regarding its apparent visual content (=what is seen in the image?) and possible differences between the two buildings will be identified. The discovered artefacts can either be tangible objects, defined spaces or can refer to certain atmospheres. Secondly, the found artefacts will be put into a wider context (=what is the setting and framework the image is embedded?), referring not only to the design intentions voiced by the EU but also to the image's setting and its architectural integration. Ultimately, content and context of the image will be synthesized to draw conclusions about the iconic potential shown in these images.

The following paragraphs will list these themes and propose certain key statements for analysing these categories (Fig. 02.7).

Objects / Elements

Inventory of the buildings

The EU consists of a vast array of seemingly everyday objects that are not explicitly associated with a European symbolism such as ordinary office accessories, seating furniture, art objects or more specific technical equipment such as voting devices in the plenary hall. They appear so frequently in the images that they inevitably become part of a typical EU interior. Does the use of this interior rather adds to an atmosphere of consent or do they, in the way they are used, open room for dissent?

Signage of visual identity

A European iconography manifests itself in an exuberant use of logos, symbols, and letterings following strictly the EU's "visual identity manual" (European Commission, 2017). While the permanent display of all flags of the individual member states and the use of every official language of the EU is a clear sign towards an iconography of dissent, the deliberate attempt of placing the logos of the EU as visible and noticeable as possible onto furniture, walls and facades shows an attempt of creating a unifying, corporate identity.

Places / Spaces

Places of mediatising

Since the rise of social media and the accompanying competition for attention, the EU is striving to create an infrastructure that facilitates this process of visual self-reproduction. Thus, in addition to photo spots for passers-by, whose framing and background are fixed, there are also social media spots and even dedicated TV studios equipped with the right equipment for Member of the Parliament (MEP) to produce content for their digital channels. The predefined framing, as already noted in the previous section, shows that the EU is striving for a corporate identity and thus for a visual consensus.

Spaces of appropriation

A political building is by definition always also a projection surface for political messages and a place for protest. Iconic public settings help to raise awareness for these messages. For this purpose, the Agora Simone Veil is frequently used as a central location for expressing political messages, both from the citizenry and from the official EU side. This creates an open space for dissent that is appropriated in a variety of ways.

Places / Spaces

Athmospheres

Perception of the building

While the façade of the parliament building in Brussels is often depicted as faceless and anonymous, revealing a hidden consensus, the building in Strasbourg creates a recognisable, "distinct silhouette" (Pipins, 2014, p. 452). Simultaneously, it opens up room for interpretation about his seemingly unfinished roof structure and is being compared with the Tower of Babel whereby the interpretative sovereignty of the building is not predetermined but is up to the citizenry.

Examination themes (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 02.7**
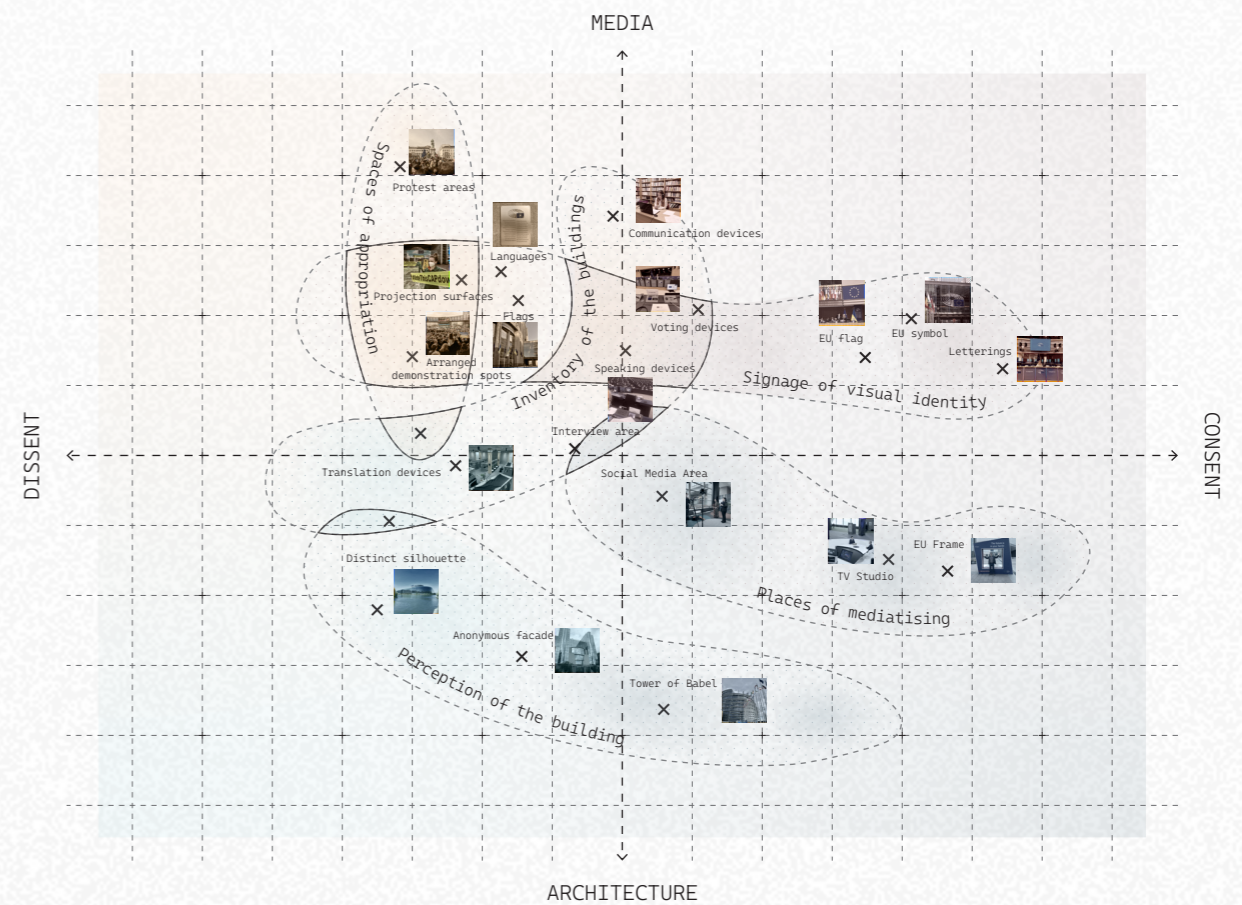
Relationship matrix (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 02.8**

c. Visualization of the concluded results

Besides extensively mapping the found data of the social media analysis, the results of the quantitative-qualitative study will be visualised in the form of a relationship matrix (Fig. 02.8) along two axes: On the horizontal axis, the artefacts are arranged in terms of their significance for an iconography of dissent or consensus. At the same time, the vertical axis indicates whether this phenomenon is more of a medial or architectural nature.

The individual themes are arranged in this diagram, taking into account their relationship to each other. In this illustration, in addition to the number of elements per theme, possible thematic overlaps will become visible as well, thus revealing the complex iconographic network of consensusland.

2.3.   Limitations of the research

The chosen research approach as visualized in the diagram on the following page [2] (Fig. 02.9) opens up a variety of possibilities to investigate the complex field of architectural iconography. Nevertheless, the quantitative-qualitative research methodology is also characterised by some obvious weaknesses. Since the research will primarily focus on iconographic artefacts revealed through the Social Media analysis, it thus inevitably generates blind spots. These blind spots are either characterised by selection bias, as the users of social media platforms do not represent a cross-section of the global population (Ok Kim, 2019, p. 236) or through the fact that relevant content is not in every case publicly available.
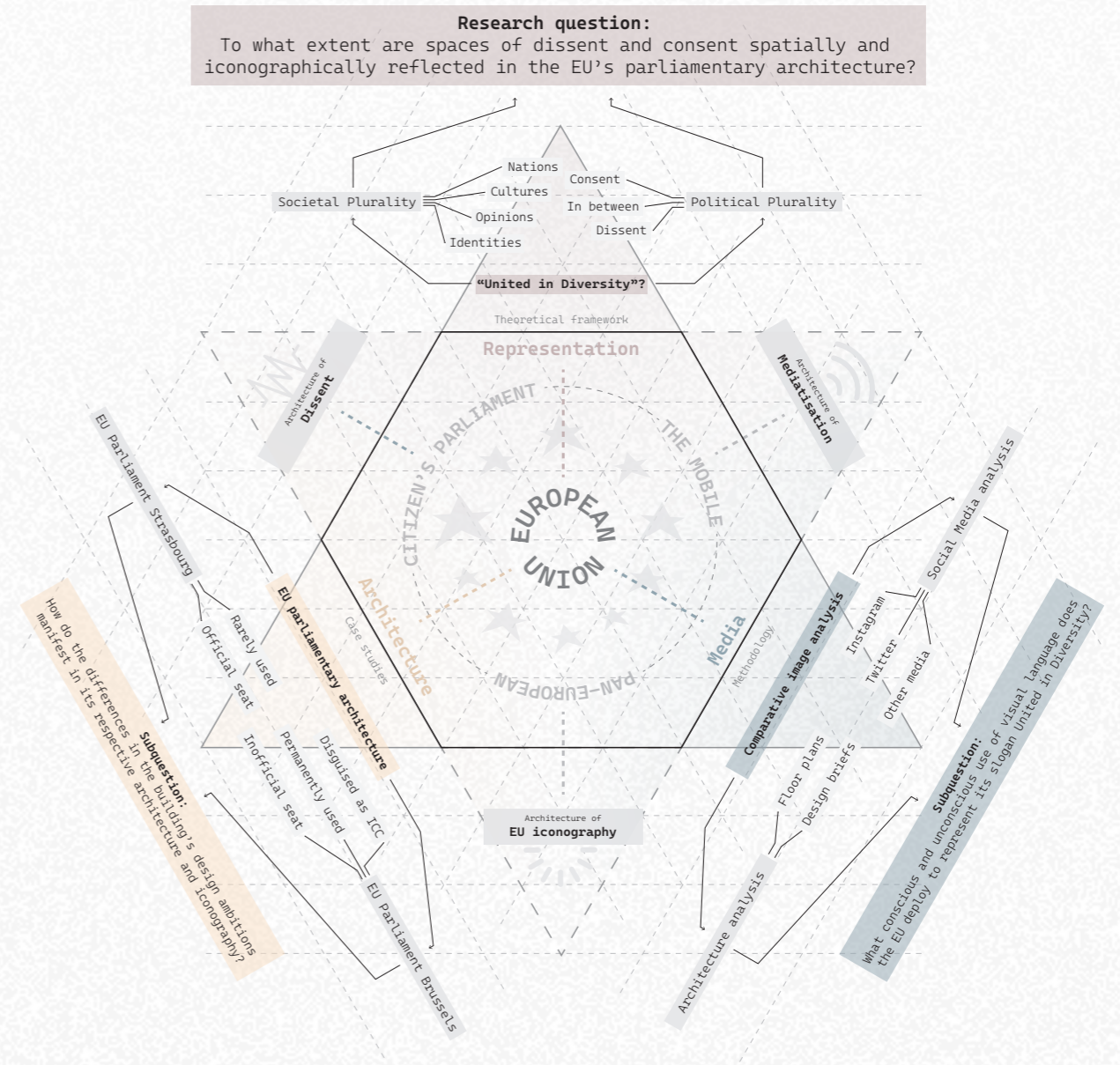
Research diagram (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 02.9**

2   The diagram shown here once again visualises the tripartite nature of the research topic presented here. The original fascination of the European Union and its accompanying political and architectural dilemmas touches on the following areas: The question of representation comprises the theoretical framework of the work, which takes the slogan of the EU "United in Diversity" as a starting point. For this study, the parliamentary architecture of the EU, including the two Parliament buildings and their different histories of origin and architectural characteristics are used as case studies. The topic of mediatisation is used here as a methodological basis to link the two previously discussed topics. The investigation of these three areas finally lead to an architecture of dissent incorporated in the idea of a mobile pan-European citizens' parliament.

TOWARDS

DISSENSUSLAND

## 3.1.	Relation to research: Towards an architecture of dissent

As the preceding analysis has shown, the EU's built manifestations and their iconographic potential have to contest themselves on an entirely new stage: In an age where media reach is the benchmark of a global and fiercely contested competition for digital attention, and social networks are merciless multipliers for the representation of a mediatised architecture – on this stage, the European Union has to ask itself the question how its built manifestations contribute to an architecture of dissent which manages not to subjugate itself to the binary rules of the attention economy and yet to appropriate a plurality of opinions and interpretations that offer room for genuine opposition.

My research project examines to what extent these spaces of dissent are already embedded in the EU's parliamentary architecture. The image analysis based on the two case studies will therefore provide me with valuable insights into the EU's approach to materialising such spaces of dissent and how these places and settings are iconographically depicted and perceived – especially through the use of new media communication technologies. The found artefacts will help me to develop design guidelines that I can use for the later design to develop an effective European visual and architectural language of dissent that can become the point of departure in order leave consensusland. Thus, the connection between research and design can be named as follows:

An architecture of dissent as a design parameter for a democracy at the interface between media and physical space

- · Which design parameters are crucial to create spaces that provide room for diversity and dissent?
- · What European iconography can nourish the creation of spaces of dissent and consent
- · What role does an increasing mediatisation of these spaces play?

The crisis of democracy is also a crisis of representation, in other words the question of who is represented in democracy, which interests dominate, which means, possibilities, places are found to unite the different social positions and interests. In representative democracy, this place is parliament. In digital democracy, however, parliament loses its significance.

(Diez and Heisenberg, 2020, p. 31) in

Power to the people: Wie wir mit Technologie die Demokratie neu erfinden

A PAN-EUROPEAN MOBILE CITIZENS PARLIAMENT

Le cirque de l'Europe (Zimmermann, 2022; modified by Stoschek 2022) **Fig. 03.1**

3.2.   Design proposal:
The pan‑European citizens parliament

The European Union and its accompanying bureaucratic machine are still trapped in the realms of consensusland. The fate of an insidious democratic decay can only be eluded with a stronger involvement of a broad public that not only provides voice and space for genuine dissent, but also establishes a new culture of democratic competition. French political scientist Hélène Landmore therefore proposes a new, progressive form of democratic decision‑making whose executive power envisages large‑scale citizen participation: Open democracy relies heavily on the active participation of an informed citizenry through the process of deliberation. Still, with more than 500 million EU citizens, the core element of deliberation can only work through the use of digital technologies. At the same time, this process must also be able to take place to some extent in physical form in order to create the necessary points of identification and guarantee principles of mutual control or the involvement of the not technically inclined part of the population.

However, it can be questioned whether a permanent location is the definite answer to a broader inclusion of the EU's citizenry. The EU's decision for establishing 2,5 (in‑)official parliament locations, including Strasbourg, Brussels and to some extent also Luxembourg, was, however, never an intentional undertaking but the result of an opaque and ill‑conceived process. Thus, to overcome any national particular interests and not fall into the trap of a permissive consensus again, I therefore propose a pan‑European mobile citizens' parliament, *le Cirque de l'Europe*, which represents the conscious materialisation of a digital open democracy in a modern, eventising form.

While in this scenario, the digital space serves the pure acquisition of information and opinions needed for deliberation, the physical serves as the space for actual dissent, thus creating a testing ground for the stability of certain arguments - a conception of Mouffe's political arena materialised into a built form. The process of such a mobile citizens' parliament could be similar to that of a political TV debate, in which randomly selected citizens who had previously informed themselves about political topics on a digital platform argue and exchange their

The Image of Europe tent (OMA 2004)

Fig. 03.2
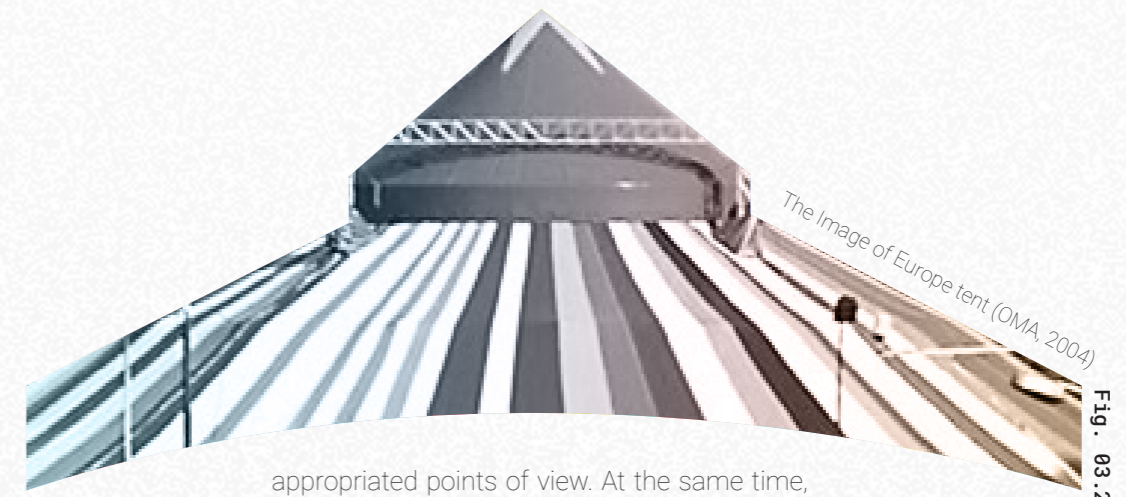
appropriated points of view. At the same time, through the extensive use of media communication technologies, this space also offers the possibility of mass networking, where not only discussions but also voting results and mood measurements of a digital European citizenry culminate live in one place.

Due to its adaptable, temporary and reversible structure, le Cirque de l'Europe operates in a location‑independent manner and can thus tour Europe along a set route and actively engage with EU citizens on its tour. In this way it is possible to circumvent the complex hierarchical system of national particular interests and supranational competences: Le Cirque de l'Europe can make stops in urban centres as well as in less significant places and regions. Similar to the regular G7 summits, European places that are otherwise geographically insignificant can be brought to the public's attention.

Le Cirque de l'Europe will ensure that the EU and its ideas will be anchored in the depths of society's collective memory of European citizenship, thus imbuing this space of dissent with a sense of community and belonging, true to the motto United in Diversity.

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Index of abbreviations

EU   European Union (successor of the European Community in 2009)

EC   European Community (predecessor of the European Union)

EP   European Parliament

MEP   Member of the European Parliament

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