ATLAS OF
€UNITY

by Dominik Stoschek

AN ICONOSPATIAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE REALMS OF CONSENSUSLAND

Atlas of €unity

An iconospatial journey through the realms of Consensusland

Deciphering the architectural grammar of dissent embedded in the

European Union's parliamentary architecture

Research Paper by Dominik Stoschek (5234379)

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Explore Lab 34

TU Delft Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment

Mentors

Ir. Elise van Dooren

Ir. Roel van de Pas

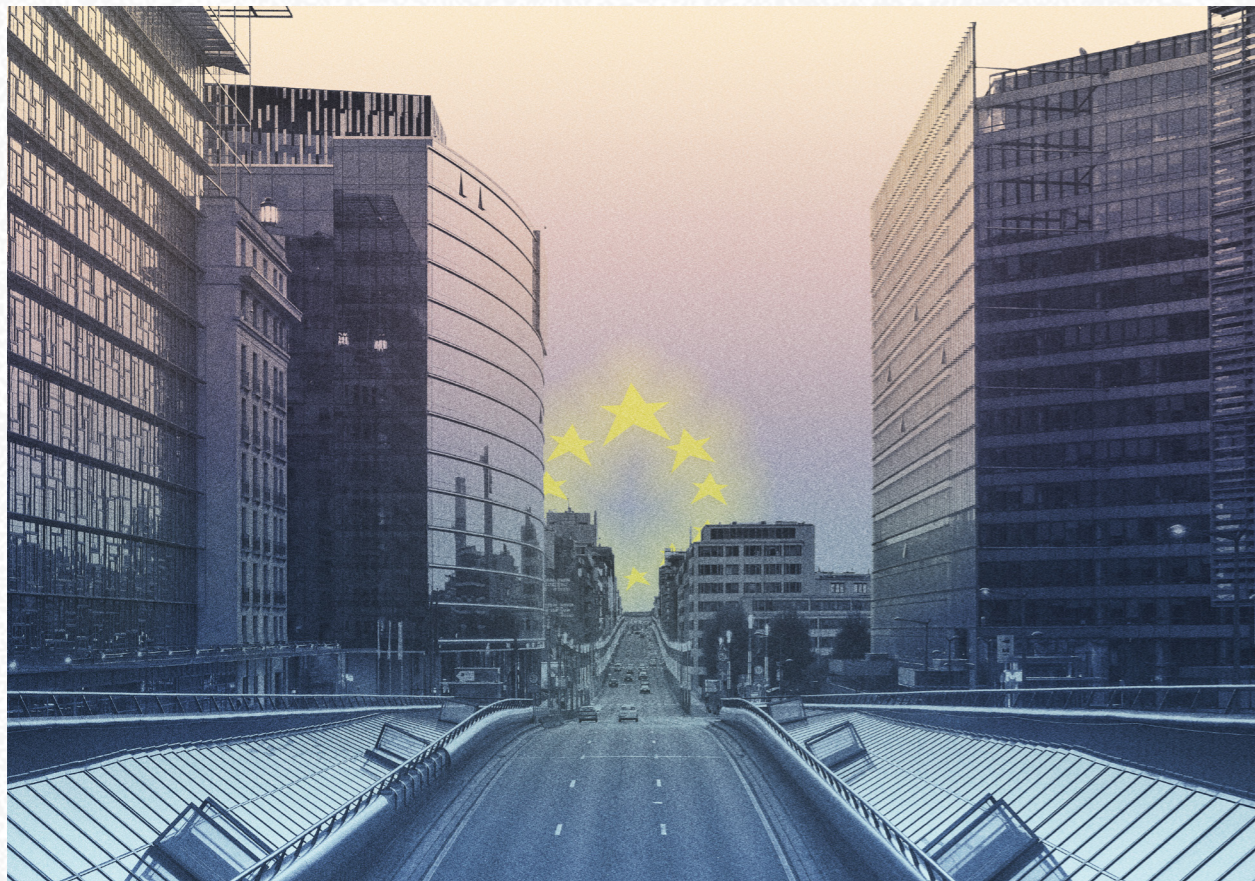Ir. Mieke Vink

Tutors

Dennis Pohl

Prof. Dr. Georg Vrachliotis

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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 an overarching 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 examination of its architectural and iconographic potential in regards to the European ambition of uniting in diversity. However, for a representative building, such as the EU Parliament, this aspect is a crucial parameter for the evaluation of the balance of power between spaces of dissent and consent.

Therefore, this research links visual content gathered from various Social Media platforms with an accompanying in-depth architectural analysis of the European Union's parliamentary buildings. On this basis, an extensive visual-spatial overview of spaces of dissent and consent will be generated.

By decoding and contextualising the so-called *Consensusland* through a comparative analysis the complex iconospatial network of a European architectural grammar of dissent becomes visible. It reveals a spatial manifestation that is dedicated to the bureaucratic procedures of the European legislative body and thus, instead of a veritable space of dissent that would feed on productive synergies of conflict, imposes on itself an atmosphere of conflictual consensus that degrades its architecture into a bureaucratic, homogenising means to the end of compromise.

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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

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*, 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 and executed through an utmost bureaucratic apparatus, 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

Donald Tusk (Charlier, 2017) Fig. 01.3

Ⅰ Atlas of €Unity

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*.

In order to live up to the European principle of "United in Diversity", new design solutions are needed that can establish a paradigm shift from consensus to dissent as a driving force in the decision-making process. New design solutions that, in the form of a kind of built political arena, can not only develop a symbolic impact, but also increase the radiance and catchment area of political discussion.

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 visual and spatial 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: How do the political aggregations divide the building architecturally and what spatial logistics and arrangements behind the decision-making procedures reconciliates these political rifts again?

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 what I call iconospatial ambitions towards the EU's self-imposed slogan *United in Diversity*.

Due to the enormous spread and the accompanying infiltration of all conceivable areas of life, social media today arguably also represents "the most complete dataset of architectural taste", an all-encompassing "feedback on the state of the discipline" (Lonergan, 2018, p. 60). Therefore, this research utilizes publicly available visual content from Social Media networks such as Instagram and Twitter depicting the architecture of the two parliament buildings. 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

Fig. 01.6 Kerstin Geers (OFFICE KGDVS, 2020)

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. For this purpose, the floor plans of both buildings are used and the previously identified spaces of dissent and consent are located and placed in relation to each other. This hybrid method therefore will allow to answer the following research (sub-)questions:

To what extent is an architectural grammar of dissent iconospatially reflected in the European Unions's parliamentary architecture?

- In what relation do the spatial constitution and the iconographical depiction of spaces of dissent and consent stand?
- What differences in the architectural implementation of the EU slogan *United in Diversity* can be identified in the two parliament buildings?
- From which iconographic and architectural principles does an architectural grammar of dissent derive?

1.3.   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* (European Commission, 2014), *Brussels - A Manifesto* (Patteeuw et al., 2006) or the *Image of Europe* (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 (COM), published a report entitled *The Commission's buildings policy in Brussels* (European Commission, 2009), in which a newly acquired architectural ambition of the EU became 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. 01.8**

NAi Publishers, Rotterdam

A Berlage Institute Project
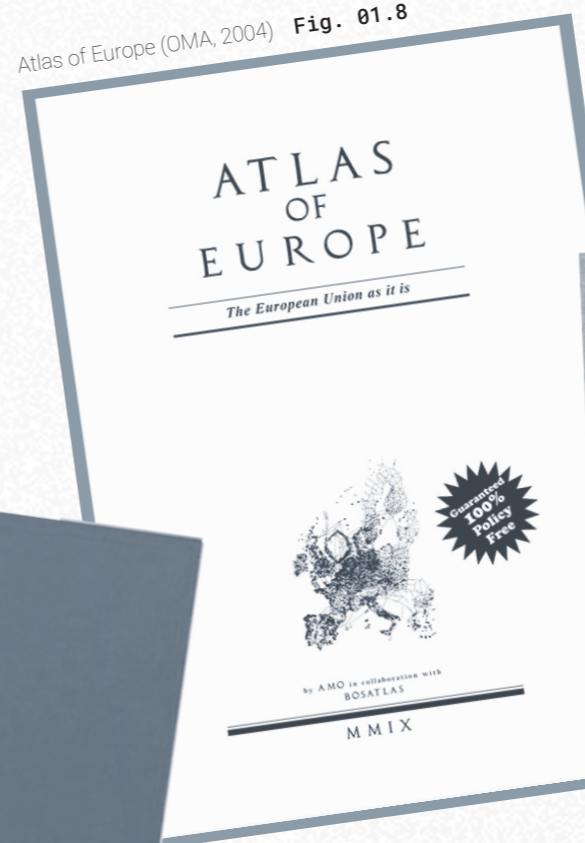
Brussels - A Manifesto (Berlage Instituut, 2006) **Fig. 01.9**

A New Narrative for Europe (Leftloft, 2016) **Fig. 01.7**

The research presented here attempts to link to this micro-level by examining the spatial and iconographic grammar 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.

A grammar of dissent and consent, which arguably cannot be delineated any longer today without mentioning Chantal Mouffe's *Agonistics* (Mouffe, 2013), is complemented by thematic essays on Walter Benjamin's 1921 *Critique of Violence* and Jacques Ranciére's *Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics*.

The iconospatial aspect of this research is among others informed by the conception of imageability, established in Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City* and later adopted and developed further by Charles Jencks in his book *Signs, symbols and architecture*. Lynch 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. For the examination of the relation between architecture, power and politics, this research relies on the work of Minkenberg et al. *Power and Architecture. The construction of capitals and the politics of space* which deciphers the complex network of that relationship and its manifold aspects.

Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2020)* **Fig. 01.10**

Atlas of €unity *(Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2020; modified by Stoschek, 2022)* **Fig. 01.11**

1.4.   Methodology

In order to find out about the embedded spaces of consent and dissent in the EU's parliamentary architecture, I will execute an iconographic examination of publicly available visual content from Social Media networks which are then linked to an architectural examination of their spatial constitution.

This approach takes Aby Warburg's image atlas *Mnemosyne* as a reference and uses the collected images and videos to develop an *Atlas of €unity* that identifies and addresses recurring patterns and themes in the iconography of EU architecture, structures them and then places them in an overarching architectural context. In order to interpret whether these findings rather constitute spaces of dissent or consent, I make use of Charles Jencks guideline 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, the image analysis is a hybrid of a small-scale quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative investigation of the findings which subsequently links the spatial constitution of the building with its iconographic aspects. This process will be divided into three main stages: Systematically collecting and mapping visual content (quantitative part), analysing the architectural constitution of both buildings on the base of the decision-making process of the EU parliament, interpreting the relation of the spatial constitution and its iconographic aspects according to predefined examination criteria (qualitative part) together with visualizing the results.

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 nearly 1,000 pictures from "books, magazines, newspaper and other daily life sources" were pinned. His approach is seen as an inspiration for today's visually and digitally dominated world. Warburg et al. (2020, p. 9).

a. Systematic collection and mapping 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 *France2* 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 150-200 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 visual content of the broadcasting companies' media libraries 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. Clusters 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.

For the examination of the actual content of the images, I will analyse the images based on predefined themes referring to the spatial constitution of the decision-making process of the EU parliament. This process can be divided in procedural, informal and public spaces of dissent and consent, which are embedded in the architecture of both parliamentary buildings and thus allow an equivalent comparison of the two building complexes, whose histories of development differ fundamentally from one another.

To identify and contextualise these spaces, I will make use of Erwin Panofsky's Iconographic-Iconological method (Panofsky, 1955): 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. 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 icono-spatial potential shown in these images. The following paragraphs will list these themes and propose certain key statements for analysing these categories:
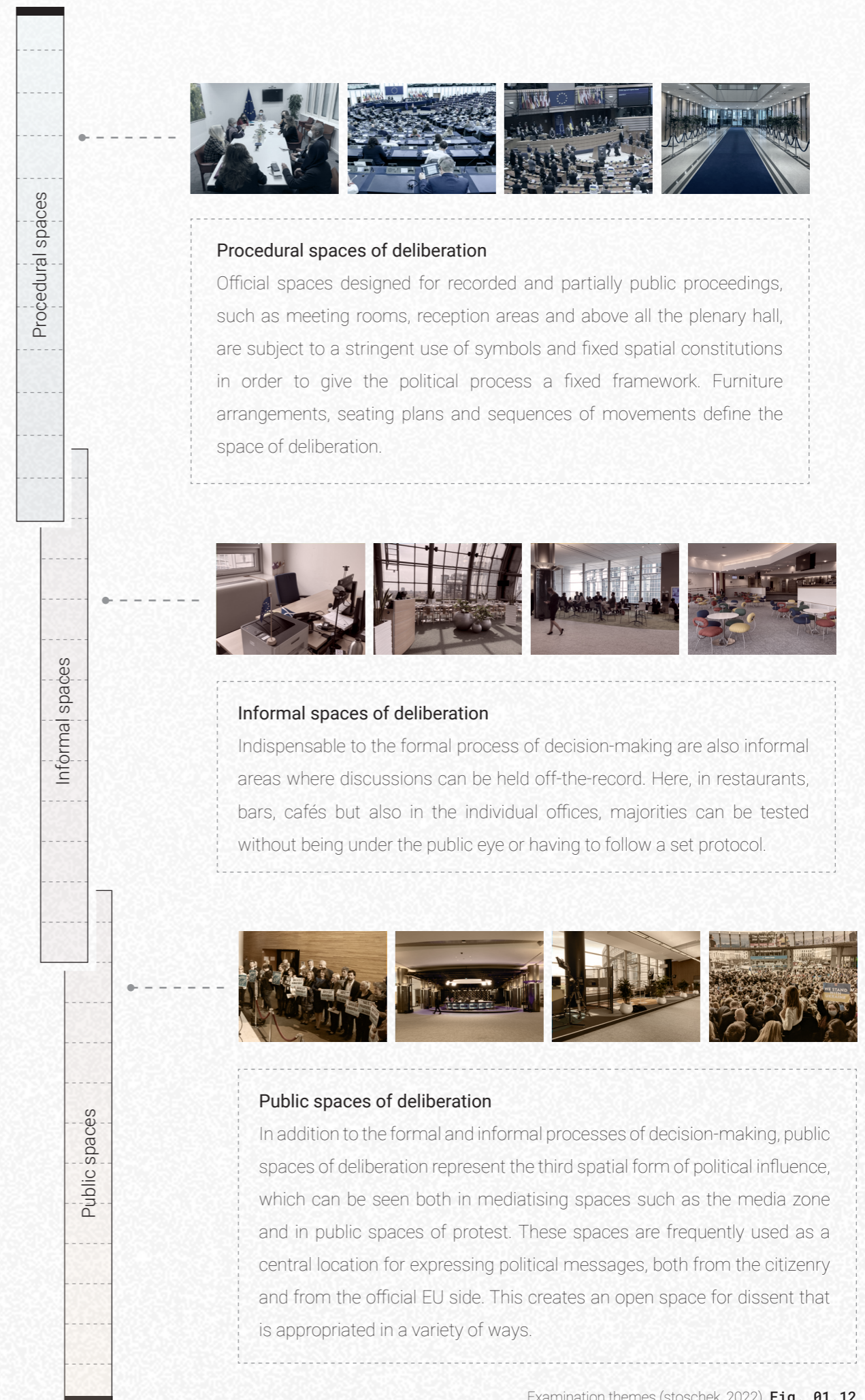
b.   Analysis of the architectural constitution on the
base of the decision-making process of the EU parliament

The political decision-making process is naturally also reflected architecturally in the layout of the two parliament buildings. Parallel to the examination of the visual content, which primarily provides information about how the mentioned spaces are used and represented, the analysis of a spatial constitution of these areas will therefore also help to make statements about the architectural relationship between them.

For this investigation, I will therefore use plan drawings of both buildings in order to then compare and highlight the spatial positioning of spaces of deliberation and put them in relation to each other. Since a complete and detailed examination of both buildings would go beyond the scope of this work due to their enormous size (the parliament building in Strasbourg alone consists of more than 30 conference rooms distributed on an area of 220.000m²), and since I do not have a complete collection of floor plans of both buildings due to security reasons of the EU Parliament, I limit this part of the research to the most important floors of both parliaments. Thus, the third floor of the EU Parliament building in Brussels is the level on which all parts of the building are connected, and all three areas are present at the same time. In Strasbourg, these areas are found mainly on levels 3 and 4, which is why I will primarily refer to these two floors in the analysis.

In addition to the analysis of the floor plan design and the associated arrangement of the spaces of deliberation, the concrete configuration of these spaces also plays a key role in the architectural analysis. This is already partly evident in the examination of the visual content, which is why there will naturally be overlaps here. Thus, both parts of the analysis are slowly brought together in order to eventually obtain a coherent overview of the network of spaces of deliberation.

Procedural spaces

Procedural spaces of deliberation
Official spaces designed for recorded and partially public proceedings, such as meeting rooms, reception areas and above all the plenary hall, are subject to a stringent use of symbols and fixed spatial constitutions in order to give the political process a fixed framework. Furniture arrangements, seating plans and sequences of movements define the space of deliberation.

Informal spaces

Informal spaces of deliberation
Indispensable to the formal process of decision-making are also informal areas where discussions can be held off-the-record. Here, in restaurants, bars, cafés but also in the individual offices, majorities can be tested without being under the public eye or having to follow a set protocol.

Public spaces

Public spaces of deliberation
In addition to the formal and informal processes of decision-making, public spaces of deliberation represent the third spatial form of political influence, which can be seen both in mediatising spaces such as the media zone and in public spaces of protest. These spaces are 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.

Examination themes (stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 01.12**

c.   Interpretation of the relation of the spatial constitution and its iconographic aspects

In a third and final step, the aim is to bring together the architectural and iconographic characteristics found with regard to a grammar of dissent and to classify them in the spectrum between spaces of dissent and consensus. For this purpose, the previously established definition of spaces of deliberation is applied in order to make a final assessment and to draw conclusions about the different implementation of these spaces in the two buildings.

To visualize the results of the quantitative-qualitative study, the collected visual content will be shown in the form of a relationship matrix covering the three spaces of deliberation. Simultaneously, they are evaluated and arranged with regard to their dissent potential. At the same time, the previously identified recurring themes are also presented by showing them through clustering. The juxtaposition of the visual content of the two buildings also highlights their iconospatial differences.

Hence, in this illustration, in addition to the number of elements per theme, possible thematic overlaps will become visible as well, thus revealing an architectural grammar dissent.
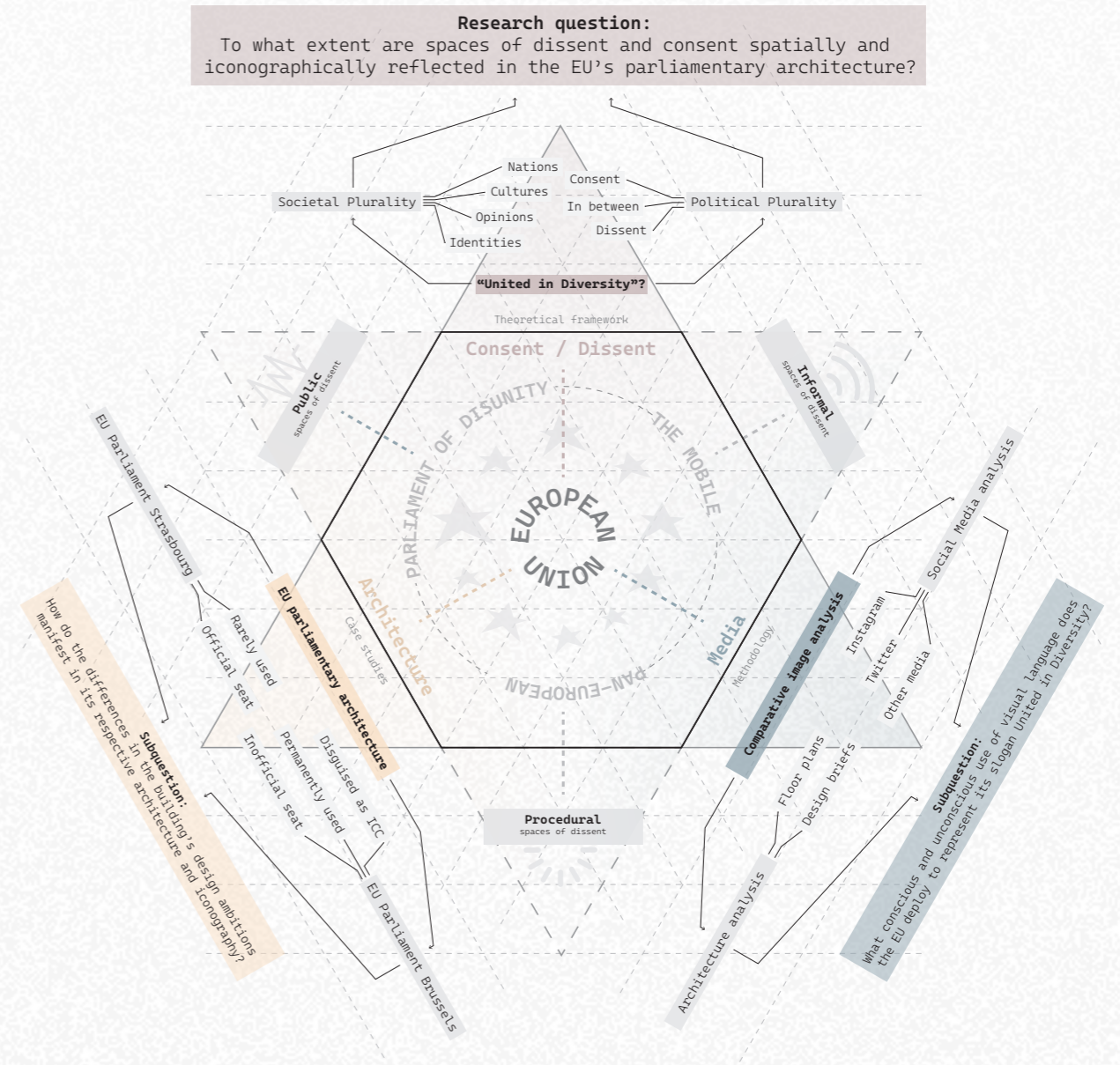
Research diagram (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 01.13**

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 parliament of disunity.

1.5.   Limitations of the research

The chosen research approach as visualized in the diagram on the following page (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 first part of the research will primarily focus on iconospatial characteristics 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. Moreover, the complete visual coverage of all areas relevant to the research is also not given, as these often appear too irrelevant for the purpose of representation on social media.

The architectural analysis has its weak point above all in the incomplete representation of the floor plans, since for security reasons the internal structure of the building cannot be publicly accessible. Therefore, the analysis focuses on the most important floors, leaving parts of the buildings hidden for the investigation.

It is therefore attempted to fill in the blind spots of both parts of the research as much as possible through other sources of literature and through informal conversations with people involved in the political processes of the EU Parliament.

1.6.   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 both in the iconographic depiction and the architectural implementation of spaces of dissent and consent. Based on the EU's greater involvement in the design process, I suppose, that in Strasbourg, a European grammar of dissent is especially more visible and apparent in terms of a more successful interlocking of procedural, informal and public spaces of dissent. Through a more compact overlapping positioning of these areas, a mutual referencing can take place that does not seem possible in Brussels due to a loose, lined-up building structure. I also assume that, in the example of the parliament building in Strasbourg, a mediatised European spatiality and iconography of dissent is better and more subtly constituted in its built space through creating an iconic, visual silhouette, symbolising and nourishing an environment of dissent.

A European grammar of dissent thus derives from the still ambiguous and complex concept of European democracy, in which 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.
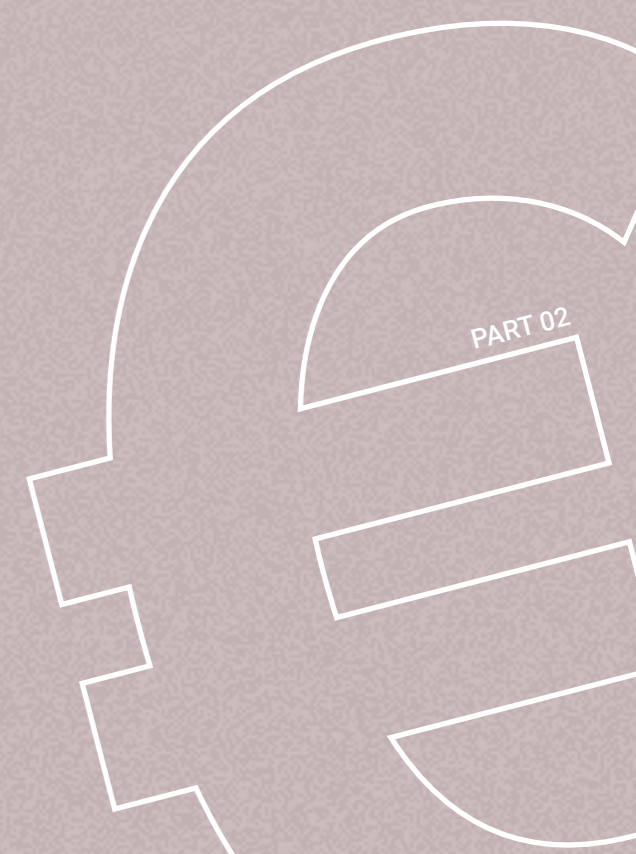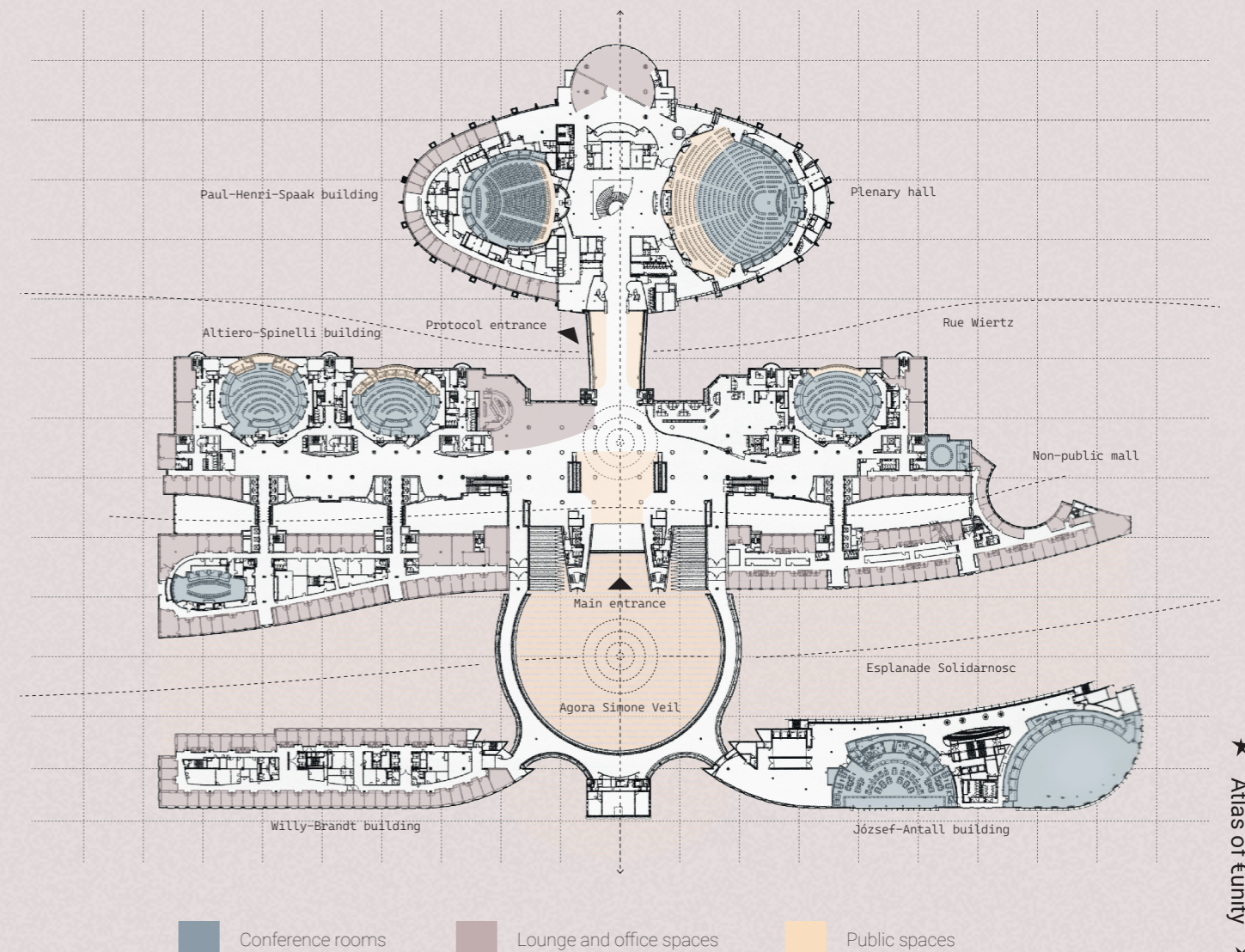
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CONSENSUSLAND

DECODING

PART 02

Aerial view of the European Parliament in Brussels (Parlement européen, 2012) **Fig. 02.1**

Conference rooms · Lounge and office spaces · Public spaces

Fig. 02.2 Floor plan level 3 (Societé Espace Léopold, 2008)

→ Overview: The EU-Parliament in Brussels

The architecture of Brussels' EU Parliament differs significantly from that of its Strasbourg counterpart: In Brussels, the building had to be embedded in a tightly meshed urban fabric, perforated and bordered by existing infrastructures such as the former above-ground railway line or Park Léopold which resulted in a building complex split up and scattered all over the site.

Thus, the Parliament building consists roughly of three building parts, which are separated on the one hand by the Esplanade Solidarnosc, a public promenade, and Rue Wiertz, the main access to the building. In the main part of the complex, the Altiero Spinelli building, a non-

public linear atrium additionally divides the office wing from a series of meeting rooms. A central crossing and meeting point is provided by the foyer directly behind the public main entrance, from where all parts of the building can be reached via level 3. The other two annexes can also be reached via the Konrad-Adenauer passage, floating over the Agora Simone Veil, but these only contain further office and meeting rooms. The Paul-Henri Spaak building can also be reached via another large skybridge looking in the other direction, which contains the presidential rooms and the plenary hall, as well as other offices, and therefore also a large part of the representative rooms.
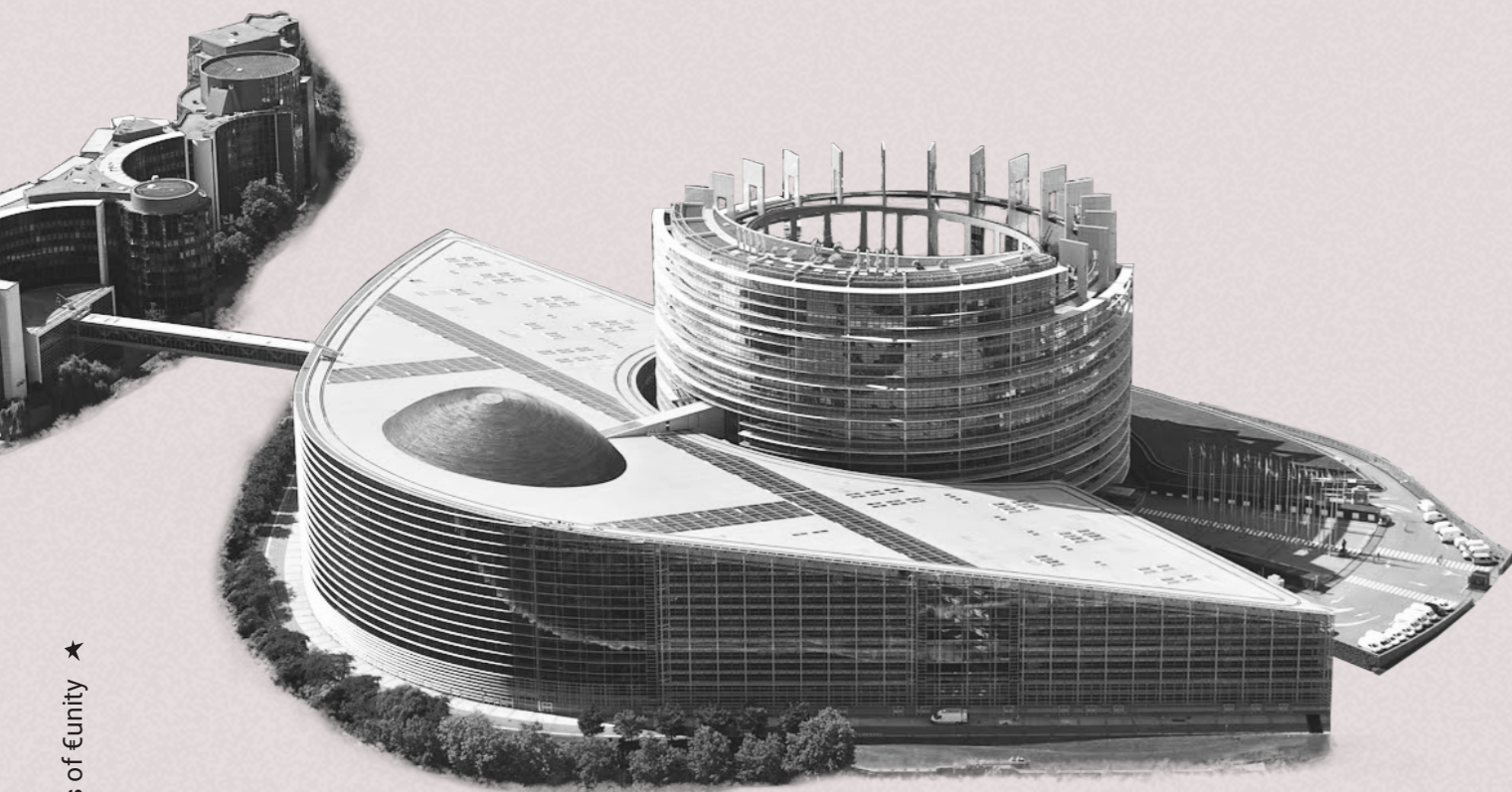
Aerial view of the European Parliament in Strasbourg (Parlement européen, 2011) **Fig. 02.3**

■ Conference rooms ■ Lounge and office spaces ■ Public spaces

Fig. 02.4 Floor plan level 3 / 4 (Architecture Studio, 1998)

→ Overview: The EU-Parliament in Strasbourg

Strasbourg did not have to fit the building, which emerged from a public architectural competition, into an existing urban structure, but was able to skilfully stage it on a greenfield site as a complementary building block in the EU quarter. The result is an ensemble consisting of two distinctive geometric shapes: The tower, already recognisable from afar, whose form appears unfinished and whose elliptical inner courtyard forms the Agora Louise Weiss, and the boomerang-shaped main part of the building, which contains the majority of the meeting rooms and into which the concise, egg-shaped plenary hall is inscribed. Two clearly defined axes cut through the building: On the one hand, one axis runs from the main entrance across

the inner courtyard and across a slender skybridge that spans the River Ill until it finally ends in the adjoining Winston Churchill administration building. The second axis is designed as an atrium that separates the main building into two parts and connects them with a myriad of bridges. While one part contains the majority of all meeting rooms, the other part consists of the plenary hall and associated representative areas, such as media areas and lobby areas.

EU Parliament Brussels

1963-1968 — Construction of the Berlaymont building

1987.b — Receipt of building permit to demolish the existing structure of the brewery

1987.c — Granting of construction permit based on inital sketch by EBE

2010 — Completion of the Passerelle Konrad Adenauer

1987.a — Proposal for International Conference Center by association of political and business figures

1988.a — Publication of the EBE study as justification for ICC

1994.a — Expansion of the EU: Austria, Sweden and Finland

1986 — Commission of urban study by the Region Brussel called Espace Bruxelles - Europe (EBE)

1988.b — Agreement of EU Parliament to rent Brussels' parliamentary hemicycle building

1994.b — Inauguration of Justus Lipsius building for the Council

2001 — Nice treaty: all European Council meetings to be held in Brussels after 2004

1988.c — **Launch of informal architecture competition organised by the "Association des Architectes du CIC"**

1995-1998 — **Completion of the parliament (Paul-Henri-Spaak) and the office buildings (Spinelli, Brandt, Antall)**

Timeline markers: 1960 — 1980 — 1985 — 1990 — 1995 — 2000 — 2010

EU Parliament Strasbourg

1989 — Construction of the new European Court of Human Rights designed by Richard Rogers

1994.c — Commission of Societe d'Amenagement et d'Equipement (SERS) to find financing for and construct the Parliament

1982 — Beginning of new French national decentralization policies

1990 — **Organization of international competition for Parliament building in Strasbourg**

1998 — **Inauguration of the building in September 1998**

1991 — Launch of ideas competition for Front de Neudorf area

1986-1991 — Construction of Winston Churchill Building

1992 — Maastricht Treaty: More power to the EP, thus underlining the importance of Strasbourg

2004 — East enlargement of the EU: Parliament building too small now

Timeline of the parliament building's development (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 02.5**

2.1.   The EU and its devotion to consensus: A historic love story

Consensusland finds its outward, symptomatic expression in the built structure of the EU institutions, in its architecture and adopted symbolism. Still, its inherent, almost pathological character of compromise is deeply rooted in the historical development of a confederation of states whose never-ending need for harmony and mutual agreement probably formed the basis for this insidious personality trait.

Thus, the search for a permanent seat for the European Union has always been a question of the greatest possible ability to reach consensus, where the European principle of unanimity

not only found its first culmination point but was also shown its limits for the first time in the history of the then still young European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). After the then six member states in the early 1950s repeatedly failed to unanimously agree on a common European capital that was to be home to all three European institutions, this process was deliberately drawn out only to finally reach agreement on the three cities Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg with the Belgian capital as the de-facto capital for the then ECSC (Hein, 2004, pp. 70–74). This decentralised compromise solution was thus not a resolution based on strong majorities that would have emphasised the ability to dissent and decisiveness under

the umbrella of a common will of member states. It was one that, by its diluted and ambiguous nature, appeased the national needs of all six member states and was forced through the need to create a fait accompli and be able to start work.

The debate about the capital of the EU, which can commonly be seen as the origin of the EU as the consensus machine it is known for today, continued in the 1970s and 1980s when the rapidly growing European Communities (EC) needed new premises for the European Parliament, which was first elected in 1979.

Thus, even the temporary decision to designate Strasbourg as the location for the European Parliamentary Assembly and the construction of the Palace of Europe intended for it could not prevent Brussels from again seeing its chance to host the European Parliament in the Belgian capital and thus unite the most important three institutions in one place. As a result, both cities tried to win the favour of the parliamentarians, as they were granted the right to choose not the official location, but their permanent place of work. Thus, both locations initiated slightly delayed processes to have a possible European Parliament planned and built (Hein, 2004, pp. 103–105).

Brussels guerrilla tactics

While Strasbourg as the designated location of the EC's legislative branch was able to pursue a transparent and officially supported path for this venture, Brussels followed downright guerrilla tactics in order to circumvent the official statutes of the EU. The temporary status did not allow the EU institutions to finance or build their own premises. Seeing economic profits arising, various Brussels-based real estate developers and banks therefore joined forces under the name Societé Espace Leopold to establish the legislative branch of the EC in Belgium's capital (Fabbrini, 2020, p. 91). Thus, without a public architectural competition and without the EU's substantive involvement and participation in a public discourse, several buildings were constructed in the late 1990s, eventually forming not an European Parliament but an International Conference Centre (ICC), which was permanently leased to the EU in 1995. These "unofficial, behind-the-scenes, hidden practices that made these buildings possible" thus completely elude discursive debate and thus also form a prime example of "informal,

stealthy architecture" (Fabbrini, 2020, p. 102). From now on, much of the parliamentary work, including all procedural, informal and public processes of decision-making on the future of Europe, took place in a building whose main function had to be disguised from the public. In this regard, during its time of genesis, Brussels *Consensusland* has historically resembled more an anarchically governed piece of land, subject to the law of the economically strongest, and completely untethered to the strict, bureaucratic protocols of the EU as we know it today which are geared towards the greatest possible consensus.

Strasbourg's pioneering spirit

Strasbourg, on the other hand, was able to build its very own *Consensusland* on a greenfield site. Situated picturesquely along the banks of the Ill River, it was suddenly possible to incorporate untamed European pioneering spirit into the project of the permanent seat of the European Parliament. This unprecedented freedom allowed the EU not only to incorporate its own ideals and ambitions into the design, but also to maintain its sovereignty throughout the process and beyond.

To counter Brussels' faits accomplis, Catherine Trautmann, the then mayor of Strasbourg, set up a commission in 1990 to take up the fight for the seat, the "bataille du siège" (Le Monde, 1990) as Le Monde heroically called it at the time. Confident of victory, the commission announced that it would have a new plenary hall built in which the plenary debates could take place once a month in order to underline and justify Strasbourg's position as the official seat of the European Parliament.

As the statutes of the EC allowed it, in 1992 an official architectural competition could be called for the first time in the forty-year history of the EC, which can be seen as an „encouraging step forward in democratizing and popularizing the architecture of the European institutions" (Hein, 2004, p. 108).

In 1998, only three years after the Brussels building complex was inaugurated, the winning entry designed by Paris-based Architecture Studio opened its doors for a whole twelve meetings a year – enough to further underpin European host aspirations. From now on, the compromise
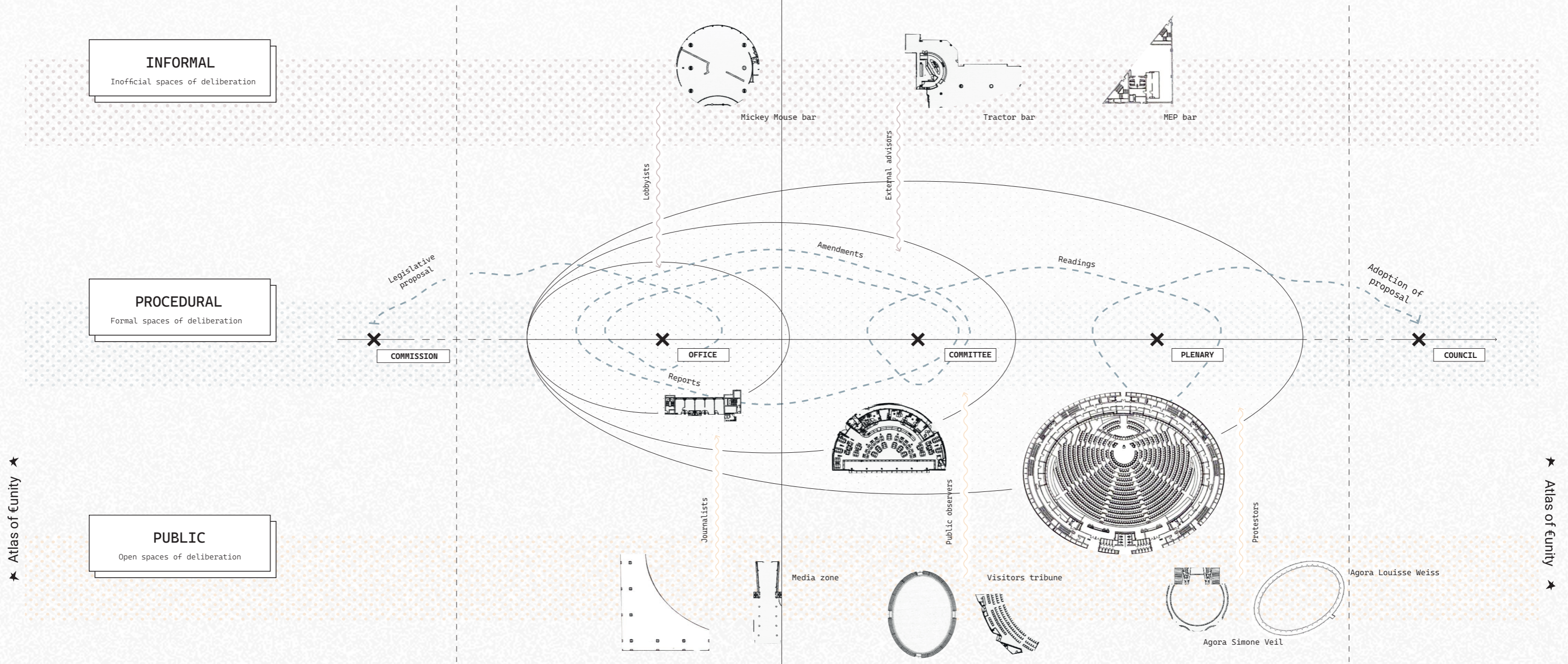
solution envisaged from the outset among the member states had become literally concrete reality and the debate over the seat of the Parliament now had weighty arguments set in stone on both sides that made a resolution of this conflict a distant prospect.

Even the currently smouldering debate triggered by the ongoing competition for the Hemicycle Building in Brussels is being forcefully stifled at its core. Not only are the results, if they even already exist, kept under wraps, there is also a strong insistence that the announcement of the competition results take place in Strasbourg – no single doubt should be left as to which city is the official host to the European Parliament. Especially after the Corona pandemic, during which most of the meetings had to take place in Brussels, nothing is feared more than a decision that could shake up this compromise that has been painstakingly worked out over decades (Redecke, 2021).

Thus, without going into the details of the actual architecture, the genesis of both parliamentary buildings already indicates that the constitution of compromise bestowed on *Consensusland* in the early days of the EU is deeply and firmly anchored. Hence, every effort is made to maintain and to defend it against any dissent and antagonism in favour of a homogeneous EU that is willing to compromise.

INFORMAL
Inofficial spaces of deliberation

Mickey Mouse bar

Tractor bar

MEP bar

Lobbyists

External advisors

Amendments

Readings

Legislative proposal

Adoption of proposal

PROCEDURAL
Formal spaces of deliberation

✕ COMMISSION

✕ OFFICE

✕ COMMITTEE

✕ PLENARY

✕ COUNCIL

Reports

Journalists

Public observers

Protestors

PUBLIC
Open spaces of deliberation

Media zone

Visitors tribune

Agora Louisse Weiss

Agora Simone Veil

Legislative processes in the EU-Parliament (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 02.6**

2.2.   Decision-making in the EU Parliament: A European consensus machine

Probably the greatest challenge in the now almost 70-year long history of the EU has been and still is to maintain the balance between the preservation of the sovereignty of the individual member states and the transfer of their rights to the EU.

If one takes a closer look at the legislative construct of the European Union, it does not appear surprising that even ordinary citizens are striving for breaking up the realms of *Consensusland*. It is therefore not without reason that the main demand of the *Conference on the Future of Europe* (CoFE) revolves around the abolition of the unanimity principle and the easing of the veto rules

"guaranteeing a transparent and understandable process for the citizens" (European Commission, 2022, p. 82)

In this way, the EU translates its absolute willingness to compromise, anchored in the DNA of the EU and manifested in the genesis of its parliamentary architecture, during the legislative decision-making process into consensus mechanisms that are reflected and executed on a spatial level in either distinct or ambiguous spaces of deliberation. Therefore, the European slogan *United in Diversity* does not only obtain its final dimension through a historical constitution of an unclear

political constellation within the member states, but naturally also includes a "spatial component as expressed symbolically in architecture. Because of the diversity of European cultures, something like the functional equivalent of civilization is needed to fill the vacuum created by the fall of the older and now largely discredited discourse of civilization" (Delanty and Jones, 2002, p. 456).

Public

As a body representing a supranational community, the integration of the public into the legislative processes and spatial structures of parliament is of essential importance. Thus, the public is involved in the decision-making process through so-called public spaces of deliberation - or must actively participate in it: For these places are often constituted through public squares and adjacent streets, where public protest and political messages can be voiced, and only rarely take place in the actual parliamentary architectures. There, the accessible zones are limited by the restrictive security architecture of the parliaments to strictly regulated visitor areas, which at the same time guide the gaze and gait and thus only place the visitor in the role of the silent observer. This function is also conveyed by the third spatial form of public exertion of influence: Through the increasing use of media techniques, such as TV studios and social media spots, an attempt is made to allow a broad public to participate in the legislative process - through more intimate insights, but with an even smaller chance of active participation, spatially speaking.

Hence, in general, spaces of public deliberation offer the greatest potential for dissent, since it is there that opposition to the on-going debates becomes clearly visible in the public eye. Nevertheless, concrete influence on the decision-making process coming from demonstrations on public squares in front of the EU-Parliament or from the comment section in the live stream of an EU plenary session is very limited and indirect due to its clear outsider position and by its non-integration in the political protocols of the EU Parliament.

Informal

Nevertheless, since the legislative procedure is rarely a linear and concise process and even more rarely does this procedure take place only in the official and designated procedural spaces, decision-making processes also take place to a certain extent in what I call informal spaces of deliberation. While in the official realms of *Consensusland*, a strict protocol is adhered to and everything said and written is recorded, in these "spaces

of informal speech acts diplomacy becomes negotiable. They make decisions capable of a majority, or rather: unanimous" (Pohl, 2022, p. 164). What all these spaces have in common is that their main function conceals the actual task of informal, off-the-record exchange with confidants, colleagues, external advisors and lobbyists. Thus, lobbies, cafés, restaurants, bars, even spa and sports areas and functional circulation zones are areas that add an unpredictable, but thus also opaque, component to the legislative process. Nevertheless - for dynamic decision-making, these areas are of enormous importance as they provide a valuable outlet for dissent in an atmosphere of perennial and sometimes tedious compromise-seeking.

Procedural

In the legislative control centre of Europe, this vacuum is filled by a multitude of complex, repetitive processes. Before a legislative proposal can be presented to the heads of state in the Council for final signature, it goes through numerous stages of amending, extending and renaming. At the same time, this proposal passes through the hands of countless protagonists involved in this process in the most diverse ways: Rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs, members of the responsible committee, policy advisors, interns and external actors such as consultants or lobbyists.

These procedural intertwinements of protagonists and written documents constitute something I call procedural spaces of deliberation. By its semantic definition, a parliament is a place of verbal exchange that provides a myriad of spaces for the purpose of deliberation and subsequent decision-making. Thus, although well known to the public, the legislative process takes place only to a very limited extent in the plenary hall, but primarily in a series of conference halls, meeting rooms and offices, which create space for a non-continuous, dynamic but still contained procedure through their different shapes and sizes. Due to the EP's peculiarity of sounding out new majorities for every legislative project, the main task underlying these spaces is not the creation of a culture of controversial discussion, but rather the elimination of thematical differences and the exploration of common ground and compromises. Dissent can therefore only take place within a predetermined and very limited framework. Actual contradiction in the sense of "agree to disagree" would therefore require not only exhausting but overusing its spatial constitution: Deliberately taking the wrong seat, speaking into the microphone without being asked, or even leaving the meeting room prematurely – procedures that the EU Parliament not only does not envisage, but tries to avoid through strict behavioural protocols.

EU–space however has a tangible aspect: it is constantly

reproduced by the people within it and becomes visible

both in material space and in interactions and relations

within this space and between the spatial, material and

symbolic, imaginative aspects of European space […].

Such a stance on space allows us to see how social and

physical space is reproduced, how practices, subjects

and spaces are configured […], and how places reveal the

social relations and reflect the hierarchies within the

city and within the EU bureaucratic apparatus. Each

configuration of these practices and subjects produces a

different kind of space.

Ethnographer Paweł Lewicki on the notion of EU-space

2.2. Between the spatial, material and symbolic: An architectural grammar of dissent

The superposition of spatial, material and symbolic aspects of what ethnographer Paweł Lewicki here describes as EU-space becomes equally visible and identifiable in the realms of *Consensusland*. There, a spatial overlapping of the various forms of political interference in the decision-making process takes place, the existence of which is not accidental but the result of careful consideration: A look into the design brief for the current competition for the Paul-Henri-Spaak building in Brussels shows that these three spaces represent a well-rehearsed triad for every single area of the Parliament (European Parliament, 2020, p. 124).

The configuration and interlocking of the procedural, informal and public spaces of deliberation within the EU's parliamentary architecture will therefore be the main focus of the following analysis, which will concentrate on how the spaces of deliberation are represented architecturally and iconographically. I will first discuss the constitution of the public spaces for deliberation before passing through the informal areas and moving on to the core of parliamentary architecture, the procedural spaces.

a.   Public spaces of deliberation

Public squares

A political building such as the EU parliament is by definition always also a projection surface for political messages and a place for public protest. Iconic and visible public settings help to raise awareness for these messages. For this purpose, both parliament buildings in Brussels and in Strasbourg have incorporated public squares on their premises. These spaces are frequently used as a central location for expressing political messages, both from the citizenry and from the official EU side creating an open space for dissent that is appropriated in a variety of ways.

The Esplanade Simone Veil in Brussels is a large public mall cutting through the building complex and culminating in the adjoining public square Agora Simone Veil right in front of the main entrance of the parliament. Although executed uncharitably and in parts even hostile to humans, due to its firm and accessible integration into Brussels urban fabric, this space is often frequented by passers-by and tourists and is appropriated by a broad public due to its indeterminate and unprogrammed nature.

The EU in Brussels makes use of this peculiarity by attempting to stage this linear backbone of the Parliament as the main artery of Europe: One inevitably gets the feeling that here the EU's visual identity manual (European Commission, 2017) finds its materialised, large-scale, but also ephemeral application, which shows itself concretely in the exuberant display of symbols, logos and lettering. Here, one witnesses the emergence of a European corporate identity of consensus, which does not pursue a

dissensual proclamation of European diversity, but rather directs the viewer's gaze towards a compromise-laden representation of diluted messages of European unity. This gaze manifests itself and culminates in the temporary installation of the EU frame - a photo spot, which deprives each taken image of self-determination and individuality and makes the EU appear as an all-encompassing entity in the background.

The counterpoint to this artefact are the numerous protest actions that take place at this agora, which introduce a disruptive element of contradiction to this place and at the same time counteract the predefined visual framing that the EU is aiming for torpedoing its actual intention.

The public spaces surrounding the parliament in Strasbourg can only serve to a limited extent with the opportunity for public expression of dissent. Not only is the Louise Weiss building beyond the spontaneous tourist and protest cultural sphere of influence, it also offers little truly public space that can be used for this purpose. Thus, the area at the back of the building, intended as a representative entrance area, has to share its programmatic occupation with the entrance and exit of motorised private transport and a first security check point. The result is that the inner courtyard, conceived as a public agora and dramatically advertised as a "place where all exchanges transit, whether they be commercial, political or based on friendship, or even love" (Mourier, 1999, pp. 172–173), actually becomes more of a transit zone for the flow of visitors and goods, which cannot always do justice to the theatrically staged architecture surrounding it. The provision

of space for protest and publicly expressed dissent is hindered by the semi-public character of the inner courtyard and thus often only occurs by official representatives with the ulterior motive of strengthening the seat of the EU Parliament in Strasbourg. Nevertheless, Strasbourg also offers this one culmination point, where a specific symbolic potential for dissent can be explicitly discerned: The glass sculpture *United Earth*, placed in the centre of the courtyard and consisting of assembled shards of different sizes, represents "the idea of openness to further expansion of the EU in order to create a united world" (Miskiewicz, 2005).

Hence, while the parliament in Strasbourg is an intentional and staged place of exchange, which however, due to its inaccessible character, eludes a larger public, the opposite applies to Brussels. There, a fully integrated civic space, which repeatedly provides the setting for public debate, equalises this arduously acquired public diversity: Its ephemeral and predefined symbolic display on the part of the EU dilutes and homogenizes once again its intention of creating a space of dissent.

Visitors areas

Visitor areas may often appear inconspicuous and meaningless spaces, but they offer in most cases the only opportunity to allow the ordinary citizen a glimpse into the most sacred of European parliamentary work. The dome of the Reichstag in Berlin, for example, manages par excellence to integrate the visitors' gallery for the plenary chamber as a "viewing chamber that is open to the public" (Jones, 2011, p. 156), thus positioning the visitor as a critical observer of the elected people's representatives, looking down to them from above.
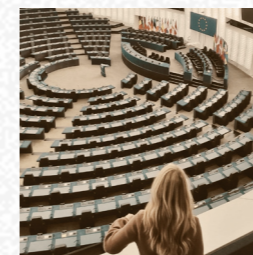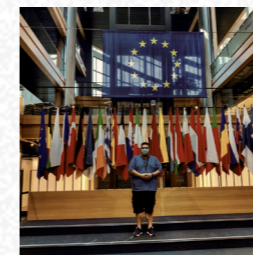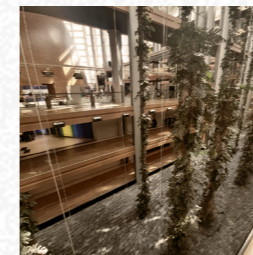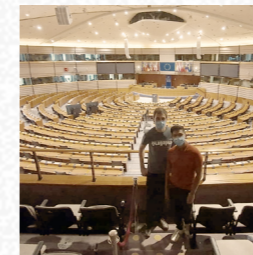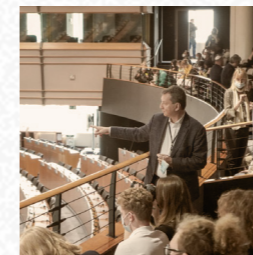
Both, Strasbourg and Brussels offer the public a marked-out visitor tour of certain areas of the parliament. In the parliament in Brussels, this tour is limited to a small, narrowly defined area through the Paul-Henri Spaak Building, where the visitor enters through a back entrance and is then channelled through anonymous, nondescript corridors, where provisionally placed flags desperately attempt to create a representative backdrop. Unexpectedly, one finally ends up on the visitors' tribune of the plenary hall, which, however, only takes up a very small part of the tribune, thus limiting the view of the representatives' observers to a strongly limited and specific perspective.

In Strasbourg, on the other hand, the public is given the opportunity to move way more freely and unconstrained on the premises of the parliament. While the tour begins in the dramatically staged inner courtyard, it then meanders around the wood-panelled plenary hall to finally culminate inside of it. Not only has more space been allocated to these visitor areas, but the open and accessible architecture of the building also allows the so crucial visual connections to be established towards areas that would otherwise remain hidden, thus also establishing a tangible, albeit rather platonic, form of contact with the people's representatives. Places intended for mediatised representation appear to be better integrated into the course of the tour but also into the overall architecture of the building. The visitors' gallery with space for more than 700 visitors (Ritzenhofen, 1998, p. 593), which completely surrounds the plenary hall, is oriented more towards the principles of the viewing chamber of the Reichstag in Berlin and thus allows a free choice of perspective, which also provides more intimate insights behind the desks of the

parliamentary presidents.

Thus, in Brussels, the visitor is kept on a literally short leash and allowed only a few but all the more framed glances, offering only little room for dissent. The opposite is the case in Strasbourg: There, a serious, spatial exchange is offered supported by a transparent and connective architecture together with an adapted choreographic sequence. The visitor is not seen as a necessary evil to be integrated, but as an essential component of democratic processes.

Media zones

The development and application of new communication techniques has also led to a steady implementation of a "specific media-architecture serving the production and circulation of audiovisual information" within the EU institutions (Pohl and Esteve, 2019, p. 67). Similar to the visitors' areas, these media zones perform a hinge function between a broad public's attention and the parliamentary processes, which otherwise tend to remain hidden.

In Brussels, architecturally this hinge function takes place primarily in the prominently located entrance zone of the Altiero Spinelli Building on level 3, which, due to its central position within the parliamentary complex, represents a neuralgic junction where not only communicative but also administrative and informal processes take place. It houses not only a professionally equipped TV studio, but also spots specifically designed for interviews and social media videos with a corresponding, representative backdrop. Its intensive use and the overlapping of a wide variety of functions
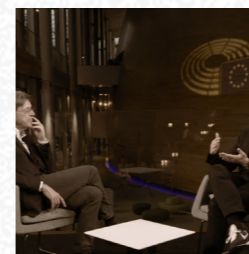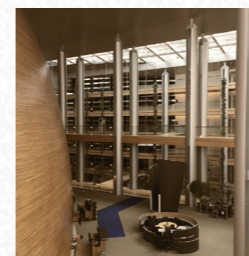
give the place a hectic, bustling and, above all, complex character, which inevitably makes it – aside from the plenary hall - the most frequently depicted location. Simultaneously, however, an antipole is built up to the hierarchically most important and most neuralgic place of the parliament, the plenary hall. Thus, in Brussels, the plenary hall is not the place where European democracy culminates, but rather the inconspicuously designed but programmatically loaded hallway junction in the Altiero-Spinelli-building.

In Strasbourg, around the centrally located so-called "Egg" containing the plenary hall, differently sized media islands are arranged, which can be used either as TV studios, interview areas or discussion panels. This arrangement transforms the plenary hall automatically into an omnipresent backdrop, thus visually anchoring the architectural climax of the parliament inevitably into the viewers mind. It is therefore not surprising that the wood-panelled exterior of the plenary hall is often used as a literal projection surface for political messages - on a symbolic level, a political demand can probably not be addressed more directly to its respective addressee.

Contrary to the usual spatial hierarchy of parliamentary architecture, in Brussels a second, powerful culmination point is created by spatially decoupling the media zone and the plenary hall. Strasbourg, on the contrary, manages to foster synergies between these two areas. Not only is a productive symbolic tension created, the spatial arrangement also enables a clever interlocking of areas intended for the public and procedural areas. Here, dissent and disagreement can be expressed more directly and more purposefully.

a.   Informal spaces of deliberation

Circulation areas

In order to prevent that the political decision-making process remains in its rigid, procedural course and is strangled by this bureaucratic corset, it also requires areas that serve the informal off-the-record exchange in addition to designated areas for dissent and consent. In principle, all rooms that are not subject to protocol in the official rules of procedure and thus retain a confidential character can be used for this purpose. This is particularly true of inconspicuous, purely functional spaces such as corridors and staircases. It is therefore not surprising that neuralgic connecting routes such as the two skybridges in Strasbourg and Brussels and present access elements such as the prominently positioned staircase in the atrium of the PHS building are also visually staged for these purposes.

 What both buildings have in common is that, due to their sheer size, they require an enormous amount of space for access purposes. In Strasbourg, these spaces were implemented in a visible and open manner, turning directional access corridors into non-directional access surfaces. The atrium cutting through the boomerang-shaped part of the building, which in turn is crossed by several ten-metre bridges, creates a symbolically occupied point of orientation that can be glimpsed from almost any point in the building.

 In Brussels, on the other hand, due to the concatenation of building complexes, spaces for vertical and horizontal development are manifested in a multitude of "endless", confusing and winding
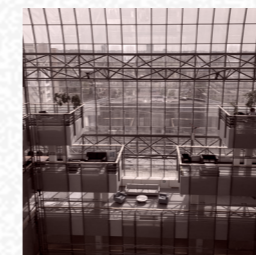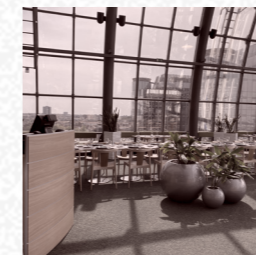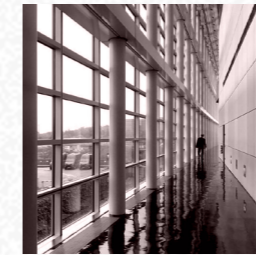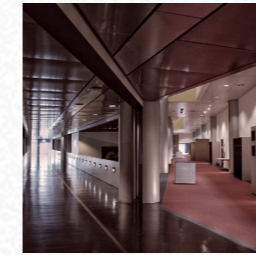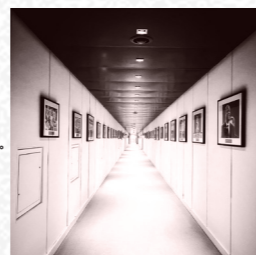
corridors. In combination with the multitude of languages spoken on these premises, this building is therefore often described as a "veritable Tower of Babel". The spatial lack of clarity obviously ensures that exchange takes place not only informally but also in secrecy, a peculiarity that should rather be avoided in a transparent democracy.

Informal meeting spaces

It already paints a picture of exclusivity that areas that were planned specifically for the purpose of informal exchange - foyers, cafés, bars and restaurants - almost completely elude visual depiction and dissemination. This realisation only underlines their informal character, which is obviously characterised by a high degree of confidentiality but also opacity.

In the cafés and bars of the Brussels Parliament, for example, explicit reference is made to a ban on photography in these areas. It is therefore not surprising that almost all of these spaces are located in the most remote areas of the parliament, not only protected from the public gaze, but obviously also from the gaze of the representatives of other parties. Whether it be the exclusive *Restaurant Spaak* on the uppermost floor right across the parliament's president's office, lounge furniture just underneath the giant barrel-shaped glass roof or the illustrious MEP bar *Astrid Lulling* on almost the lowest floor, at the very end of the elongated atrium - these spaces do not want to be visited spontaneously in passing, but deliberately withdraw themselves from an excessive degree of unwanted attention.

In Strasbourg, too, there are very few images of these spaces available, although there is a handful of them suggesting that again the open-plan architecture of the Strasbourg parliament enables these spaces to be observable, at least from a distance, thus creating a certain platonic transparency. At the same time, the decision to install larger-than-life and therefore hard-to-see blue seating furniture throughout the building as "places for casual encounters" (Mourier, 1999, p. 103) testifies to the recognition of the concept of informal exchange: Here, confidential meeting places do not necessarily have to be disguised by overlaying it with token functions but are indeed seen as an integral part of decision-making and can thus also be institutionalised.

Even though the basic principle of these informal places of exchange is no different - in both buildings confidentiality is achieved through closure - the spatial approach to them is of a fundamentally different nature: by placing these spaces in the most remote and invisible areas of the building, Brussels tries to conceal as far as possible not only the question of what is being discussed, but also the question of whether it is being discussed at all. In Strasbourg, an approach of greater openness has been chosen, which has recognised the importance of these places and therefore tries to institutionalise them. Thus, a gradual shift towards a gentle procedural space of dissent can be seen here, which makes it clear that veritable dissent also requires the aspect of informal exchange as an outlet function.

Offices

Almost more than the informal meeting spaces, the offices, the most intimate areas of each MEP and each political group, are also hidden from the view of the larger public. Not only does the actual parliamentary work take place here, but the offices also form micro-control centres embedded in the macrocosm of the European Parliament. From drafting amendments, over discussing strategies to organising and holding meetings, offices do not represent neutral places but are appropriated by the respective occupant and thus also framed individually – although this personalisation often only takes place by adding a symbolic layer consisting of logos and flags.

The aspect of individual appropriation, however, contrasts with the basic architectural concept underlying the parliament building in Brussels: There, the offices "evoke the regularity of the work but also the absolute parity between the members of parliament. Indeed, behind each window there is a desk. They are all identical, aligned on a perfect footing" (Societé Espace Léopold, 2008, p. 149). The architectural intention therefore aims towards creating a space of consent, where embracing political differences between the parliamentarians and subsequently also a European diversity is not preferred.

This desired absolute parity is only possible because in both buildings, instead of open office landscapes, the architects relied on the outdated concept of individual or two-person offices, which naturally also has an effect on the working methods of the parliamentarians: The main legislative work takes place in isolation, meetings for consultation and information gathering are thus inevitably institutionalised, as informal conversations across tables are not possible.

This form of seclusion is spatially reflected even stronger in Brussels: In the part D3 of the Altiero Spinelli building (AS building), most of the office spaces are not only arranged along endless corridors but are also distributed over a total of fifteen different levels and building spans. The horizontal nature of the building is supposed to symbolise "the constancy of work, the journey, the progress of research and the discussions which accompany it" (Societé Espace Léopold, 2008, p. 212). Due to this positioning, these clusters also represent the territory of the respective political camps, which automatically conveys the feeling of entering enemy territory should one catch the lift to the wrong floor.

In Strasbourg, the majority of the required office space is housed in the tower of the parliament building, where the circular and elliptical arrangement of the office spaces creates an equally strict harmony, which is again reinforced by a horizontal separation.

Therefore, even though the design of the office spaces follows a rigid, homogenising pattern that presupposes absolute parity, its type and arrangement appear to indicate a certain potential for dissent: Although a concept out of date, the secluded clusters of individual office cubicles are indeed conducive to the production of genuine dissent since here, without the omnipresent possibility of informal exchange, an opposition can build up that is not initially guided by an exuberant need for compromise.
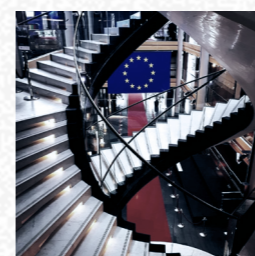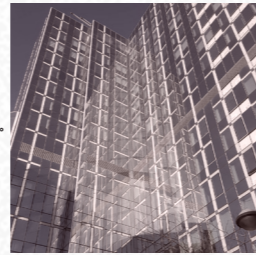
b.   Procedural spaces of deliberation

Protocol entrance

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). This unifying European corporate identity materialises above all in the example of the protocol entrance of the parliamentary buildings. The so-called Cour d'Honneur is a "ceremonial approach way for VIP guests visiting Parliament with a parking area and dropoff, a media photo and filming point, support areas with waiting rooms and sanitary facilities for drivers, as well as rooms for security service personnel" (European Parliament, 2020, p. 145). Here, representative objectives overlap with a protocol-like procedure in its purest form, the mixture of which were intended to create the greatest possible harmony among the participants and thus culminate in a choreography of European consensus.

While in Brussels this protocol area is not focused on the main entrance of the parliament building along the public mall, but is accessed from a side street via a rather inconspicuous entrance, the symbolic choreography during official visits in Strasbourg takes place via the same route that ordinary visitors would take. Thus, there is no spatial separation of a broad public and the official visiting committee like there is in Brussels, but an intended overlapping of these two spheres in the courtyard of the Louise Weiss building. Although this overlapping does not coincide in time, it creates a palpable tension in this place between these both public and procedural spaces of dissent.

Meeting rooms

While the protocol entrance is a singular, but all the more significant element in the complex spatial assemblage of the parliament, the typology of the assembly hall occurs in large numbers due to the sheer size of the building. In addition to the plenary hall with 750 seats for parliamentarians, the Strasbourg parliamentary building has alone a total of 29 conference rooms of varying size and design, which are available to parliamentarians for committee meetings, trilogue sessions, but also gatherings of a more informal nature (Ritzenhofen, 1998, p. 593).

It is therefore not surprising that the Strasbourg parliament building is described as a "labyrinth of halls" (BauNetz, 1999) and that the inability to find meeting rooms is often the subject of various tweets by people from the EU bubble. This lack of clarity, however, probably refers more to its sheer size than to a convoluted arrangement. Thus, the "intense formality of the plan, with its symmetrical banks of secondary conference spaces and offices arranged in each wing of the hemicycle strictly" ('Community Centre', 1993, p. 52) testifies rather to the attempt of diluting the implicit hierarchy between these spaces as much as possible with the claim of creating an absolute balance of power.

In Brussels, on the other hand, a certain degree of disorder can actually be explained by a non-stringent arrangement of the meeting rooms. The mere fact that the parliamentary complex is broken up into four individual buildings connected only by skybridges and the irregular distribution of the halls among them suggests long, winding paths leading to the exact opposite of a balance of power. All rooms follow, according to their size and function, a predetermined
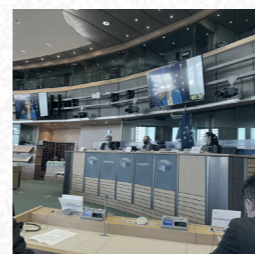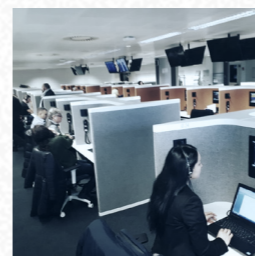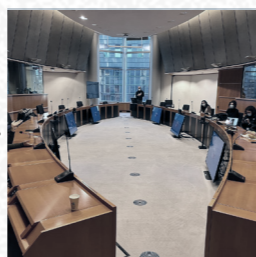
equipment protocol, which not only manifests itself in translation booths, lecterns and oversized screens, but also determines the seating arrangement and the consequent formal procedure of the meetings. In addition to these codified formalities, a look at the floor plans also reveals the tendency that the smaller the meeting rooms become, the more its seating arrangement departs from that of a typical plenary hall. While the seating arrangement in the large-format meeting halls is oriented towards the semi-circular structure, from which a hierarchy between the audience and the chair of the meeting sitting opposite each other emerges, it gradually approaches the typology of the round table as the size of the meeting hall decreases, at which the participants can discuss quasi-hierarchy-free on one level. Thus, the round table stands for a "symbolic consensus - regardless of whether conflicts are actually resolved", as it hardly allows the involved parties anymore to break off talks for objective reasons (Blumentrath et al., 2009, p. 17).

Conversely, this means that hierarchy thus also leads to a reduced willingness to compromise. While in contrast to Strasbourg, the indeterminate arrangement of the meeting rooms in Brussels introduces a hierarchical and consequently disruptive element, this argument loses its persuasive power when looking at the seating arrangement: there it becomes apparent that in both buildings the typology of the round table has been predominantly introduced not promoting dissent but enforcing consensus.

Plenary hall

Apart from the protocol area, which already has the link to a formal procedure in its name, there is arguably no other space in parliamentary architecture that is more subject to a procedural and protocol-like format than the legislative heart of every parliament, the plenary hall. It is not without reason that this place is also by far the most depicted space, which attests to its enormous relevance and representational potential.

Despite this significance, the respective design and spatial placement of the two plenary halls in Brussels and Strasbourg could not be more different. The official European statutes alone cause what is probably the biggest administrative difference leading to the Brussels plenary hall only being used for extraordinary or mini plenary sessions. The main assembly of the European Parliament remains Strasbourg, which is why this European itinerant movement takes place once a month to formally and conclusively vote on legislative proposals negotiated in Brussels.

Consequently, the Brussels plenary hall does not appear to be the representative showpiece of the Parliament, but rather seem like a slightly oversized, standardized meeting room, which virtually seamlessly fits into the complex sequence of rooms in the Parliament but is thus also drowned in its presence. The hall of the building, originally planned as an International Conference Centre, is located in the southern wing of the PHS building, with access from levels three and four. While one enters the hall through ordinary and inconspicuous doors, only circular windows embedded in these doors hint at the presence of the most powerful room in the entire
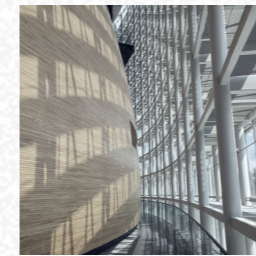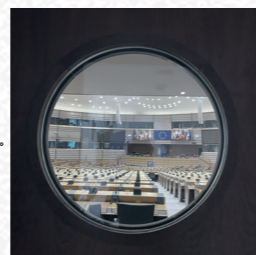
complex. The interior is dominated by the same warm materials as applied in the rest of the building's meeting rooms - although the somewhat old-fashioned, rustic wooden atmosphere is not unpleasant, it does not set this room apart from the rest. Thus, the unspectacular design elaboration of this space only underlines once again its administrative position as a functional secondary backup for the flagship of the Strasbourg parliament.

Strasbourg's plenary hall presents the exact inversion of the cosy, wooden interior of the assembly hall in Brussels: A somewhat cool atmosphere emanates from the diffusely lit side walls, which is contrasted by the omnipresent European blue of the furnishing. The simple, calm interior of the hall draws the entire attention of the audience to the centre of the room, the culmination point of the hall.

Also from outside and from a distance from the other side of the Ill riverbank, the plenary hall presents a much more memorable image: the Paris-based firm *Architecture Studio*, responsible for the design of the parliament, has incorporated the plenary hall into a colossal, egg-like and wood-panelled solitaire, which is intended to represent its own "city within the city" (Mourier, 1999, p. 9) and whose curved contour is silhouetted against the façade from the outside. The exclusive and distinct position within the parliamentary spatial structure not only bestows an ever-present appearance on the central body of legislative processes, but also enables other areas to wrap themselves around this core like layers of an onion. As a result, procedural, informal and even public spaces touch and overlap at this point: Around the plenary hall, the open layout allows for the arrangement of the media zone and two small cafés,

which also serve as foyer areas before and after plenary sessions. Adding to this, the visitors' tour also winds through these areas. These intersections also create reciprocal processes - such as the use of the plenary's wooden wall as a projection screen for political messages - that emphasise not only the spatial but also the thematic overlap of these areas and make synergies for a veritable space of dissent recognisable.

Thus, although both plenary halls in Brussels and Strasbourg are similar in their typology and function, they seem to adapt in their design to their respective administrative position. While Brussels' parliament core cannot do justice to its intended role due to its inconspicuous appearance, Strasbourg's concept of a legislative solitaire creates a culmination point that allows the close interlocking of all three spaces of dissent without diluting them. Inside, European legislature finds its spatial climax. Not only does the Strasbourg Parliament with this concept seem to be a pioneer and at the same time a reference - for example for the Europa building, the seat of the European Council, which opened in 2016 - the potential for the production of dissent is furthermore given here in the most diverse and rich ways.

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ATLAS OF

€UNITY

AN ARCHITECTURAL
GRAMMAR OF DISSENT

Office facade

Offices

Office spaces

Informal meeting spots

Meeting spots

Cafés

Strasbourg
EU-Parliament

Circulation areas

Hallways

Sky bridges

Plenary hall

Translator booths

Plenary hall

Meeting rooms

Committee rooms

Procedural
spaces of dissent

Procedural
spaces of dissent

Delivery entrance

Visitor areas

Visitor's tribune

Main entrance

Visitor's tour

Protocol entrance

Corporate identity

Protests in the plenary hall

Protests in front of the plenary

Public squares

Agora Louise Weiss

Media zone

Interview areas

TV Studio

Protests in the agora

Public
spaces of dissent

Staircases

Meeting spots

Informal meeting spots

Offices

Restaurants

Office meeting

Office facade

Office spaces

Circulation areas

Hallway / Sky bridges

Brussels
EU-Parliament

Plenary hall

Meeting rooms

Committee rooms

Plenary hall

Conference room

Protocol entrance

Protocol hallway

Cafés

Interview / social media area

Media zone

Photo backdrop

Guided tour

TV studio

Visitor areas

Visitor's tribune

Places of framing / Corporate identity

Demonstrations

Public squares

Visitor's tour

TOWARDS

DISSENSUSLAND

> As such, architecture and urban design are also a manifestation—and not only a symptom or symbol of space in its politicized sense, that is, more often than not, public space manipulated by political interests.
>
> Political scientist Michael Minkenberg on the notion of politicised space

3.1.   A space of conflictual consensus instead of veritable dissent

At the beginning of this research, I argued that the parliamentary architecture of the EU resembles a *Consensusland* on whose premises all dissent in the sense of political disagreement is diluted and abandoned in favour of absolute compromise. However, since *Consensusland* is not only constituted on a spatial level but is above all characterised by the administrative processes of this supranational legislative structure, the intention was to decipher the entangled realms of *Consensusland* and thus to crystallise an architectural grammar of dissent. This grammar adopts these entanglements and bases them on the following three main findings for an architecture of dissent:

Symbolic disruption

In order to nourish an environment of dissent, what is needed first and foremost is space, both of spatial and symbolic nature - space that enables those involved to cast off the narrow corset of majority opinion and finally provide a democratic outlet for the "agonistic dynamics of pluralism" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 19). In this respect, the baseline is unambiguous: While Brussels houses a simple, functional conference centre, the parliament building in Strasbourg represents a symbolically loaded entity in which every design decision has been guided by a deeper meaning. Thus, a certain interpretative scope is already provided here, which allows the viewer to determine to a certain extent how this space is occupied, used and, above all, perceived. It is a matter of already inscribing disruptive elements and visual dissonances into the spatial structure forming the basis for the production of dissent. Referring to an aesthetic of the unfinished and contradictory, elements such as the incomplete roof structure or the use of a multitude of initially repulsive geometries in turn ensure a broadening of the viewer's perceptual horizon.

Programmatic superimposition

The realisation that the process of spatial dissent production employs various means of articulation is already a first key to deciphering this procedure. However, it has become evident that only a successful interlocking of these three areas – procedural, informal and public - establishes reciprocity, which in turn generates productive synergies. This aspect is only implemented to a limited extent in the two parliament buildings. Brussels eludes this interference almost completely. It equalises the processes taking place there and their spatial correspondences to such an extent that in the end only singular entities remain that lack any possibility of dialogue. Here, right at the beginning the individual components are broken down into their single parts, so that the tender seedling of dissent cannot even bud.

The Strasbourg Parliament presents a somewhat different picture. Here, emphasis was deliberately placed on creating an architecture dedicated to openness and transparency, even though this often tends to be only of platonic nature. However, in this way, it was possible to create not only spatial but also visual links between the three spaces of deliberation, eventually creating productive tensions and make them visible. The implementation of the plenary hall is a key example of this, in and around which all three spaces culminate and generate the greatest possible potential for dissent.

Ideally, thus, no rigid, structural and symbolic separation of the various spatial functions and consequently

also user groups exists. Spaces and functions flow into each other, allow insights and outlooks and overlap at neuralgic points to create unexpected, unforeseeable synergies that provide fertile ground for dissensus-based discussions.

Spatial juxtaposition

In a democracy, where reaching of a decision is the assessment standard for the functioning of this system par excellence, dissent cannot be a definite and final state, but must always be a means to an end enabling to exhaust this process and render it as radical as possible. Therefore, similar to the constitution of identity which establishes itself only "through cultivating the difference-to-oneself" (Derrida, 1992, p. 11), an architecture of dissent must also maintain the possibility of spatial demarcation to oneself and others.

Here, the first question is how a configuration of conflict can be provoked, which eventually feeds into productive tension: This question can be addressed at the macro level of the EU, where the question of the capital city clearly shows that Brussels venture of building a parliament in disguise has led to a lot of potential for conflict, which has still not been fully exhausted. Regardless of how this conflict is assessed, it provides enough breeding ground for dissent, which is further fuelled by the decision to implement the parliament in an existing, fragile urban structure. Strasbourg's officially tendered parliament building on a greenfield site has not been exposed to any controversy in this respect but has thus also not been given the chance to stand its ground in a confrontation with possible opponents.

At the same time, this aspect can also be considered on a concrete micro-level. For the process of finding radical compromises, an actual spatial confrontation is necessary - from the confrontation with the public, over the arrangement of the individual political camps' office clusters, to the specific seating arrangement in the meeting rooms. All these elements can be found in different forms in both Brussels and Strasbourg. Whether it is the more successful confrontation with the public through the public mall in Brussels or the stringent, almost hierarchical juxtaposition of the meeting rooms in Strasbourg - signs of this aspect of an architecture of dissent are present in both buildings but have not been implemented in full consistency.
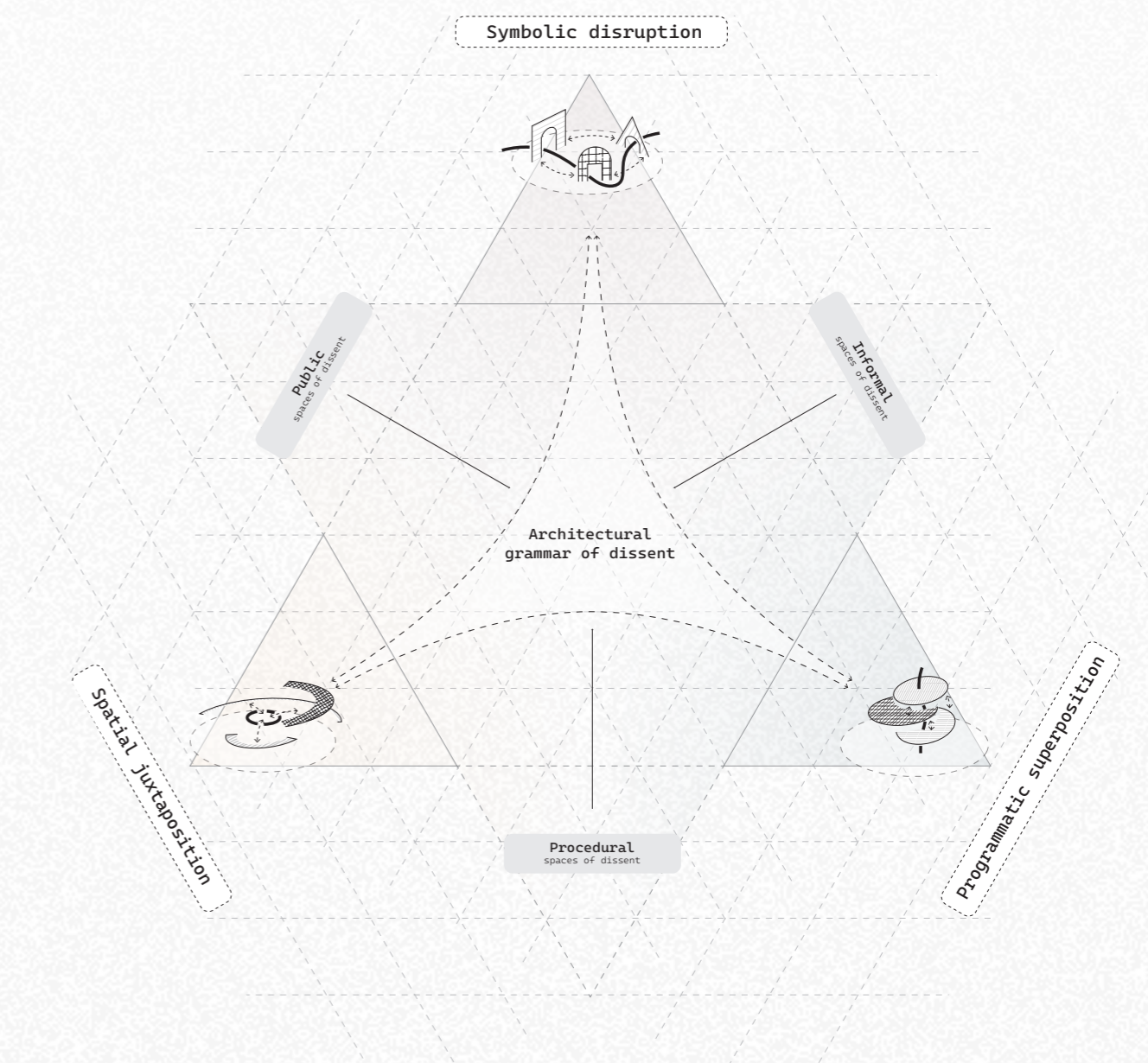
Conclusion diagram (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 03.1**

Conflictual consensus

In the end, the parliamentary architecture of both buildings offers definite potential for generating genuine dissent, although both attempt to foster it in different, even opposing ways. While Brussels actively attracts conflict through non-transparent processes and a controversial and intangible building structure, Strasburg takes on the role of the overachiever, trying to do everything right but lacking that certain disruptive momentum in doing so. Thus, both parliaments rather cultivate through their architecture an atmosphere of conflictual consensus instead of a veritable space of dissent.

What is therefore needed to overcome these architectural misjudgements is an architecture that not only serves as the soulless shell of the parliamentary apparatus but assumes an active, indispensable role in the legislative process - what is needed is *Dissensusland*.
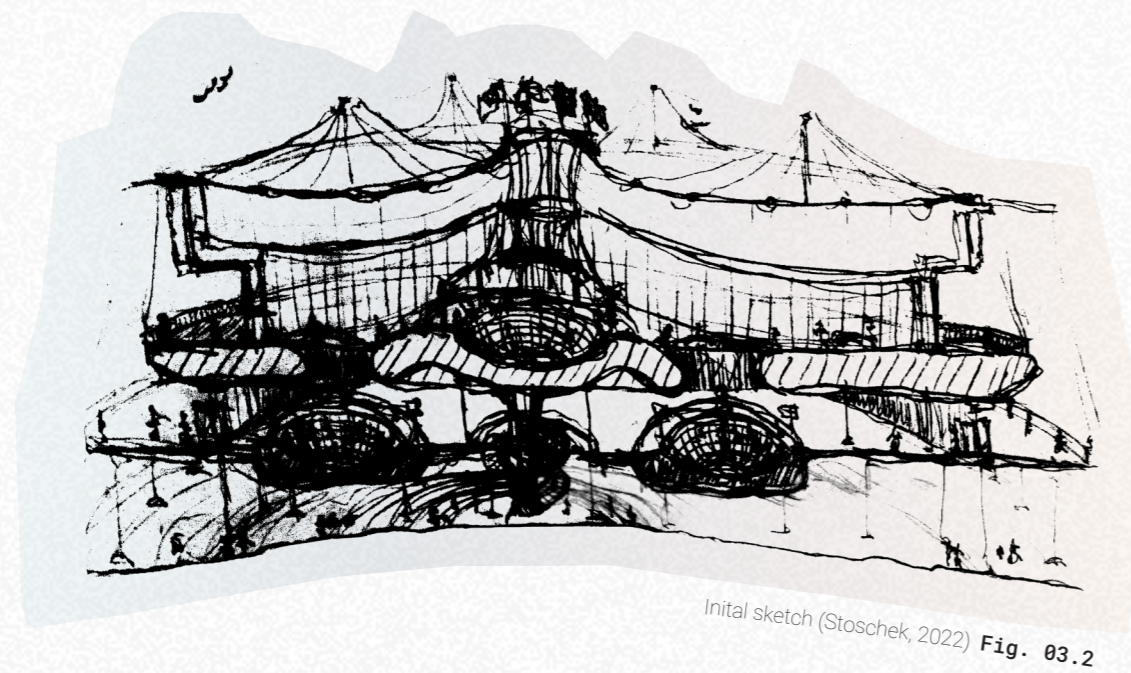
Inital sketch (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 03.2**

When the agonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered
[…], then passions cannot be given a democratic outlet.

Political scientist Chantal Mouffe in her book *Agonistics*

3.2.   A plea for Dissensusland

In the end, the main concern of the European legislative body is to establish a culture of dissent according to Mouffe's concept of agonism, which nourishes the "struggle between adversaries" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 18), ultimately leading to consensus via taking the detour of a mitigated culture of dissent. A clumsy, unproductive antagonism that only fuels the "struggle between enemies" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 18) would ultimately not be conducive to a successful decision-making process.

Still, the European Union and its accompanying bureaucratic machine are therefore trapped in the realms of *Consensusland*. Consequently, to argue against the EU's current culture of consensus, a radical counterproposal is needed to find out how an actual space of dissent would manifest itself architecturally. What spatial configurations does a so-called *Dissensusland* - A radical production space for dissent, where the productive synergies of dissent, rather than the expectation of compromise, drive decision-making? For this project, however, this place must submit to a completely different logic, it must give itself a new legislative operating system that adapts to the current mechanisms of overall social developments in order to get out of the compromise-ridden rabbit hole. Above all, *Dissensusland* aims not only to embrace and celebrate the diversity embodied in the EU slogan United in Diversity, but also wants to confront and challenge it.

This project therefore requires a paradigm shift within the EU: while the *Consensusland* in Brussels and Strasbourg is slow, bureaucratic and compromise-laden, a *Dissensusland* must be able to act quickly, hyperlocally, location-independently, individually and, above all, dissensually. Because "consensus often means a decrease in interaction. No more interaction means stasis." Stasis thus does not lead to the production of challenging ideas, but to the "pragmatic administration of a status quo" (Miessen, 2011, p. 83). Therefore, the main question is what framework, what network and, above all, what architecture is needed to constantly break up this state of stagnation.

Dissensusland therefore operates not on the legislative, supra-national level of the EU but on a societal level located in European places, regions and border areas that accumulate a high potential for dissent due to their history and symbolism but which also simultaneously let the actual status quo dilute by their lack of discursive confrontation. At such conflict sites, be it the conflict between the Spanish territory and the Catalans striving for independence or the low-threshold smouldering struggle between East and West Germany, it is important to discuss through a radical confrontation of the respective views whether the productive synergies of dissent are sufficient for a rapprochement or if a turning away from each other should no longer be stopped.

Arguably one of the most controversial conflicts of recent years is the UK's departure from the EU. The tight 2016 referendum in favour of Brexit has not only severed countless infrastructural links, it has also driven a wedge between supporters and opponents of the referendum and between the British and European citizens. Should the UK be granted a site for the European Capital of Culture in 2022, this relationship has now also been severed. Thus, these social rifts continue to widen and the English Channel thus figuratively becomes more and more impassable. Nevertheless, it is important to keep the channels of communication open in order to use this potential for dissent not only to address conflicts, but also as a society to explore this intangible relationship.

There, at this culmination point, *Dissensusland* envisions a pavilion-like, temporary and low-threshold site-independent structure that incorporates diverse confrontational spaces within a tightly knit network along the British and European shores of the English Channel, thereby initially seeking unadorned and open-ended dissent. The principle of a stationary and therefore stagnant EU is reversed here into a so-called DeliverEU, which is supplemented by a tight network of sub-platforms in order to encourage the role of the 'crossbench practitioner', an 'uninterested outsider' and 'uncalled participator' who is not limited by existing protocols, and who enters the arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to generate change" (Miessen, 2011, p. 244). Thus, the structure is about capturing and presenting the prevailing potential for dissent on a particular topic, giving moods, opinions, prejudices and emotional conflicts a spatial framework in which they can unfold and, in the best case, result in profound opinions and future-oriented ideas.

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Concept sketches (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 03.3**
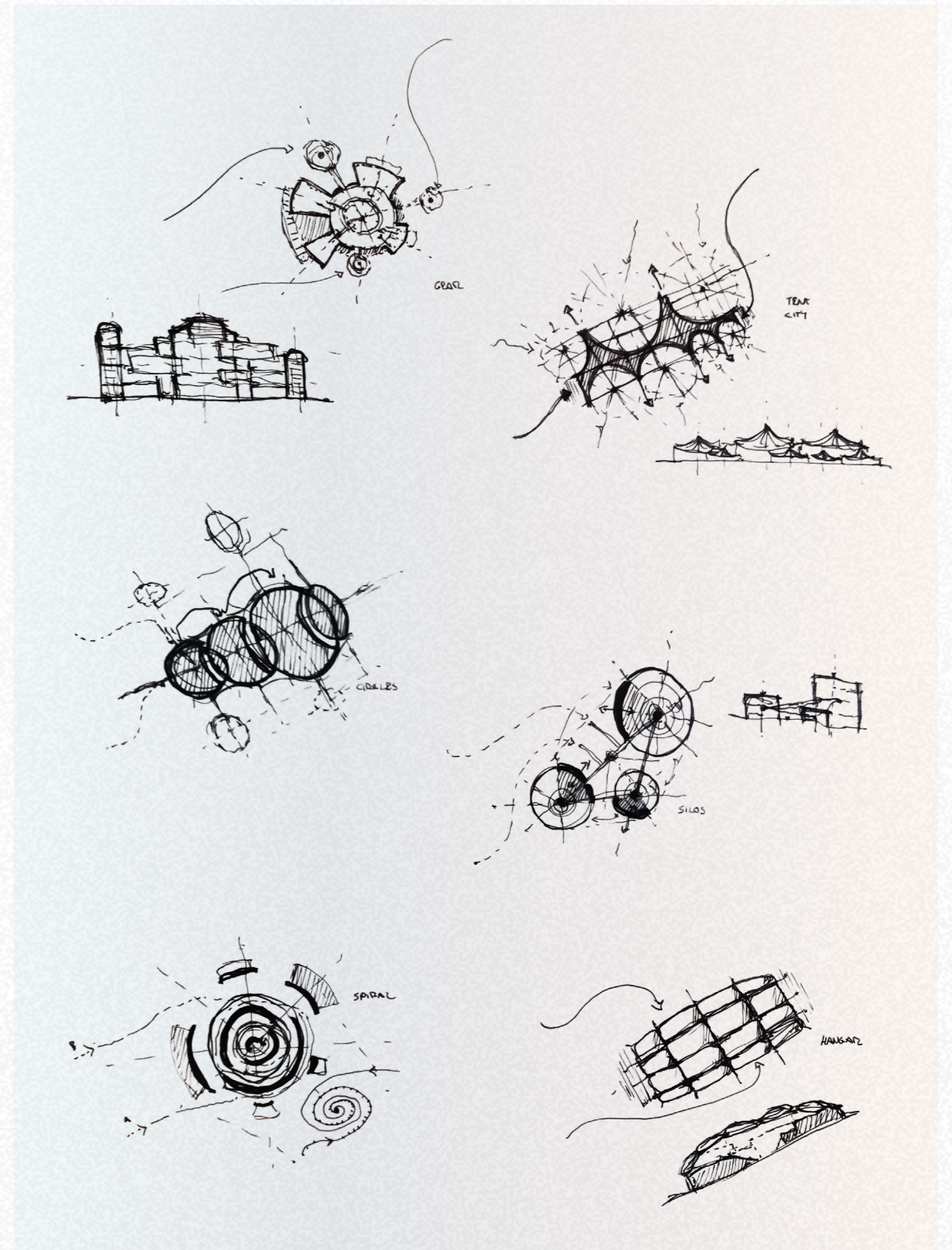
APPENDIX

Collection and mapping of visual content

Instagram posts (n=76)

Twitter posts (n=30)

MEP Twitter posts (n=37)

Visual content Brussels (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 04.1**

Instagram posts (n=120)

Twitter posts (n=16)

MEP Twitter posts (n=39)
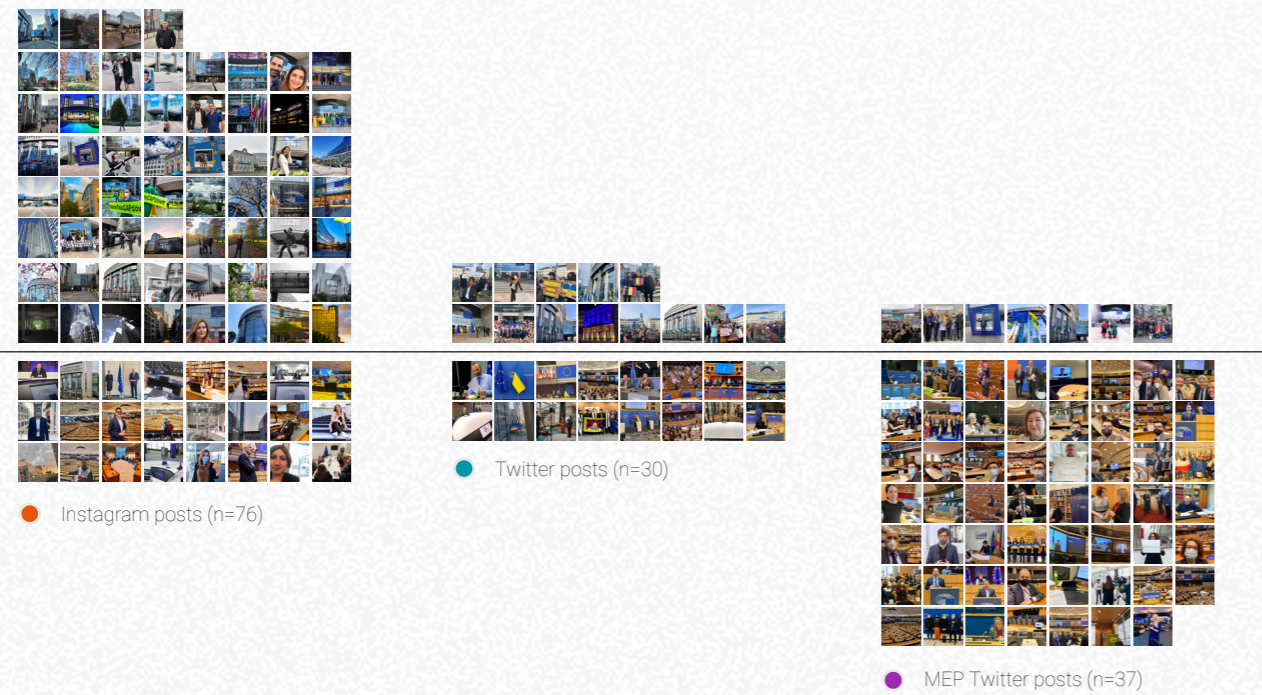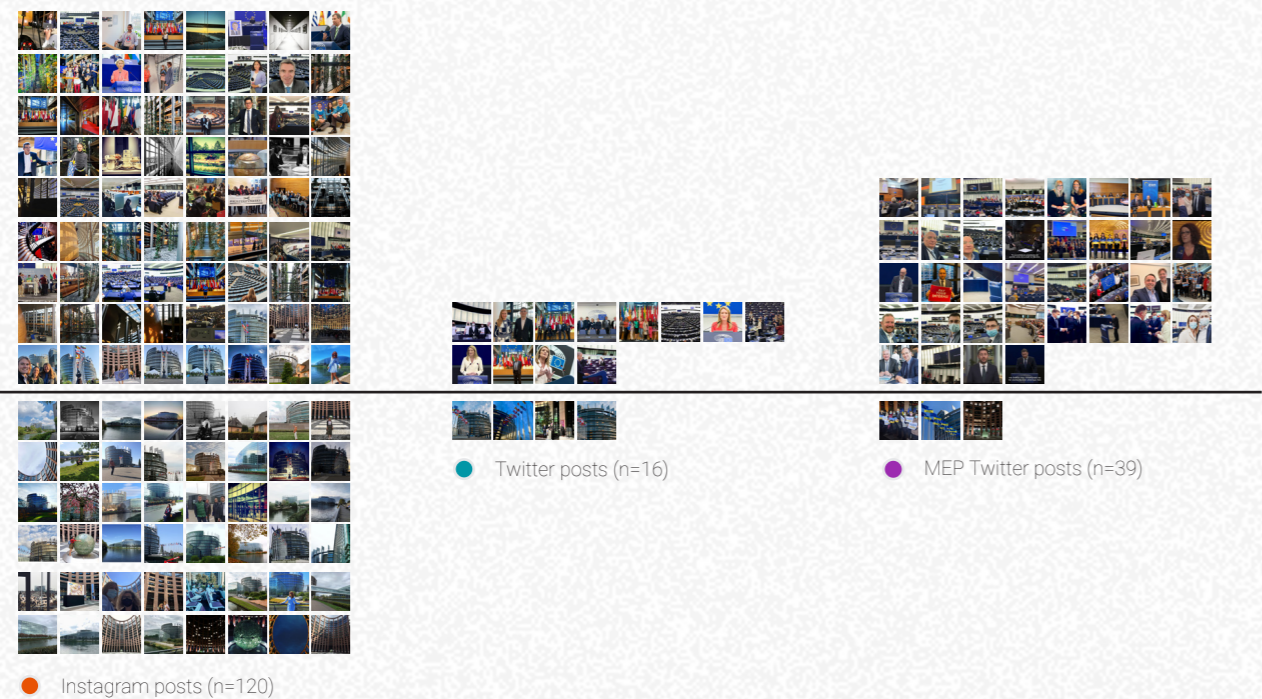
Visual content Strasbourg (Stoschek, 2022) **Fig. 04.2**
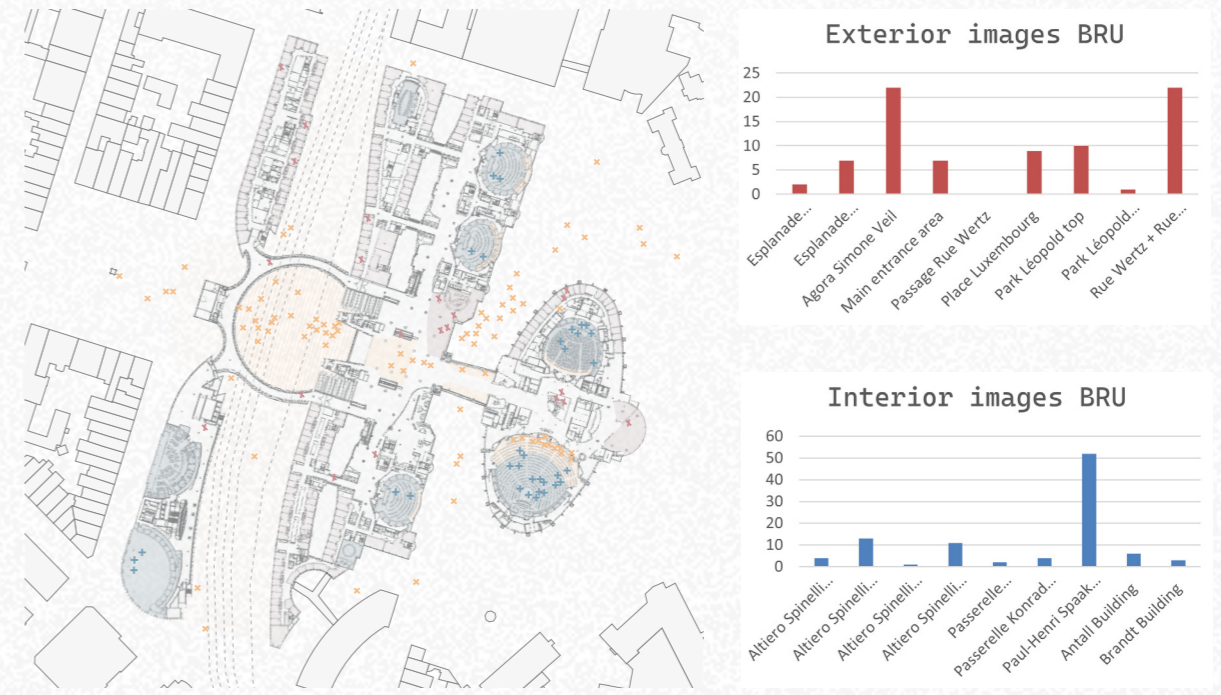
Fig. 04.3 Mapping of visual content Brussels (Stoschek, 2022)

Exterior images BRU

Interior images BRU
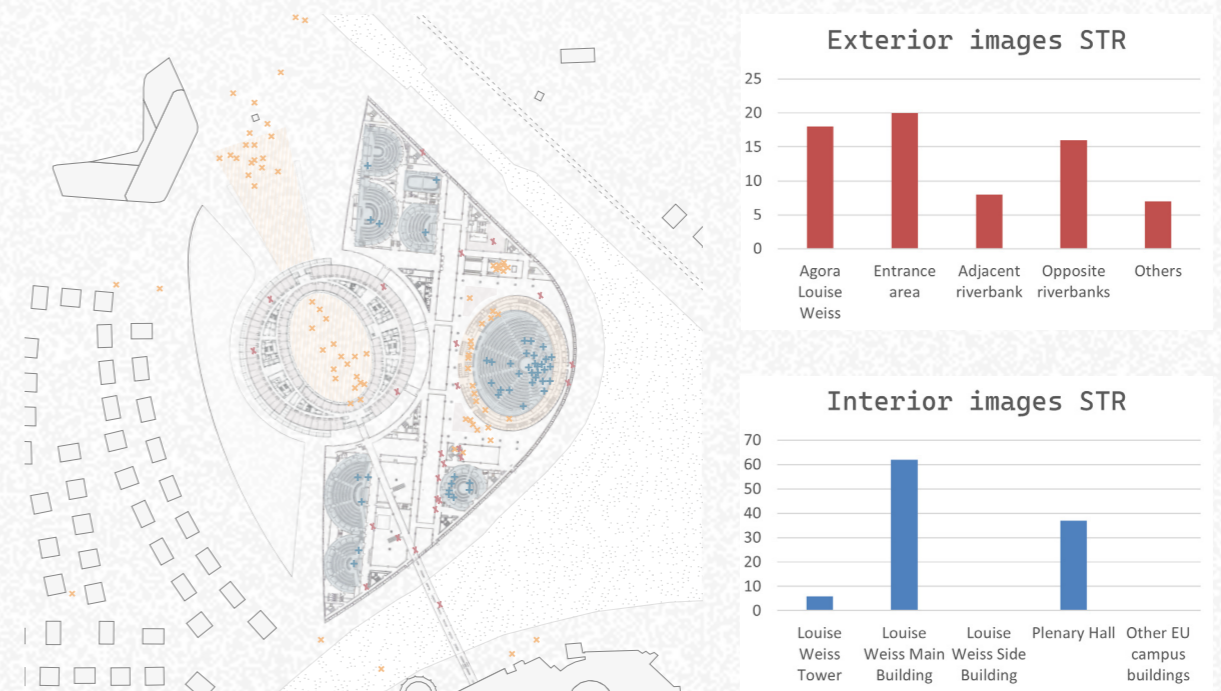
Fig. 04.4 Mapping of visual content Strasbourg (Stoschek, 2022)

Exterior images STR

Interior images STR

Index of abbreviations

EU	European Union
COM	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EC	European Communities
CoFE	Conference on the Future of Europe
PHS	Paul Henri Spaak
AS	Altiero Spinelli
ICC	International Conference Centre

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