THE VIRTUAL TOWN HALL

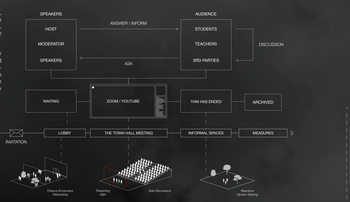
WHAT ARE THE TOWN HALL MEETINGS?

Town hall meetings are a way for a company or institution's management to meet and connect with their community. They tend to be hosted by members of upper management and are attended by all employees either in a large meeting space or conference hall or via virtual platforms like Zoom or Youtube for larger groups and broader accessibility. The purpose of EPFL's Town Hall meetings is to connect with all members of the university, staff and students alike, informing about big changes, common issues and answering questions from the community.

"Town Hall Meetings" are a reference to the historically prevalent physical meetings that took place in the past, today many town hall meetings are conducted virtually for broader accessibility and convenience, and it's programs are merely 2D adaptations of existing three dimensional experiences.

Due to recent health concerns and widespread restrictions, Town Hall Meetings have gained increased importance due to these uncertain times in which the community were in need of more information about EPFL's handling of the situation. For the first time, students, teachers, researcher and collaborators joined in online at a larger scale to discuss, ask questions and learn about possible future steps.

Unfortunately, these meetings have never reached the level of participation and engagement hoped by the media department, and have kept on decreasing as time went on. Today, these meetings are hosted physically again due to it's low attendance.



WHY MAKE IT IMMERSIVE?

With half of the world online, our current environment is rapidly digitizing, while our virtual one becomes far more immersive.

The events of the Covid-19 pandemic further accelerated digital reliance, as modern society turned to alternate modes of communication when time, distance, or hazardous constraints prevented individuals from gathering in person.

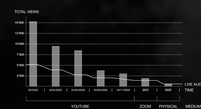
As a result, we have started to question if a part of what we do requires physical presence. *A significant part of our work is already done online; we share documents, collaborate, and communicate with one another using online platforms.*

Do we need to be physically present at all our meetings?

Is it still necessary to spend all of our time travelling & commuting to and from our offices?

EPFL is no exception to this change. It, like most organizations and institutions, has had to adapt in order to communicate with its community more effectively. Nevertheless, due to the current levels of participation at such a low scale, it may be time to turn to extended realities (XR) to bridge the gap between the virtual and the physical realm.

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

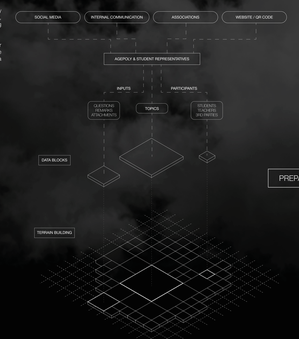


HOW DO I PARTICIPATE?

Inspired by the ethos of Switzerland's Participatory Democracy and its civic spaces, this proposal provides an overview of the realization of a gathering space that's designed to increase online presence and engagement by utilizing the benefits of added physical interactions in the information era (VR.) A space that can be visited, experienced, and accessed by anyone, at any time and from any location, where different means of interaction through the architecture of the space lead to new insights and solutions while simultaneously bridging the gap between administration and community.

As a result, members of the community can participate earlier on in the process, thus better influencing the decision making taken by the administration.

To participate, you can simply share your concerns and opinions through the online link or voice them out through social media or internal proxies.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Virtual Town Hall is essentially a digital archive of all the community's opinions and concerns at a given time. Inside, visitors may roam around the vast topography of data, interact with documents, see who participated, and view the old town hall presentations too. Moreover, the architectural documents allow for different ways to read what was discussed, and what carried more importance during a specific town hall. Elevations show which topics were more critical in comparison to others, plans highlight the total area and also how users collaborated inside the space.

Finally, the project changes form several times to better harbor the ongoing program. In the end, the town hall is archived, and a new blank space is created, one that will be built depending on the community new needs and concerns.

DATA AS A BUILDING TOOL

TOPICS

A maximum of 8 topics are selected from the communities concerns and contributions. These are the first building blocks that will enable further construction.

INPUTS

Questions, ideas, and documents start defining the landscape. During this phase, further collaboration and participation are encouraged, users may add additional data, share comments, and more which will further help our decision-makers understand the community's needs.

PARTICIPATION

Similar to a vote, a participation block highlights a user's engagement on a topic. They are the smallest and most common blocks on the landscape.

MAPPING

The process of placing and organizing user's input in space, eventually creating a landscape of information free to be explored and studied by EPFL's community and decision-makers.

TOWN

Once the event is announced to the public, the greater public can start exploring the landscape of data for further discussion and consultation before the meeting as the last blocks are added to the datascape. This form is called the Town, as it has been built through collaborative work within different groups, at every summit lies a topic facilitating chance encounters that can develop into further more intimate discussions at the base.

AUDITORIUM

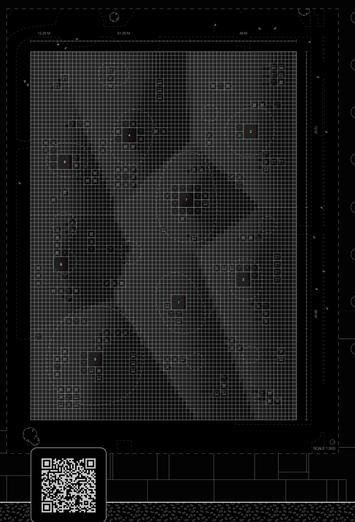
During the presentation, users can freely interact with one another and the content that surrounds them, just like in a physical auditorium, just without the hassle of interrupting the presenter vocally during a zoom meeting or by spamming the chat for questions. Here, participants may also raise their hands to ask questions or react to comments.

VALLEY

After the meeting, virtual participants may continue their discussion in the Valley, where the space transforms to create smaller distinct areas for each topic, encouraging informal interaction and chance encounters. A new topography destined for consultation and research as the space is archived for later use.

ANALYSIS

During this phase, student representatives, the Agepoly, and relevant members of the community will discuss data gathered during the first phase and filter the information before sharing it with the decision-makers. The meeting is prepared, speakers are assigned and the final form and purposes of the Town Hall are completed during the Analysis.



1 EQUITY 14.33%
AREA : 2980 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 909
INPUTS : 14

2 EXAMS 14.54%
AREA : 3022 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 851
INPUTS : 24

3 STUDENT DEBT 14.27%
AREA : 2967 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 864
INPUTS : 26

4 CLIMATE CHANGE 14.51%
AREA : 3019 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 851
INPUTS : 29

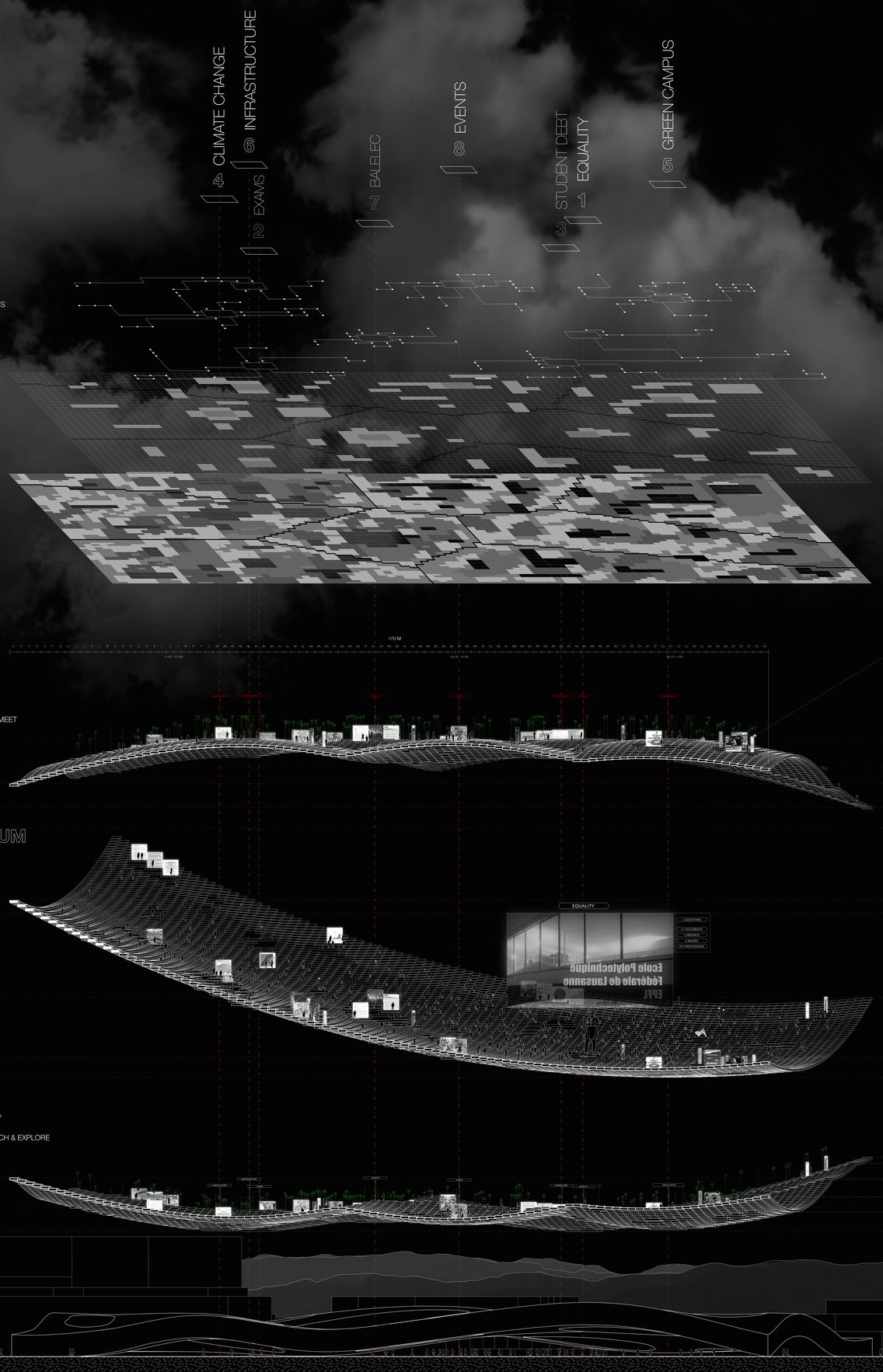
5 GREEN CAMPUS 14.47%
AREA : 3010 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 826
INPUTS : 33

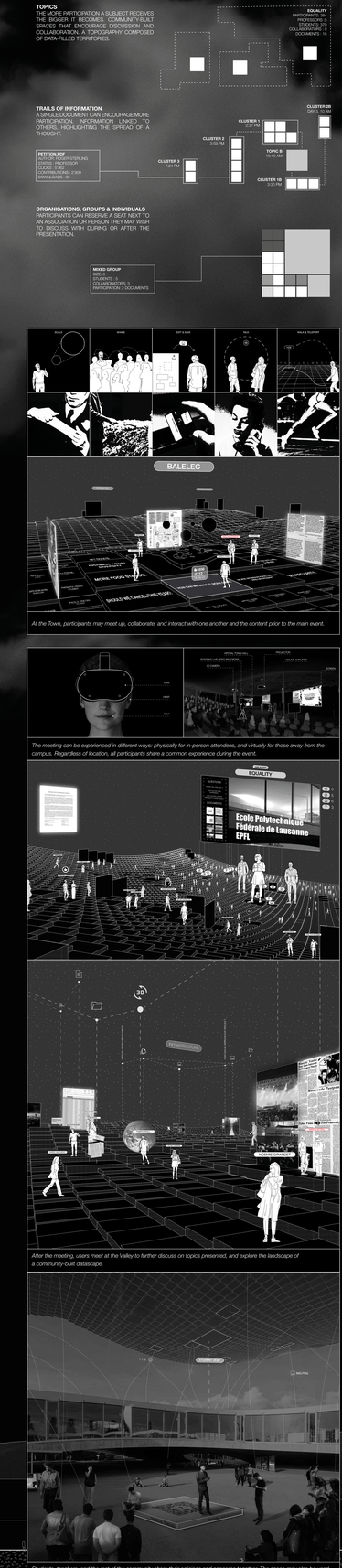
6 INFRASTRUCTURE 9.11%
AREA : 1895 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 634
INPUTS : 16

7 BALELEC 9.20%
AREA : 1914 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 534
INPUTS : 20

8 EVENTS 9.54%
AREA : 1984 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 514
INPUTS : 23

TOTAL
AREA : 20794 M²
PARTICIPANTS : 6'902
INPUTS : 184





SCALE 1:200