

AGORA Lombard Odier, Place Cosandey EPFL

The southern part of the EPFL Campus has seen significant mutations in recent years. The new ArtLab and Mechanical Sciences buildings were constructed, following on from the Learning Center, which proposes an accentuated relationship to the landscape and the open space of the campus. Between these buildings, the Place Cosandey remains as a leftover. This space is not articulated, and sits as the beginning of an esplanade, without spatial definition, other than that provided by the bordering buildings. The EPFL management, decided that it should be up to the students themselves to design the transformation of this generous space on campus.

Between September and November 2015, the ALICE laboratory coordinated this collaboration, in the form of a series of successive workshops. In order to present a coherent project, based on the student work, to the EPFL management, the results of each workshop were translated into comprehensive concepts. In a trans-disciplinary, trans-faculty, trans-study-cycle approach, about 30 participants engaged in an intense production of documents, drawings and models, in order to superimpose ideas along a structured process, forming the core of the design process. The project was then realized, in close collaboration between the EPFL management and services, the ALICE design research team, the engineers and the contractors. A first phase was completed in November 2016, in parallel with the ArtLab building by Kengo Kuma. The second phase of construction, with the major landscape design elements and the AGORA, began in summer 2018 and ended in March 2019.

On the scale of the landscape, the project proposes an intensified relationship between the campus and its environment and exceptional setting. It maintains and enhances the opening up of views towards the skies and horizons across the lake, and offers with the Disque-project a moment of elevation, in a close visual and bodily relationship with Lac Léman.

On the scale of the site, the project articulates the relationship between the 'dense' parts of the campus and the southern park-like part of the campus. Here the project plays a double role of square and urban park, acting as a node in an urban system, generously supporting simultaneous activities and movements, intertwined within the existing park system around the Learning Center.

The square itself is conceived as a Supersurface; it supports all the movements, activities and events, and it correlates between the recently constructed buildings, their different surroundings and their levels. Moments of intensity articulate the space of the square, and propose a diverse rhythm, another exposure to the space, and a certain intimacy. These moments play with the square's horizon and the strong presence of the growing vegetation— in order to exist adjacently to the flux of movements, which are becoming places of encounter and co-presence. Each of these moments have a unique relationship with movement and the surrounding horizons, as a result of their proportions and materiality. The soft contact with the attentively sanded concrete seating, or the color of the flowers in front of the diverse buildings, have been thought about with the same care as the articulation of movement at a larger scale, which now seem to reverberate off one another.

The square has become an active place for everyday activities. The food-strip at the Parvis, in the north, has led to a weekly rhythm of small businesses and food trucks, selling meals and beverages, across cultural boundaries. Students and visitors are using the square and its surroundings as a place of leisure, exchange and play. On the other end of the scale, the square is home to large-scale events such as the Balélec, a yearly electronic music festival, drawing 15,000 people over one evening.

As a public space, also visited by large numbers of families and Lausanne citizens, the project for the Place Cosandey embodies the objectives of the future EPFL campus; it inscribes itself into the Open Campus Initiative and responds to the newly launched Resilient Campus endeavor. It is a project conceived and lived by all. Open to the citizens and becoming part of a collective imagery, it has grafted itself into the existing potential of the EPFL campus and its surrounding environment. In its thoroughly urban nature as a place of exchange and sharing, it projects a timely spatial figure, as an expression of the future missions of research and education in our society.

The Agora was inaugurated on the 18th march together with the launch of the new EPFL logo.