

## **The HSLU Engineering & Architecture Campus Horw and its architectural approach on a sociological level**

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## **The HSLU Engineering & Architecture Campus Horw and its architectural approach on a sociological level**

*Research question:*

Does the architecture of the HSLU Campus promote interaction on a sociological level?

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## **Abstract**

The following work documents the project developed in the module Study Work by students Andrea Ognyanova and Carolina Rossi. This consists of the analysis of the HSLU Campus Horw and its architectural approach on a sociological level.

Based on the research of Erving Goffman's on the theory of interaction, the students aim to discover if the current structure of the university prompts or averts social interactions between individuals. To do so, the authors focused on two specific rooms on campus: the Mensa and the interior architect's Atelier. The two spaces are characterised by contrasting functions, yet both demonstrate clearly how Goffman's hypothesis manifests in everyday life. Thorough analytical observations are carried out to provide concrete examples of how the architecture plays into the individual's interaction rituals.

Through a comparison, it becomes clear that the two rooms require their users to take on different social roles. Architecturally, the circulation through both spaces results inadequate, impacting social interactions in a negative way.

Said findings are then set and discussed in a broader context, in particular that regarding the relationship between the architect and the behaviour of the user.































The Interior Architecture Atelier is the space that hosts the personal working stations of the students following this course of study. It is a particularly important location for aspiring interior architects, as it should promote practical and theoretical knowledge exchange between peers. Therefore prompts individuals to undertake social interactions.

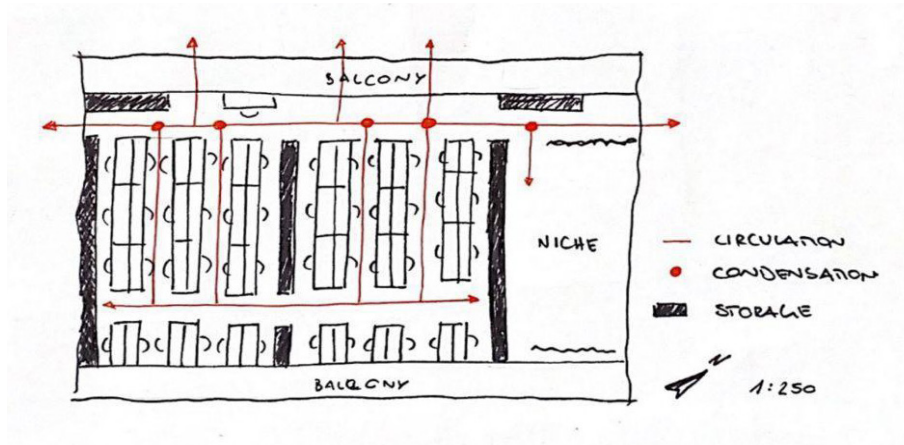


Figure 2: Floor plan interior architecture Atelier

### 4.1 Design and Construction

The infrastructure hosting the Interior Architects' Atelier is located between Trakt IV and II. The construction was built later than the rest of campus, as the course of studies, previously at the faculty of Art & Design, moved to this department.

The building has a rectangular shape and the character of a temporary structure, which makes it look more like a pavilion. Both longitudinal sides consist of a series of floor-to-ceiling windows. These are indented creating a longitudinally covered balcony on both sides of the construction. Both of these can be closed off through folding grid panels.

In the interior, the ceiling of the metal frame is clothed entirely by wood panels, which carry primarily an acoustic function. The floors and side walls are also covered in wooden panels. These have deformed with time, resulting in flooring squeaking loudly under pressure.

The furniture filling the space is focused on functionality. Through a series of high black metal cabinets, the floorplan is divided into three zones, one smaller - the niche (see Fig 2.) - the other two about the same size. Desks the size 80x160cm are positioned in lines facing each other along the width of the structure. These are completed by individual caddies positioned underneath each desk. Bigger storage units, used to store big presentation boards and materials, are also present at the edges of the room. Similarly, some home appliances such as fridges and microwaves are positioned the same way.

### 4.2 Access and Circulation

The Atelier can be accessed from the lower level court by two doors located on either side of the pavilion. Indoors, students can get in from the two adjacent buildings. The big sliding windows are also

used as entrances during warmer seasons.

The weird way in which the pavilion is squeezed between two buildings has the positive aspect of bringing life to the court. It also provides a closed connection on the lower level. Theoretically, the latter can be accessed on both ends from neighbouring buildings. However, due to the lack of space and the disturbance that such circulation would cause, this connection is cut off for people from other departments. This means that many potential casual interactions cannot take place. This path running straight through the Atelier from Trakt IV to Trakt II is very trafficked already, as it is the one interior architecture students use the most. From this main circulation way, secondary paths run horizontally between the desks to the other half of the room, where a second bigger path is located.

Through the years, as the course of studies became more popular, a higher number of desks have to be added to the space. Mobility is therefore highly reduced and paths very used. This problem with circulation is already apparent when organising tables. As there is little space, some students' desks are placed in the middle of circulation ways and exchange students don't have any workplace at all. This exclusion forces some students to work somewhere else, which again causes interactions to be cut off. General lack of space and uncomfortable desk situations cause students to work at home rather than in the Atelier, interfering again with interactions, especially ones important for academic growth.

If we look at this circumstance from a broad perspective, this can be considered a backstage difficulty on the part of the institution.

Condensation happens mostly in the niche as shown in Fig 2 (which always seems to be too small) especially when there's a presentation or team meeting - an integral part of the discipline - while people walk by or students are looking for materials in the collection of the niche. Again this can be seen as a constant backstage difficulty caused by traffic and sound/acoustics. This also makes it impossible to have two presentations at the same time and it is difficult when having coaching as well. Also, the space is so limited that if a group has to sit together and coaching are taking place in the niche, they have nowhere to go.

During lunchtime, the space doubles as an eating room where people come together for lunch. Although it sounds practical to have spaces that allow certain flexibility, this means that activities taking place in the niche always have to be interrupted over lunchtime and the space rearranged.

### **4.3 Front and Backstage**

The whole room can be considered backstage. This is defined by the actions taking place there and by the fixed props and furniture present in the space. However, it is important to note that a subtle front/back subdivision is happening in the Atelier itself, particularly in the niche, when a presentation is taking place.

The circumstance requires a more formal environment, during which the room gets transformed through the use of black curtains. Mobile props such as these allow this transformation to happen (see Chapter 2.4 for reference). However, in this case, the curtains create a dark and unpleasant environment when closed. Nowadays, with spaces becoming smaller and smaller, we see how interior design becomes more

and more relevant in allowing both casual and formal interactions to take place in the same space. This, however, must be done in a way that doesn't jeopardise either one of the scenarios.

#### **4.4 Atmosphere**

The overall ambience of the space is friendly and welcoming. There is good lighting (both natural and artificial) and cross ventilation which allow for prolonged working periods and a better chance for interactions. The environment is obviously casual, although there are work-related activities taking place in the room. Some backstage difficulty may be experienced when unexpected visitors come by. This is mostly the case since the storage is pretty limited and there are lots of things laying around, making the space appear very chaotic.

The atmosphere and the mood of the room can vary widely depending on the time/programme of the day and the course of the semester. When the whole room is full it gets very loud in the Atelier, especially during frenetic exam periods. If a visitor comes by over lunchtime or in the evening, however, it can be surprising how quiet the place can be.

The Mensa is an important location in educational institutions, where students and faculty can meet their nutritional needs. However, its significance extends beyond food because it facilitates social relationships and shapes the college community. Understanding the Mensa's dynamics and impacts is critical for fostering inclusive and supportive environments that improve students' overall educational experiences. The purpose of this academic introduction is to investigate the Mensa's relevance as a social space, with a particular emphasis on its impact on socialisation, community building, and student well-being inside educational institutions.

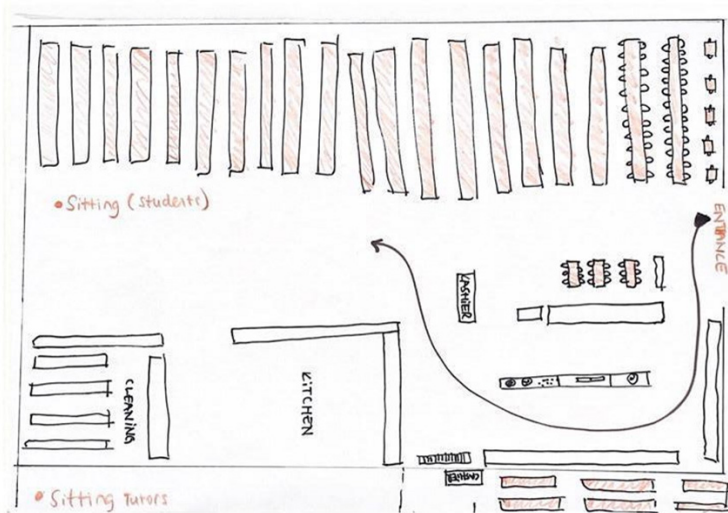


Figure 3: Floor plan of the Mensa

### 5.1 Design and Construction

The Mensa is located on the campus's highest point. The structure is modern and wide, with a large rectangular space for dining and socialising. Large floor-to-ceiling windows allow plenty of natural light and a striking view of the surroundings of the university. The Mensa's furniture and layout are intended to maximise functionality and efficiency. The room is separated into zones, with several tables and chairs organised to encourage socialisation and interaction among students and faculty members.

### 5.2 Access and Circulation

The Mensa, located at the apex point on campus, is not only the centre of social activities but also an important resource for academic success. The Mensa is easily accessible from the lower-level court via one door and many walk-through sections for students going to and from college. The library, conveniently positioned between the Mensa and the bus station, helps students focus on their studies even more, while nearby bike and motorbike parking facilities make it possible for them to travel to campus sustainably. In essence, the Mensa and its surrounding facilities foster an environment that promotes both academic and social development.

The Mensa is a large and inviting area that serves as a gathering place for the academic community to gather and enjoy collaborative meal experiences. It provides a comprehensive selection of culinary





The following comparison is based on the observations collected in chapters 4 and 5. In addition to this, a further study of circulation was conducted through the filming of videos. Collected at random times during the day, these were later converted into time-lapses and used to analyse the individual's behaviour in the built environment.

### 6.1 Indoor-Outdoor Connection

Indoor-Outdoor connections, just like circulation, are relevant for our studies, as they define who is more likely to access the building and be involved in interactions taking place in the interior areas.

Both the Mensa and the Atelier have dedicated outdoor areas on both sides. The Mensa, however, is completely detached from other buildings. As a result, it has available space all around it, which is used as a circulation or eating/entertainment area.

The Mensa's building is connected by the main roofed path to the three sister buildings of the campus. The Atelier, on the other hand, is located on the lower level and is therefore only connected through other buildings.

The indoor-outdoor connections of educational facilities, such as the Mensa and Atelier, are critical in describing accessibility and encouraging interactions on campus. While the Mensa has the advantage of being detached with outdoor space for eating and socialising, the Atelier is generally connected to other buildings, possibly restricting outdoor freedom.

### 6.2 Navigation and Interactions

In both cases we have high-intensity and low-intensity situations. For the Mensa, this depends on hours/times. While in the case of the Atelier, it depends on the program of the different days.

In the recordings, we notice how in both cases casual interactions take place. Although we don't know which students are from which department, we can assume that a lot of these are between people from different departments.

In the Atelier, on the other hand, this is not the case. The interactions taking place there, both casual and planned, are usually between students from the interior architecture department. Few interactions are between interior architecture and external students, as they are not allowed to walk through the Atelier due to overcrowding reasons.

Overall the Mensa is much more frequented because it is a reference point for all departments of the campus. Instead, the Atelier is a space dedicated to a specific group, the interior architects. In addition, the pavilion cuts off the main circulation way to external departments, resulting in an overall less trafficked space.

### 6.3 Front and Backstage

Based on Goffman's theory, both the Atelier and the Mensa are considered backstage areas. However, in both cases, we can find a front and backstage subdivision inside the space itself.

In the Mensa, this is constituted by the kitchen area, where the kitchen itself is considered backstage, while the serving area the frontstage.

In the Atelier we have an area, the niche, that frequently changes from back to front and vice versa, depending on the situation.

The affirmation that both the Atelier and the Mensa are backstage areas is also confirmed by the performers' behaviour when in the space. Individuals' attitude in the Mensa is relaxed. This is because they're taking a break from academic activities, but also because they are usually among friends and therefore are conducting casual conversations. The same is true for the Atelier. This is the space where interior architecture students spend most of their scholastic and free time. Various informal academic activities take place here, such as studying, group work, and model-making. Consequently, many casual activities take place here too, such as eating, playing during breaks and casually coming together.

The only instance during which both the surroundings and the individual's attitude are converted to formal is when presentations/coachings take place in the niche. In other words, when there are interactions with an authority figure - in this case, the professors - happening, the whole atmosphere changes from casual to formal.

### 6.4 Participants and Actors

The people of the Mensa's staff are considered the performers in the serving frontstage, as they are part of the performance taking place there. The rest of the guests in the Mensa are considered participants. They represent the supporting role of the main performer and constitute an integral part of the performance.

Contrary to the staff, the participants are there only for a short time, usually the length of a meal or to grab a coffee. Planned social interactions rarely take place in the Mensa, as it is a casual space that is not ideal for prolonged focused work.

Because it is more casual and less conducive to serious work, the Mensa is often not a setting for planned or protracted social contact. Instead, the emphasis is on dining efficiency and meeting fundamental necessities in a short amount of time. While the staff members actively carry out their responsibilities, the Participants are more ephemeral in character, focusing on their current needs rather than engaging in long-term social connections.

The dynamics of the Atelier may be different. Individuals present in a creative office can be regarded as both Participants and Actors, with the possibility for more active and intentional social interactions. Unlike the Mensa, the Atelier is intended to foster hands-on activities and artistic expression by fostering an environment in which individuals can engage in collaborative work and organised interactions.



The Atelier is transformed into a venue where both staff and students or artists take on active roles as performers, contributing to a lively and participative atmosphere.

Therefore, applying Goffman's Participant and Actor theory to the Mensa and Atelier reveals various roles and dynamics inside these settings. The Mensa primarily involves staff members as Actors and guests as Participants, with a focus on effectively meeting fundamental necessities. The Atelier, on the other hand, encourages intentional social connections and collaborative work from both staff and students/artists. Understanding these roles and dynamics can help to inform the design and organisation of these spaces, resulting in environments that stimulate meaningful interactions and support desired outcomes in educational institutions. The Mensa primarily involves staff members as Actors and guests as Participants, with a focus on effectively meeting fundamental necessities. The Atelier, on the other hand, encourages intentional social connections and collaborative work from both staff and students/artists. Understanding these roles and dynamics can help to inform the design and organisation of these spaces, resulting in environments that stimulate meaningful interactions and support desired outcomes in educational institutions.

In this section we discuss how the study of various spaces in educational institutions such as the Mensa and Atelier can provide useful insights into how the built environment influences individual behaviour and interpersonal interactions. The knowledge acquired in Chapter 2 is now compared and discussed in relation to the analysed spaces, in order to connect the collected documentation with the broader architectural context.

The first hypothesis that can be formulated based on our research is that social interactions are only as organic as the architecture's navigation. In other words, organic interactions, which are the most fulfilling to our human nature, rely highly on circulation pathways. Therefore, in order to promote social interaction, architects should strive for the most continuous flow possible when it comes to circulation.

It is obviously a challenging task, in particular considering that some sort of room division is needed and that it is not always realistic to create pathways running through entire rooms. However, it is often a matter of finding balance, or a compromise, within architectural design and room connection. In many cases, some sort of visual connection might suffice to prompt individuals to start a casual interaction. In the Atelier, for example, creating an exterior path where the outdoor balcony is currently located, might already suffice.

Another realisation that emerged while researching is that however practical creating a spatial order based on departments may be, it prevents many interdisciplinary interactions from happening. This is especially important for this particular institution, which prides itself on interdisciplinarity. It may not be realistic to put all departments in the same room, as it would require a construction of enormous dimensions. Again, it is a matter of optimization. A solution could be to group all Ateliers and labs in one building and promote interdisciplinary interaction through strategically placed common areas, such as a cafeteria or a material shop. This way it could be stated that not only does the campus promote social interaction, but that the architecture also favours interdisciplinary collaboration.

According to Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, social interactions can be compared to stage plays, with individuals continually managing impressions and altering their behaviour to match social norms and expectations. Applying this notion to architecture, the Mensa's design has the potential to facilitate and enhance social connections among its users. The Mensa can encourage individuals to get together and socialise by including convivial supplementary architecture components such as comfy seating places, communal tables, and aesthetically engaging design aspects, breaking down barriers and promoting a sense of community. Furthermore, the Mensa can boost the frequency and duration of social connections by carefully placing these sociable places in high-traffic areas, such as near doors or food service stations.

Educational space and its spatial organisation, circulation channels, and architectural design have a considerable impact on social interactions and interdisciplinary cooperation. Creating a continuous flow and visual links within the physical environment can encourage organic social contacts and transdisciplinary exchanges. While having all departments in one room may not always be possible, strategically placing shared areas can stimulate multidisciplinary collaboration. Incorporating convivial

architectural elements in spaces such as the Mensa can also improve social relationships by breaking down boundaries and establishing a sense of community.

Architects and institutions can build environments that optimise social interactions, facilitate interdisciplinary partnerships, and improve the overall educational experience by taking these characteristics into account in the design and organisation of educational spaces.

Goffman's work was revolutionary in classifying social behaviour when it was first published. Although it is a good starting point for such research, there have been other influential writers who discussed the topic with a closer relation to architecture. His point of view on interaction, however, provides important groundwork for the discipline of interior architecture, which has proven successful in recent years thanks to its closeness to the user.

The research presented in this paper intends to emphasise our understanding of the importance of spatial organisation in educational institutions, through the study of the Mensa and Atelier. The work was conducted using an interdisciplinary approach and relying on themes from architecture, psychology, and education.

The findings provide some important insights into the spatial organisation of this academic institution. To begin, the Mensa is recognised as a social area in which staff employees participate as actors, actively creating social interactions and the environment. Guests in the Mensa, on the other hand, are considered participants, playing a supportive role in the performance. While organised social contacts are uncommon in the Mensa, the area allows for casual interactions and social bonding.

The Mensa, despite its potential to bring people together, fails to effectively facilitate social interaction. To enable better interaction in Mensa, several issues need to be addressed. Firstly, the noise problem hinders communication. The space is designed for maximum capacity (see Fig.4), and the full glass windows (see Fig.5) allow noise to travel freely, making it difficult for individuals to engage in meaningful conversations. Secondly, the positioning and function of the cash desk are not user-friendly. Located in the middle of the Mensa (see Fig.6), it restricts visitors from exploring the available food options and instead rushes them into making hasty decisions and payments. Lastly, the aesthetic design of Mensa lacks coherence in creating an environment that encourages user behaviour. Goffman emphasises the importance of creating spaces that foster a sense of community, where individuals can easily connect and interact with one another. Therefore, addressing these issues and finding appropriate solutions becomes imperative. By doing so, the Mensa can be transformed into a more socially conducive space.

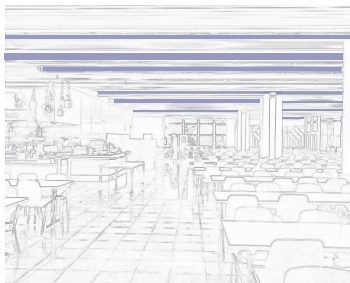


Fig 4: Interior view - Mensa

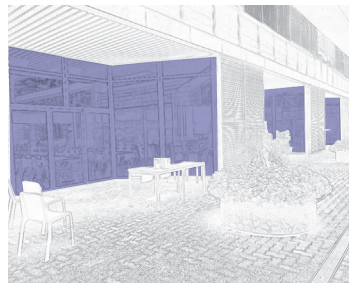


Fig 5: Façade windows - Mensa

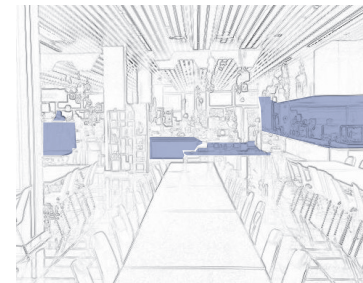


Fig 6: Spatial organisation - Mensa

These difficulties in properly facilitating social contact in Mensa necessitate improvement measures. One source of concern is noise, which impedes communication within space. Acoustic treatments, such as carefully placed sound-absorbing materials, can assist limit noise reflection and create a more favourable environment for talks. Furthermore, rethinking the positioning and functionality of the cash register might improve the user experience. Relocating the cash register to a more visible location,

preferably near the entry, would allow guests to make informed meal selections before proceeding to the payment area, supporting a calm decision-making process and encouraging exploration.

Furthermore, addressing Mensa's aesthetic design is critical to creating a friendly and coherent environment that encourages social connections. Biophilic components, such as natural materials and abundant natural light, can improve the overall ambience and add to a sense of well-being and togetherness. Creating adaptable seating configurations, such as comfy seating clusters, can also help guests communicate with one another. The Mensa may be transformed into a bustling hub that fosters social engagement and improves the overall quality of life for its users by implementing a complete strategy that tackles acoustic concerns, improves utility, and increases the aesthetic appeal of the area.

The Atelier, on the other hand, has a unique dynamic, with both staff and students acting as performers. This creative area could potentially promote interdisciplinary cooperation and casual social interactions. However, the current spatial organisation of the Atelier doesn't take advantage of its strategic position. On the contrary: it impacts its users' interinstitutional contacts on a negative level.

The Atelier's existing spatial organisation does not leverage its strategic position, significantly influencing interinstitutional relationships among its users. Noise and aesthetic difficulties, similar to those seen in the Mensa (see Fig.7), must be addressed to improve interaction. For starters, the noisy noise in the Atelier is a severe and persistent disruption, impeding concentration and production. Furthermore, the layout of the facility is not conducive to a user-friendly environment, echoing the issues raised in the Mensa. While socialising is unquestionably beneficial, it should not be at the expense of personal space. The Atelier's limited ability to provide private work locations is a significant disadvantage, as not all students can work well in the same common environment. The current configuration of the desks (see Fig.8) and of the main circulation path (see Fig.9), does not adequately respond to the students' different needs due to its multipurpose character, which includes lectures, presentations, studying, and the workplace. Furthermore, the absence of visually appealing surroundings detracts from the entire experience. Addressing these borders and creating a more favourable setting should be prioritised to foster meaningful engagement.

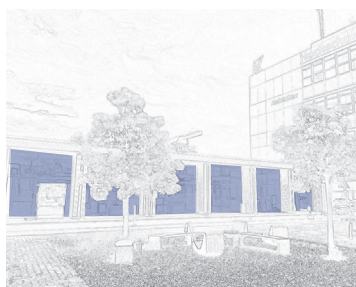


Fig 7: Façade windows - Atelier

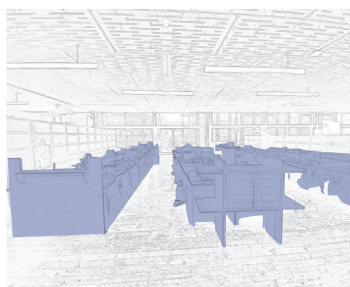


Fig 8: Spatial organisation - Atelier

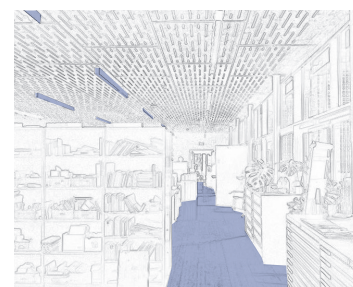


Fig 9: Main circulation path - Atelier

To address the spatial and social challenges of the Atelier, several strategies can be implemented. Firstly, it is crucial to reevaluate the layout of the space to provide designated personal workstations for students. This will enable individuals to have their dedicated area while still fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration within the community. Additionally, incorporating flexible furniture solutions and adaptable spaces will allow for smooth transitions between different activities, catering to the diverse

needs of the Atelier's users.

Moreover, careful attention should be given to the aesthetic aspects of the environment. Introducing visually appealing elements that align with the discipline of interior architecture will contribute to a more inspiring and pleasant atmosphere. By creating an aesthetically pleasing setting, students and staff will be motivated to engage and interact more effectively. Seeking input from the Atelier's users through surveys or interactive sessions will ensure that the implemented solutions align with their preferences and requirements. By adopting a collaborative approach, the Atelier can be transformed into a functional and inviting space that supports social interaction, fosters individual work, and enhances the overall learning experience.

The research proves that the Architecture discipline is highly responsible in shaping interactions, particularly in social establishments such as the HSLU's campus in Horw. In fact, both individual behaviour and interpersonal interactions are profoundly influenced by the spatial organisation of educational institutions. Understanding the relationship between spatial organisation and social dynamics aids in the creation of inclusive and engaging learning environments. Architects and planners can develop facilities that optimise social interactions, encourage interdisciplinary partnerships, and improve the overall educational experience by taking these findings into account.

Concrete ways of improving the design and organisation of educational settings can be deduced based on the observations collected in this paper. To begin, architects should seek continuous flow and visual links within the built environment in order to encourage organic social interactions. Balanced room divisions that create smart circulation links can stimulate interdisciplinary partnerships and break down social barriers. The integration of convivial architectural settings areas like the Mensa, may additionally strengthen social relationships and community building.

It is essential to be aware of the limitations of our research before implementing solutions to improve interactions within Mensa and Atelier. The primary limitation was time constraints, as we were unable to expand our data collection efforts extensively. Although we attempted to integrate our awareness with existing research, further data collection would have enhanced the depth and reliability of our results.

Another notable limitation is the absence of user interviews specifically focusing on Mensa and Atelier user behaviour. By not engaging directly with the occupants of the space, we missed an opportunity to gather valuable insights from the stage participants and actors themselves. Including user interviews would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences and perspectives, enhancing our analysis and recommendations.

This research's findings give light on the growing direction of architecture and its possible impact on social well-being. The emphasis on connecting architecture to its users and bridging the gap between architecture and Architecture represents a trend towards a more user-centred and socially conscious approach. The awareness that architecture should serve people's needs and well-being shows a shift away from purely aesthetic or commercial concerns. This may signify that we, as a society, have to put some of our individual needs towards social well-being.

However, it is to recognise that this architectural transition is not without obstacles. Balancing the

economic, social, and environmental concerns inherent in architectural design necessitates careful navigation and collaboration among architects, legislators, and the general public. Furthermore, it is critical that this transition does not result in a one-size-fits-all strategy, but rather recognises the diversity of individual requirements and cultural circumstances.

Finally, the findings point to an increasing trend towards an architecture that prioritises social interactions. This transition provides a chance for the field to have a constructive impact on society's behavioural norms. To find a balance between human demands, societal well-being, and the greater environmental context, however, intelligent and inclusive approaches are required. Architecture, with careful social study and collaborative effort, can contribute to a more egalitarian and sustainable future.

## **9 Acknowledgments**

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## 10 Declaration of Honesty

29

The authors confirm with their signature that this study paper was written independently, without outside help and without the use of other than the stated aids.

The ideas taken directly or indirectly from external sources (including electronic sources) are identified as such.

The work has not yet been submitted in the same or a similar form.



Azhlyan (Andrea) Ognyanova



Carolina Rossi

Horw, 26.06.2023

## 11.1 Table of Figures

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available at: [https://www.archdaily.com/559617/cultural-and-sports-center-bruther/544714bae58eceb81000094\\_cultural-and-sports-center-bruther\\_detail\\_-1-png](https://www.archdaily.com/559617/cultural-and-sports-center-bruther/544714bae58eceb81000094_cultural-and-sports-center-bruther_detail_-1-png)

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Attachment 1: Time-lapse video of the interior architecture Atelier



Attachment 2: Time-lapse video of the Mensa, part I



Attachment 3: Time-lapse video of the Mensa, part II

