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The New Urban Plaza

A huge park bridge constructed of steel and glass connects the two embankments, gleaming in the sunlight and shining brightly at night, its glazed back providing a venue for the life of the city. It creates a new focal point in the map of Paris.

• The authors of this project aimed at overcoming all the obstacles that stand in the way of disabled people with one great leap. Like a reclining lighthouse, the great blister of the artificial landscape shines in the sunlight during the day, and the huge Chinese lantern illuminates the night. The authors took the title of their project seriously: alterscape. This "other" landscape represents a challenge to reach out for the impossible. The Passerelle Debilly was demolished since it was not fit for people with disabilities. In its place, an artificial landscape spans the Seine. But this glazed steel megastructure does more than just bridge the gap: it brings the two embankments together, providing a new urban plaza for the whole of Paris and a venue for theater performances in summer, meetings, concerts and cinema performances. Here, visitors will find a water park, playgrounds and a garden of the senses.

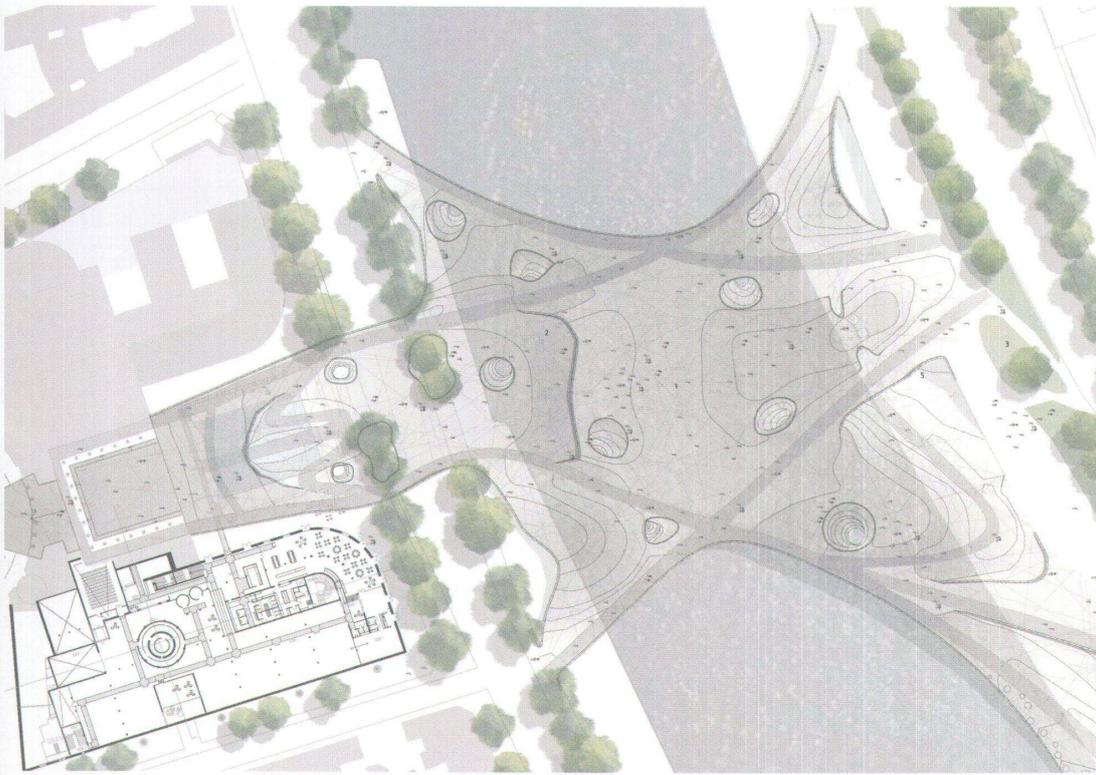
A New Connection

In the center, the structure expands to accommodate exhibition rooms, a tourist office and information points. The trees on the park bridge fill the air with fragrance, and the sheltered space under the plaza abounds in sensory experiences. The glass is variously thick, and thus variously transparent, creating multifarious lighting effects that stimulate the sense of sight, while the sounds engendered by the translucent material animate the sense of hearing. A new connection to the nearby Pont d'Alma subway station provides people with disabilities with direct access to the plaza and allows the connection to public transportation. The new urban plaza ends by the Palais de Tokyo on the upper level of the upper exterior courtyard and the main entrance to the museum. From there, the formal staircase leads to the permanent collection and the temporary exhibitions. Escalators and adjacent elevators make vertical connections easy and self-evident.

The Changed River Landscape

The authors accepted the existing exhibition rooms of the Palais as they are – simple premises like those often seen for the presentation of contemporary art. These are contrasted by the light glass and metal fixtures of the construction on the park bridge. The new spatial organization conforms with the existing building substance without any appreciable interventions. No distinction is made between elements for disabled and nondisabled people – a fact that the jury appreciated, along with the impressive and well worked-out presentation of the project. Technical problems were solved with the help of experts. More emphasis could have been placed on the theme of the garden of the senses and the interactive sensory experiments. The project makes significant changes to the river landscape. On the one hand, through the large park bridge itself, on the other through its prominence on the city map. One Seine crossing is emphasized and accentuated more than any other. Here we see that an intervention on the level of architecture is also an intervention in the city space. Urbanism and architecture are one •

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1 The title of the project is the program: "alterscape". This other landscape represents a challenge to leave familiarity behind.

2 The city landscape from below. The different thicknesses of the glass create a play with various colours.

3 The middle tongue of the plaza leads to the new main entrance, and a side arm to the basement of the Palais.

4 The reclining lighthouse also changes the city landscape: a Seine crossing is particularly accentuated.



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