

In-forming Architecture:

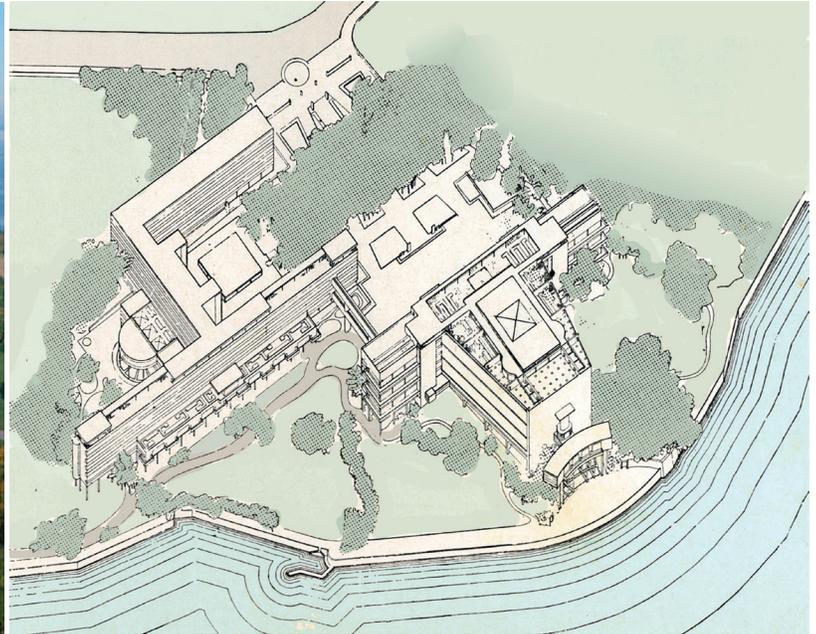
Adaptive Transformation of the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland

Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

Joint Architecture and Historic Preservation Advanced Design Studio

Critics: Jorge Otero-Pailos and Mark Rakatansky

2016 Fall / Mondays and Thursdays 1-6pm



Left: Aerial photo, UN Geneva Complex, Right: Le Corbusier's entry for the Palais de la Société des Nations competition, 1927

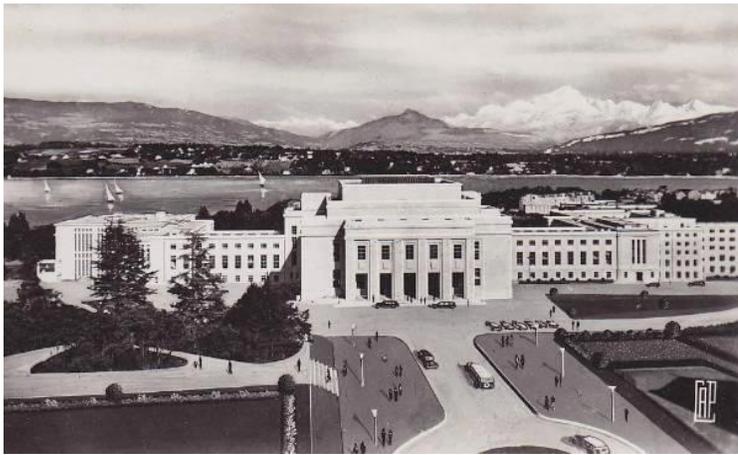
OVERVIEW

The studio will focus on adding a new programmatic intervention into the United Nations campus in Geneva, Switzerland. The Geneva campus, the second largest UN site after New York, is currently in the midst of an extensive sustainable retrofit and expansion. This campus began first as the Palais des Nations, infamous among designers for the rejection of Le Corbusier's competition scheme. The top five winning architects (Julien Flegenhimer of Switzerland, Camille Lefèvre and Henri-Paul Nénot of France, Carlo Broggi of Italy and József Vágó of Hungary) collaborated on the Art Deco complex from 1929-1938, with subsequent renovations and additions in the 1950s and 1970s. With the explosion of new forms of media, necessary for the ever more complex modes of global communication, we will be adding a 50,000 sf addition to engage the expansion of the United Nations Information Services.

The goal of the experimental Joint Architecture and Historic Preservation Advanced Design Studio at Columbia is to explore the innovative engagements involved in the adaptive reuse of major monuments with international, cultural, and historical significance. Previous studios have engaged major modernist monuments in a diversity of international and politically engaged sites including Amman, Brasilia, Chandigarh, London, and Oslo.

PROGRAM

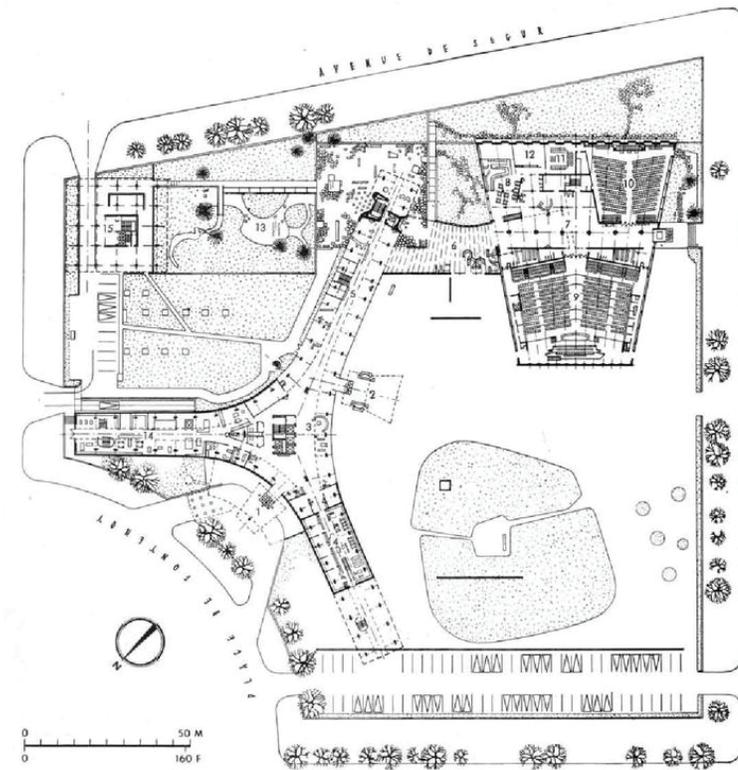
The UN Information Services (UNIS) provides the crucial interface to the public of the UN activities in Geneva and around the world — through digital distribution, exhibitions, print, radio, television, and tours — focusing particularly on the crucial global issues of human rights, disarmament, humanitarian aid and the refugee crisis, world health, and climatic change. Designing new facilities for UNIS will provide the opportunity to envision an addition to the Palais des Nations that will include exhibition, production, distribution, and conference areas to bring forth the work of the United Nations to the visiting public. The studio will focus on the problems and potentials faced today by both architecture and media: how to adaptively reuse existing forms of information to in-form and re-form our relations and exchanges in the world, exploring what new adaptive spatial and political manifestations may be evolved from the prior conceptual formations behind the meaning of the words “United” and “Nation” and “Information” and “Service.”



Historic photograph: Palais des Nations Building, Geneva



Rolex Learning Center, SANAA, Lausanne, 2010



Site Plan, UNESCO Headquarters, Marcel Breuer, Paris, 1958

STUDIO TRAVEL

We will be traveling from October 1-9, first to the Geneva to document the buildings and activities of the United Nations complex. While in Switzerland we will also make a day trip to Lausanne to see the contemporary architecture of the École Polytechnique campus, with its new forms of assembly suggested, for example, by SANAA's Rolex Learning Center. We will then travel to Paris to visit the World Heritage Center, the 1958 UNESCO Headquarters (designed by Marcel Breuer, Pier Luigi Nervi, and Bernard Zehrffuss), and related contemporary cultural facilities and exhibition facilities (including Gai Aulenti's Musée d'Orsay, Frank Gehry's Louis Vuitton Foundation, Jean Nouvel's Cartier Foundation, and I.M. Pei's addition to the Louvre).

STUDIO SEQUENCE

We will start with research into the political and design history of the Palais des Nations competition, through which we will engage in a series of recombinant experiments in adaptive logics, hybridizing the existing structure with aspects of one of the other competition entries, (including Le Corbusier's). From our contemporary moment looking both back and forward, from the past toward the future, we will explore the organizational logics and illogics of the Palais des Nations and the Geneva campus through modeling and dynamic forms of visualization.

Before traveling to Europe, we will tour the United Nations campus in New York to learn about its own spatial and organizational logics. By the time of departure for Geneva, you will be deeply engaged in the organizational morphology and politics of this global institutional complex, already starting to propose your own revitalizing addition and renovation for the Geneva campus. In Geneva, we will meet with local authorities and agencies with regard to the city as well as the UN to explore the urban relations between the two entities, their current plans and future visions. Our week in Geneva, Lausanne, and Paris will provide first-hand feedback to your initial investigations and proposals as you prepare your project for the midterm on October 26, and further to the final on December 14.