ETH Zurich Department of Architecture
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Agritopia
Fall 2023

Future Movements

Connecting Agritopia: Creating Urban-Agrarian Synergies

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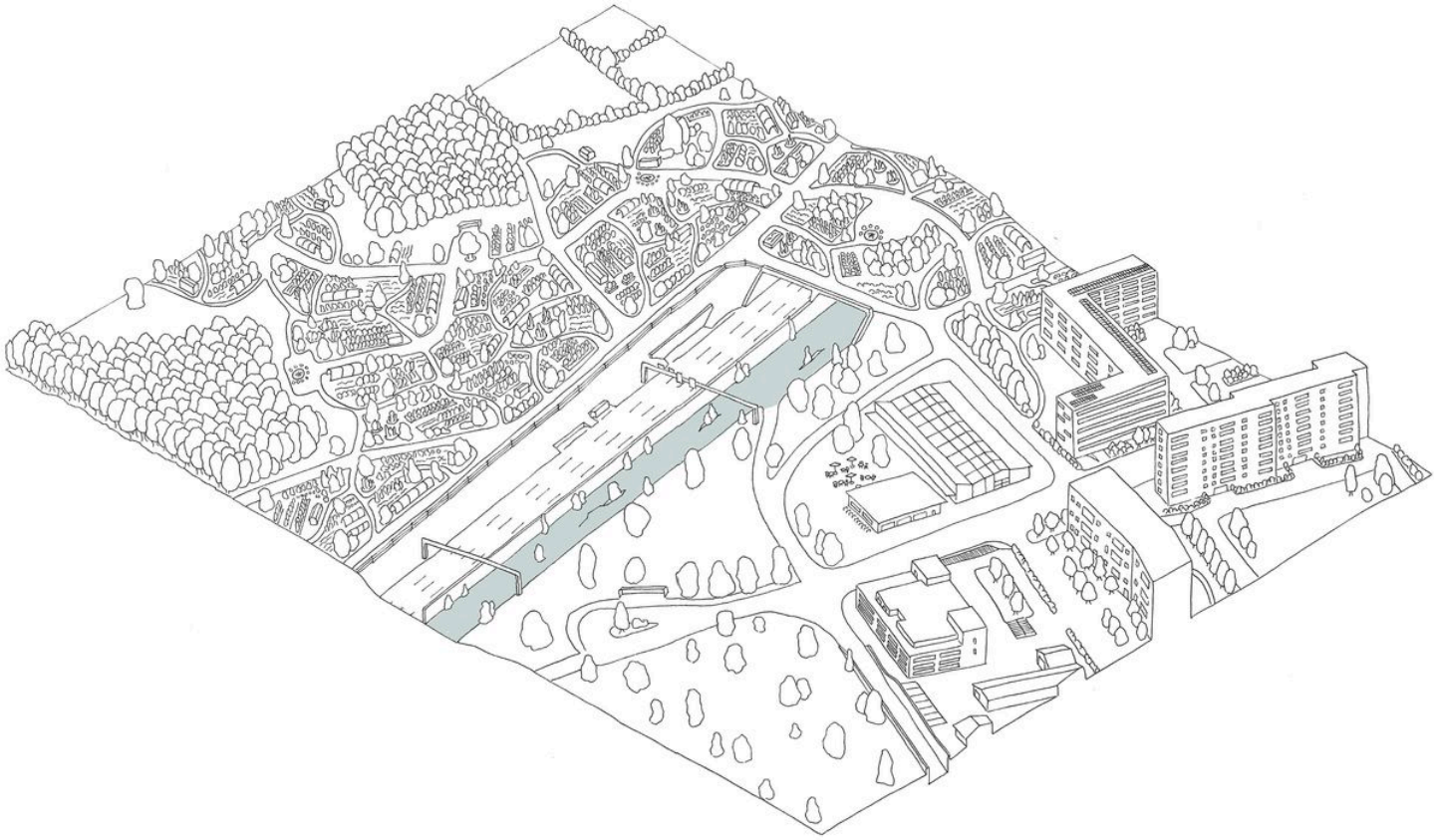
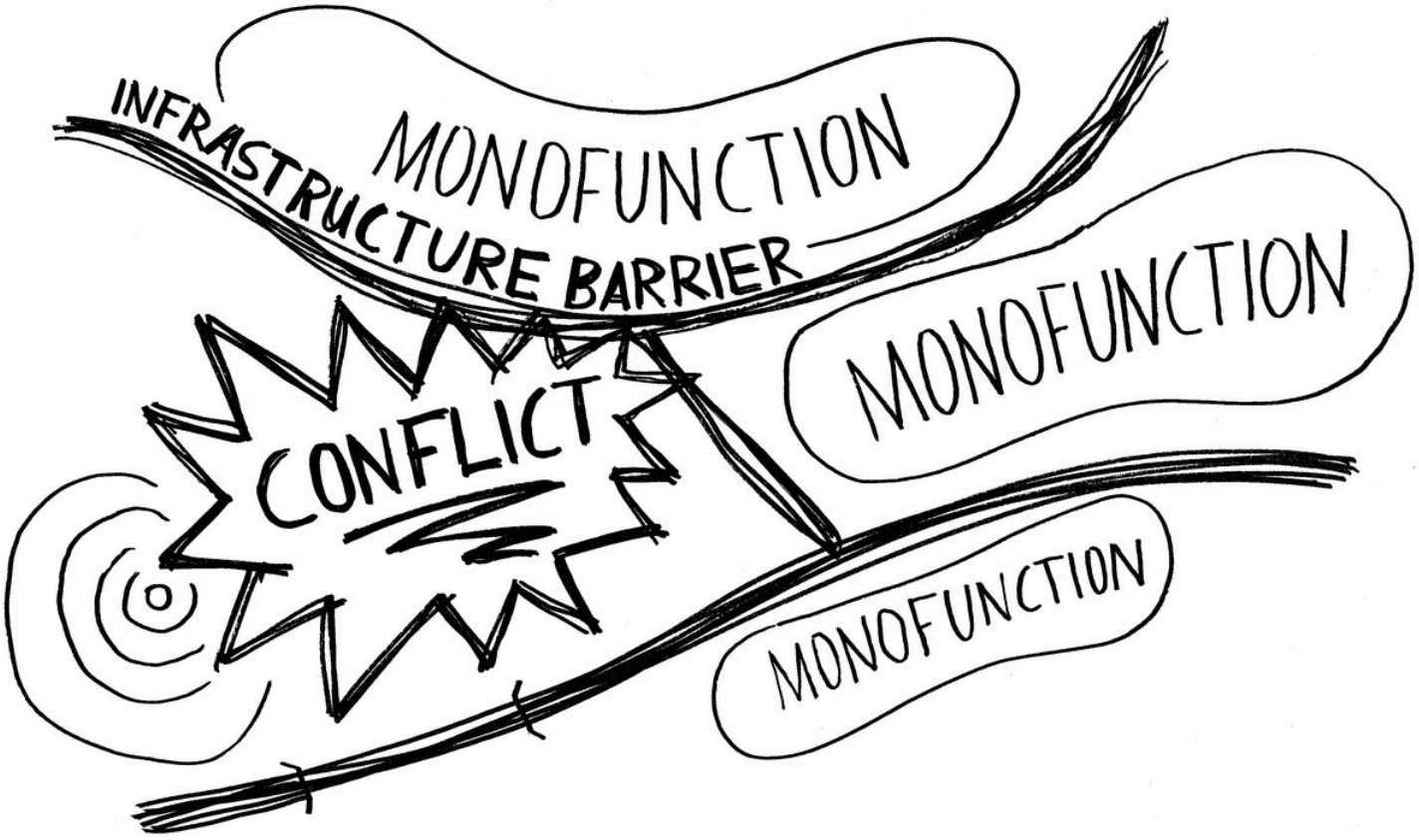


The City of Zurich and its agglomerations are expected to grow in population in the future, which will also increase the pressure on the Zürich Nord area as a recreational area. How can conditions for a productive agricultural environment, and publicly accessible recreational areas be brought together? How can humankind and animal wildlife come together, so that both can profit? How can we create social agrarian synergies as a model project for an agricultural urban society of the future?

Conflicts in an Urban Agricultural Landscape



The site of Agritopia is currently used by different groups of participants, each having their specific needs. For some it is their recreational area, for others, such as farmers, their site of work. The various activities are unevenly distributed: There are areas that are used more intensively and differently, which leads to conflicts due to miscommunication and misunderstanding between farming, nature protection and recreation.

“Vor allem wenns schön isch im Summer, heds vill Velo, Chinderwäge, Spaziergänger…”

“Und das stört?”

“Mengisch, also die einte Velofahrer chömmer ohni Problem chrütze und de gids aber söttigi die tüend würkli blöd, au wenn mer uf de siite isch.”

Quotation from a woman walking her horse on site.



Impression of a busy day on the Hohrenstein Road. Jan Güntensperger, 2023.
https://youtu.be/gxxx-zHVbSA















Bird's eye view of the Katzensee in summer.
Photograph: Hans Krebs, ETHZ Bildarchiv [https://ba.e-pics.ethz.ch/catalog/ETHBIB.Bildarchiv/r/28546/viewmode=previewview], 1979.



People on the Hohrenstein street.
Photograph: Jan Güntensperger, 2023.

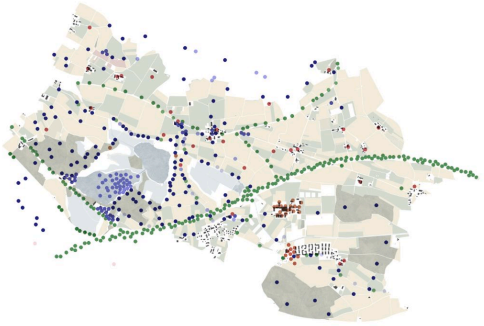


Workers on field of the Solawi "Meh als Gmües".
Source: Genossenschaft meh als gmües, 2023.

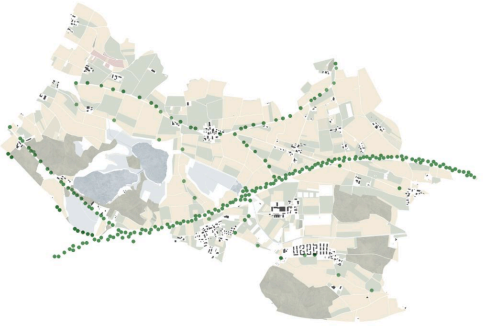


Overlooking the Highway A1 in Affoltern.
Photograph: Jos Auf der Maur, 2023.

User Groups



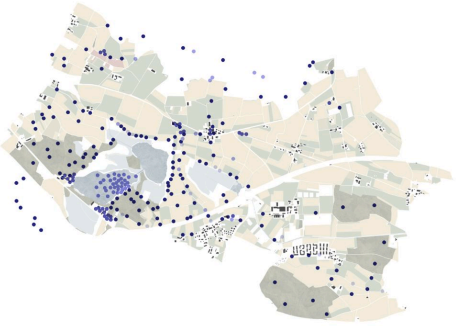
User groups on the site.



Usage by commuters on the site.



Usage by workers on the site.



Usage by recreationists on the site.

THE COMMUTERS

People that travel through the area on a regular basis to get to work or are on their way home. They are mostly concentrated on the road network of the highway and the main roads connecting the villages and the city. These intensively used roads are dividing the site.

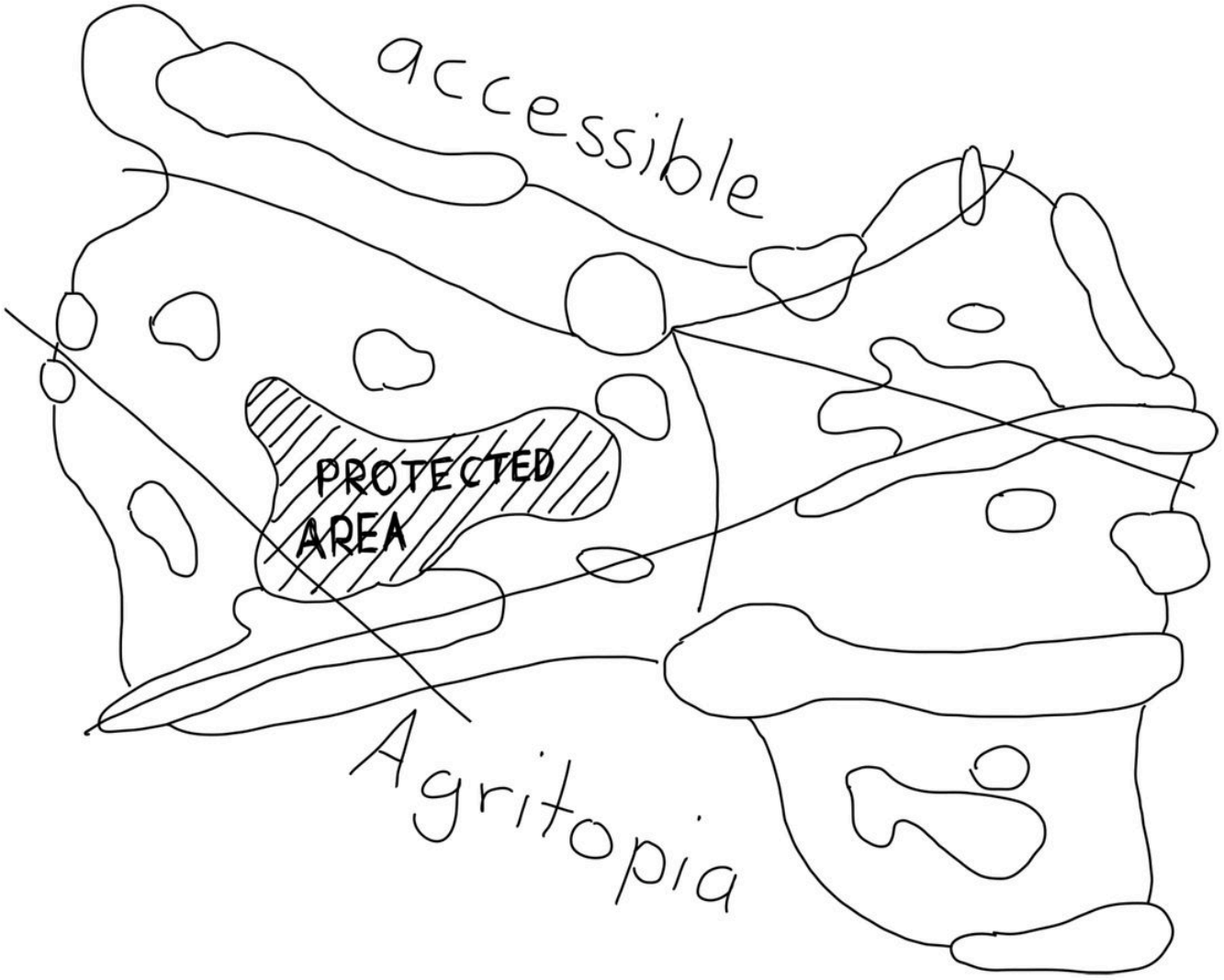
THE WORKERS

People that work in the area. These include farmers, often living and working there with their families, but also scientists of the Agroscope. They are scattered around the area in the open fields or working in the office facilities of Agroscope. Additionally, also the part-time workers of the solidarity-based agriculture farm “Meh als Gmües” can be found in the south of the area.

THE RECREATIONISTS

People enjoying the landscape, doing sports and getting some fresh air. Most of them can be found around the Katzenseen, an area close to nature and an attractive space for stay. Large parts of the site however seem to be avoided. It shows a lack of recreational appeal and is characterized by monofunctional agriculture.

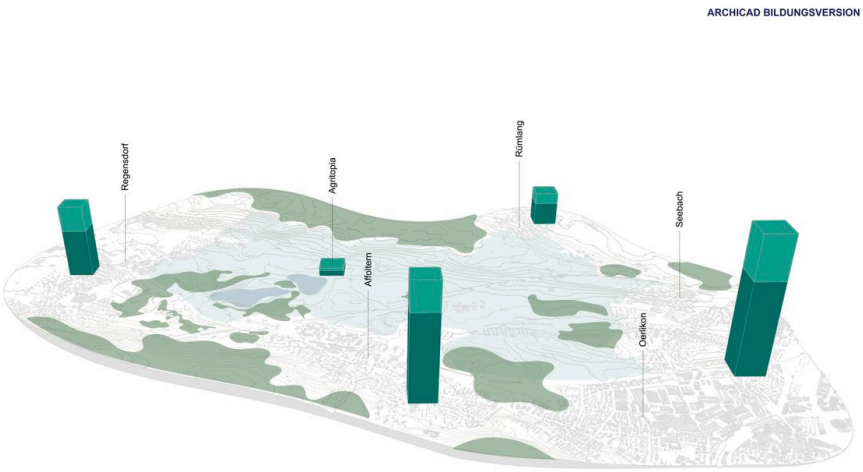
New Ways of Moving in an Urban Agricultural Landscape



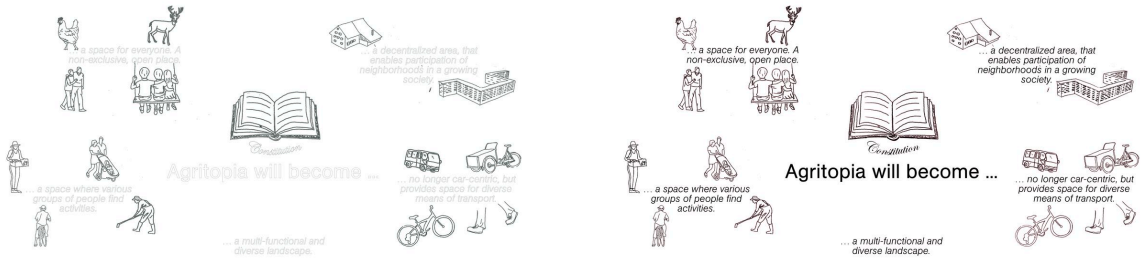
The conditions of inclusion, accessibility and participation must be taken into account for a future urban-agricultural landscape. How will mobility change against the backdrop of climate change and population growth?

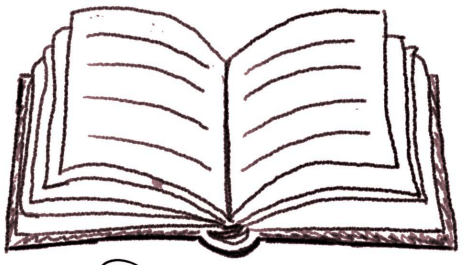
Zurich North, as well as the city of Regensdorf and the village of Rümlang are all expected to grow at a fast rate in the next 50 years. With a population increase of around 35 %, utilisation pressure on the area is expected to increase as well.

As climate change is progressing, the way we move around will have to change drastically. The climate is our reason to accomplish Switzerlands goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2050. As the surrounding cities will grow in population, also their density will be increased, making expanding public transport a logic consequence. As the reduction of cars reduces the space they need, their space can be redistributed to a more diverse transport network and thus creating a less car-centric society. By distributing local produce to the surrounding neighborhoods and processing food on site, the transport distances will be reduced.

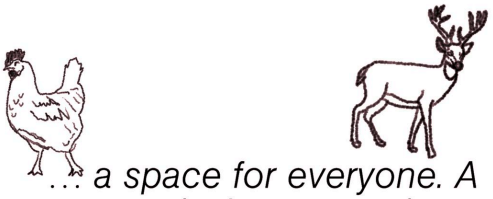


Agritopia Will Become...





Constitution

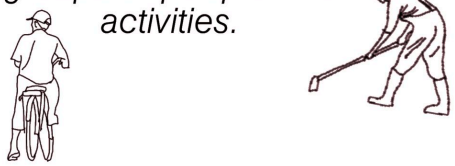


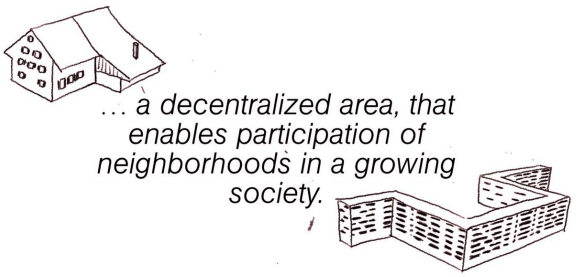
… a space for everyone. A non-exclusive, open place.





… a space where various groups of people find activities.

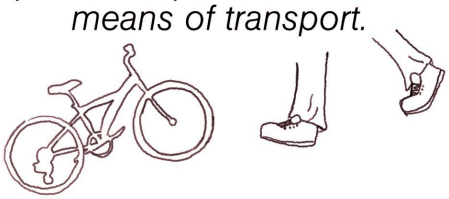




… a decentralized area, that enables participation of neighborhoods in a growing society.

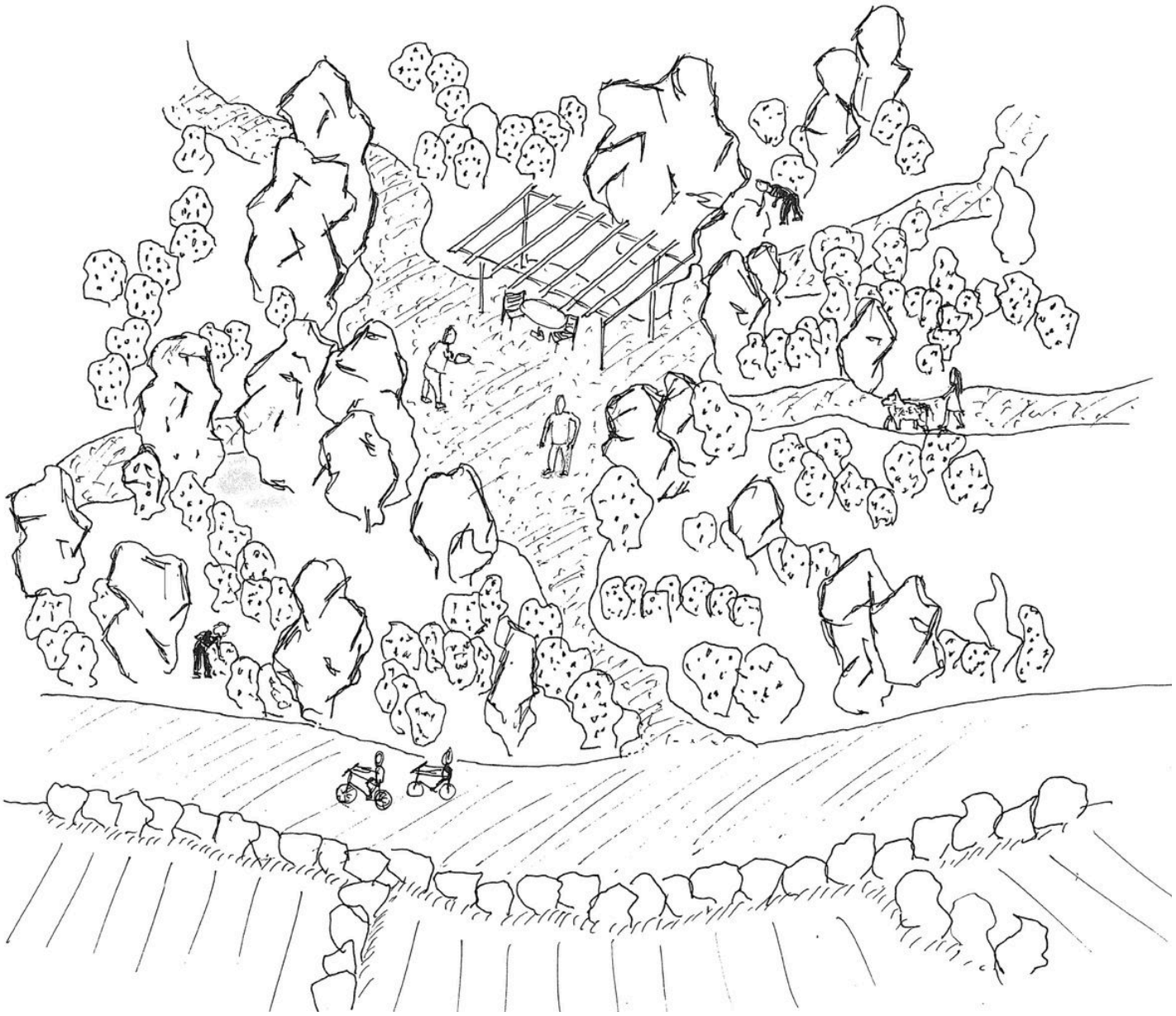


… no longer car-centric, but provides space for diverse means of transport.



Agritopia shall become a space for everyone, including humans, animals and plants. It shall also become a space where all these people find meaning in various activities. Be it by enjoying the landscape, producing their own goods or helping a farmer on site. Agritopia shall enable decentralised movements, supporting the participation of the inhabitants of the adjacent neighbourhoods and reconnecting the city to the land. Mobility in Agritopia will rely less on cars and more on other, less carbon-intensive means of transportation.

Agritopia as an Accessible and Multifunctional Landscape



A multi-functional landscape brings new forms of cultivation, new kinds of people and new attractive landscape features to the site and becomes a part of the surrounding urban fabric.

The new participants of Agritopia can be subdivided into three groups: the agritopian contributors, the agritopian commuters and the agritopian recreationists.

The contributors consist of a large variety of people work to enable a functioning Agritopia. They include farmers, teachers of the educational kitchen and new schools, cargo-bikers distributing produce as well as hundreds of volunteers and part-timers working on the farms.

The commuters now mostly consists of bikers using the new fast cycle routes and car-sharers on the remaining highway lanes. There are also people commuting with the new on-demand public transportation system on the site.

The recreationists will still be using the site, enjoying the varied landscape of Agritopia and looking for a new connection to nature away from consumption. New permaculture gardens on the city edge also provide space for recreational gardening or stay, establishing a new relationship between the urban population and agricultural produce.



Agritopian contributors



Agritopian commuters



Agritopian recreationists



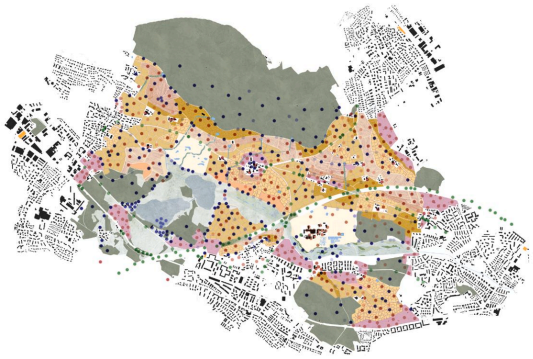
Agritopian contributors



Agritopian commuters



Agritopian recreationists



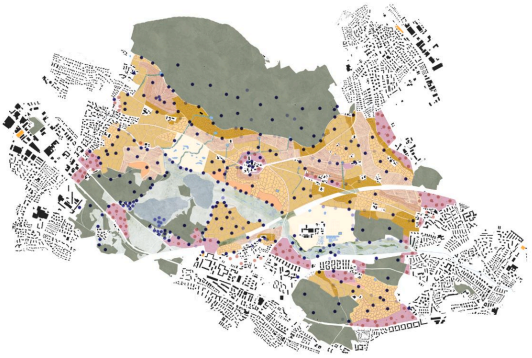
User groups in Agritopia.



Usage of commuters in Agritopia.



Usage of contributers in Agritopia.



Usage of recreationists in Agritopia.



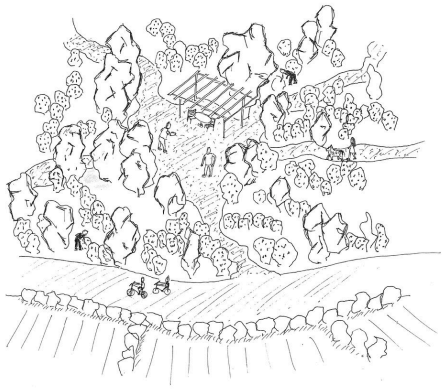
high accessibility

low accessibility

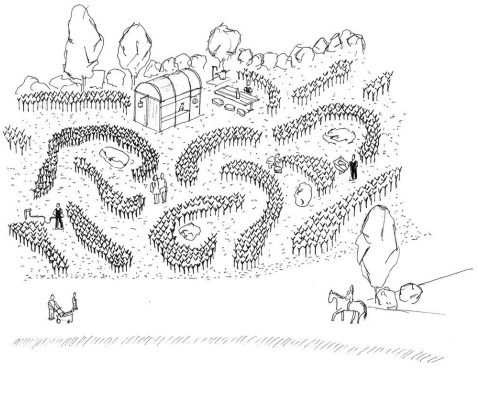
With the new landscape and cultivation, the accessibility of the different zones changes as well. Agricultural land becomes in general due to volunteer and part-time options more accessible and even opens up in certain areas new potential for recreation. Other parts of the site are no longer accessible by humans to protect the nature.



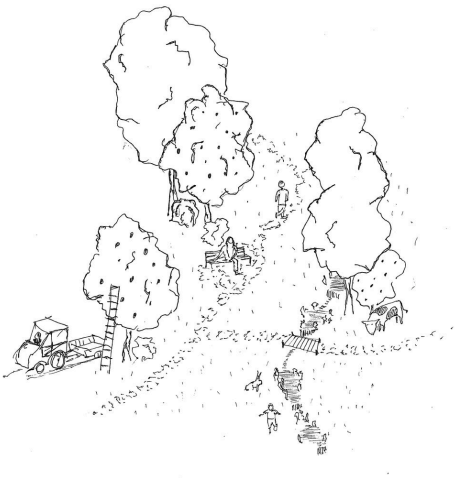
Accessible areas for recreation in Agritopia.



Close up of a berry field



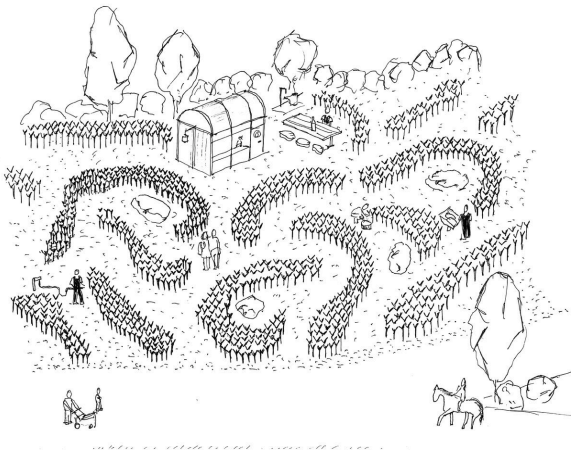
Close up of the rosegarden



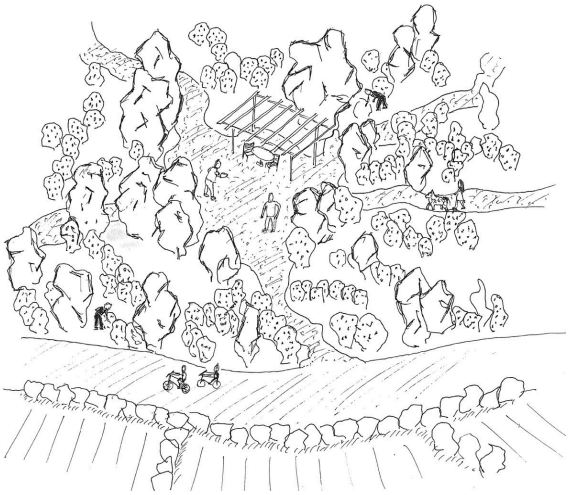
Orchards



Wetlands



Rose garden



Berry fields

The new accessible agricultural lands include orchards and berry fields for fruits and nuts, that allow the public to explore the lanscape on a hike or rest and have a picknick.

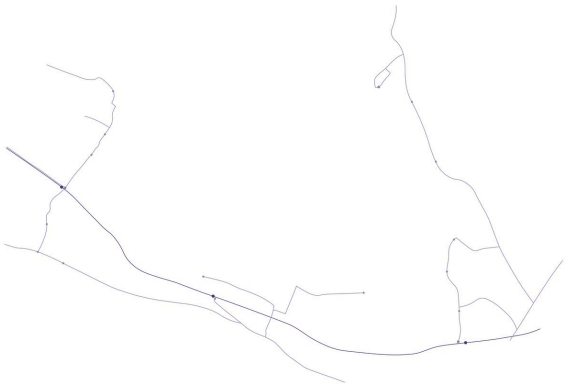
The wetland surrounding the Katzenbach can attract animals and humans alike. Children can play at the creek, while their parent may rest on the wooden footbridge and enjoy the sun.

Various small-scale gardens like the permaculture gardens at the city edge, or a rose garden located centrally provide a welcoming atmosphere for resting and encounters.

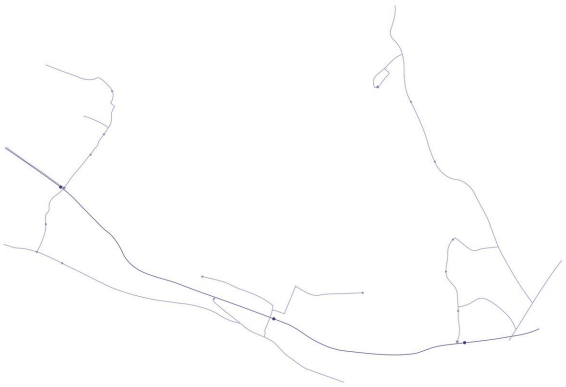
Currently the entire area is well accessible by car, public transportation however is mostly absent with only a few bus stops and a train station in the surrounding residential areas. Many parking spaces on our site allow for car users to come from far away, whereas people reliant on public networks have a much harder time to reach the area.

As the car-centred transportation network will be replaced by more varied ways of travelling, the main roads in Agritopia will be transformed into fast cycle route. Car sharing is promoted, and to access Agritopia, only public transport and cars by ways of exception will be enabled to enter.

The public transport will also be expanded into the area to connect the surrounding cities and access the Katzenrüti hamlet.



Public transportation today



Public transportation in Agritopia



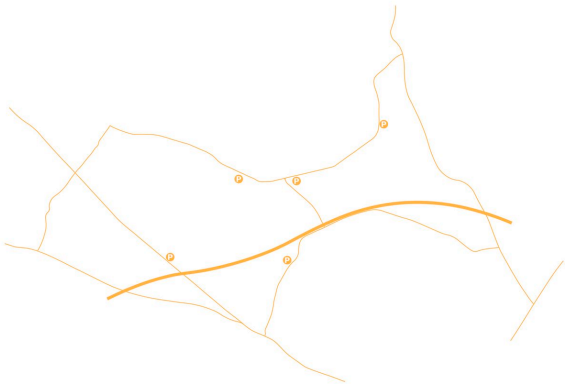
Current car network.



Car network in Agritopia.



Fast cycling routes in Agritopia.



Car network and parking spaces today



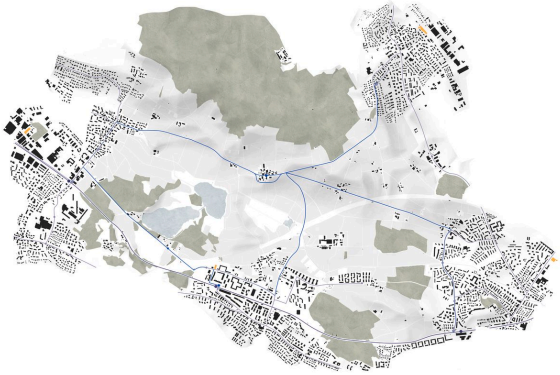
Car network and car sharing locations



Current public transit network



Public transit network in Agritopia



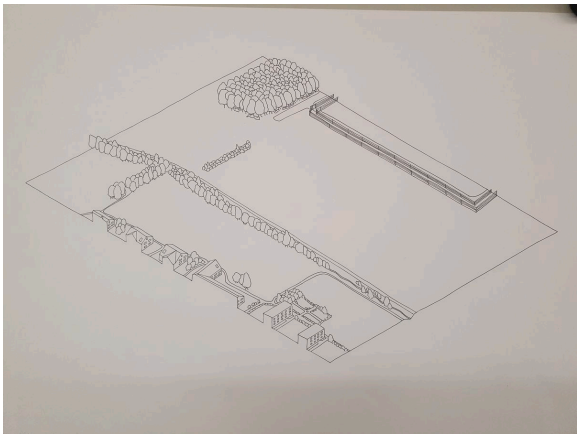
Public transit network of Agritopia

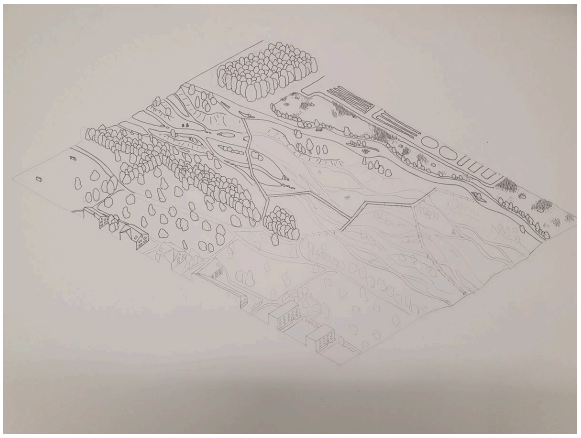
Promoting Social Interaction



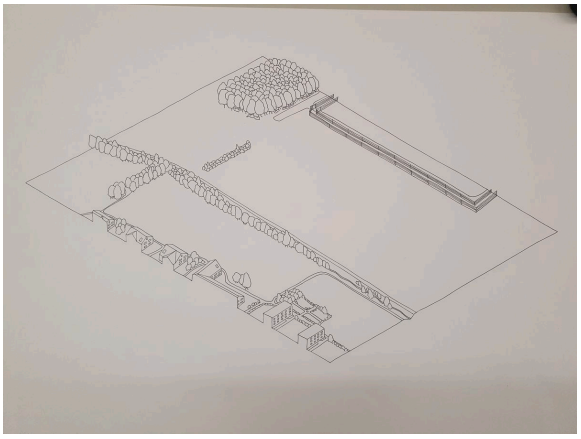
By using the principle of blurring boundaries, creating multifunctionality and connecting places the landscape will be made accessible for humans. Thus creating places for social interaction in accordance with nature and agriculture.

Katzenbach





Situation at the Katzenbach in Agritopia



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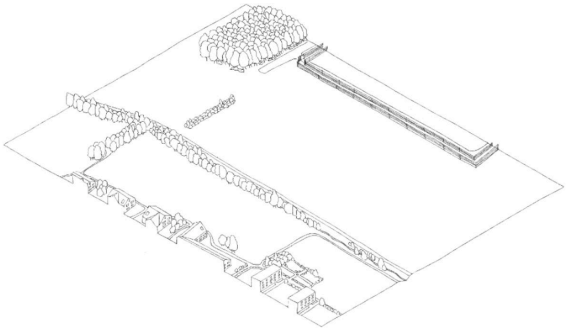

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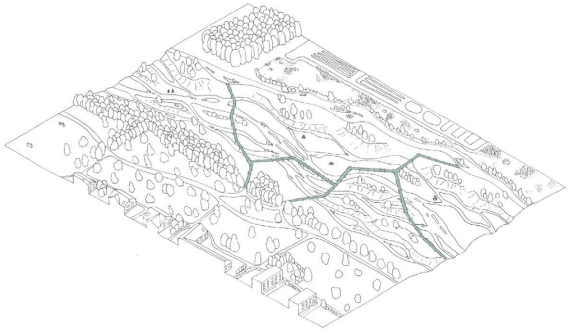

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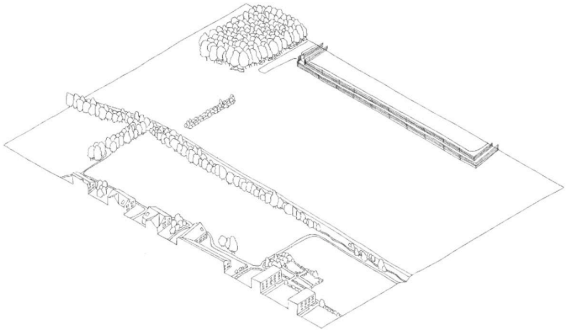

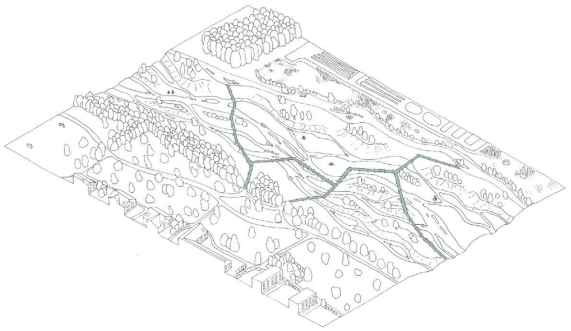

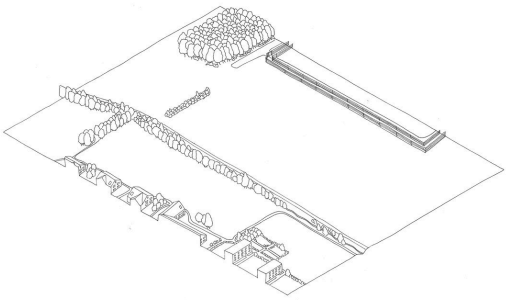

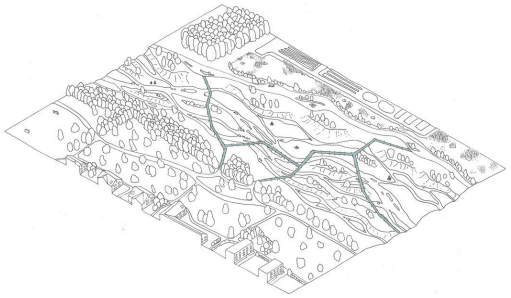

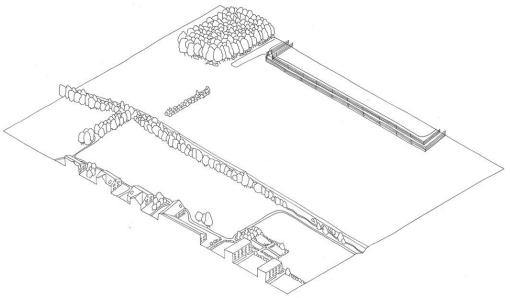

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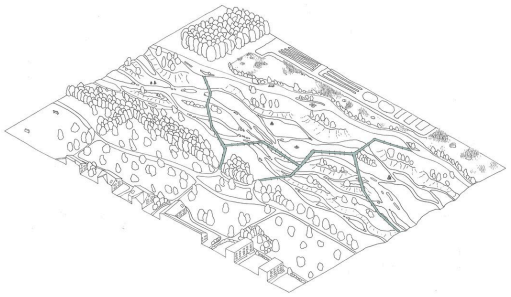

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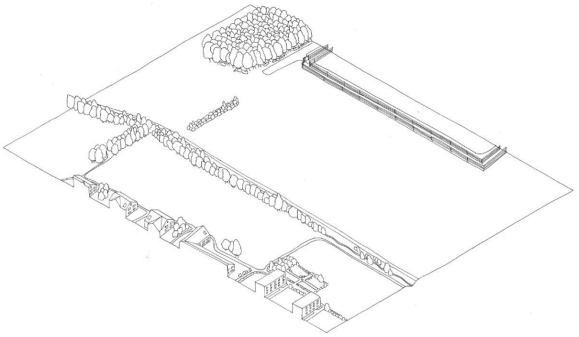

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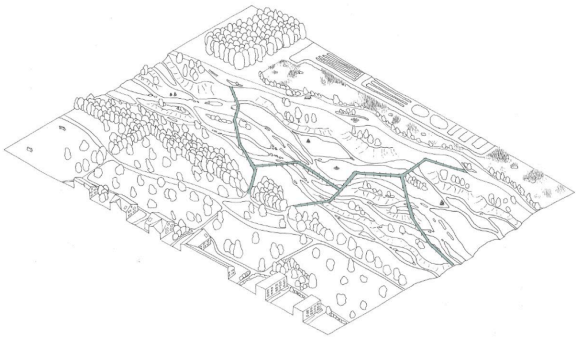

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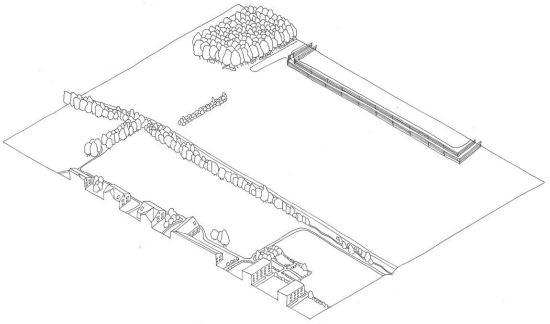

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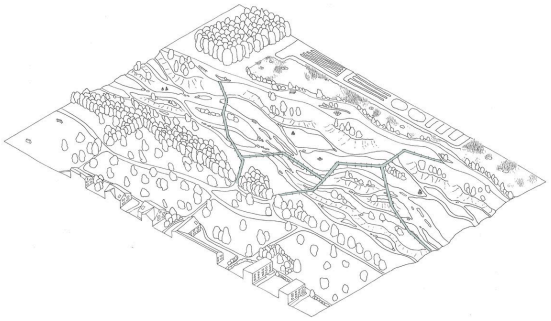


Situation at the Katzenbach in Agritopia

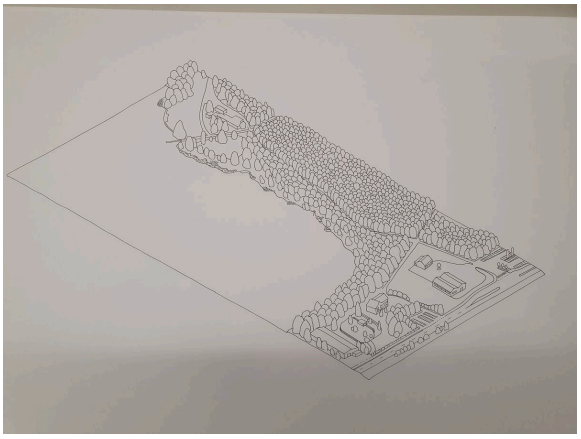
The area between the settlement edge and Agroscope is nowadays used for agriculture and for research. Some parts of the research fields are behind big fences. One footpath follows the small channeled Katzenbach.

In Agritopia, the area changed its appearance completely. The Katzenbach is renaturalised and can flow freely in a much wider area. The flow of water, and with that the areas appearance can vary extremely depending on the time of the year and the amount of rain.

Agroscope also shifted their research to new ways of agriculture with a focus of close to water agriculture.

The renaturalised riverbed becomes a new space for different actors. Nature can roam freely; plants can grow and animals find a new habitat. At the same time, it becomes accessible for humans. Boardwalks cross the river, connect the two sides and form a new path to explore the area. One can also leave the boardwalk on one of the little islands. This is a nice place for families, where the children can play in the shallow streams, build small dams or make a picknick with a small bonfire.

Katzensee



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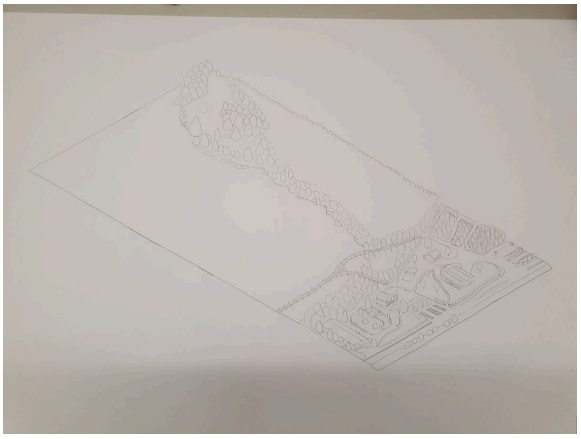

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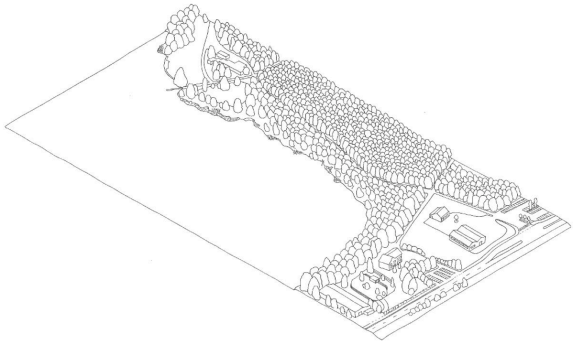
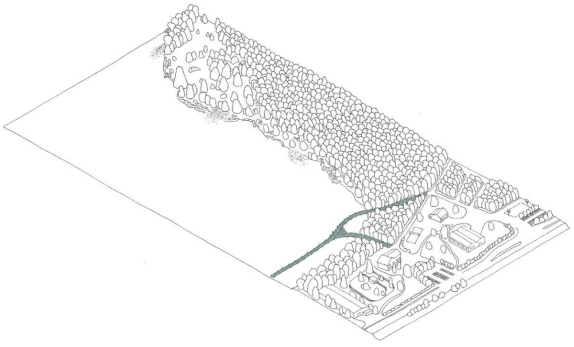
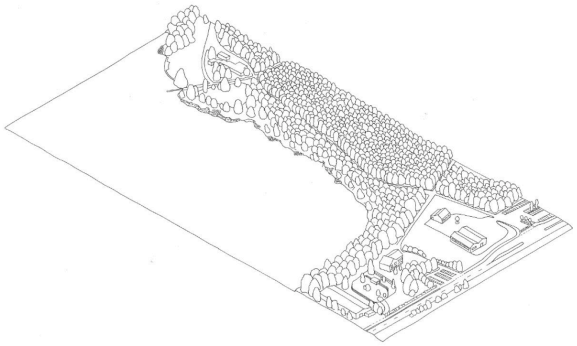


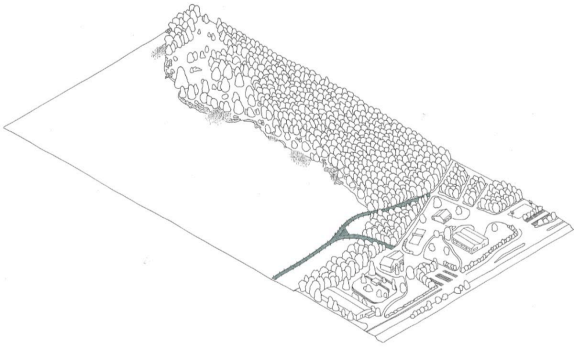
Current Situation at the Katzensee



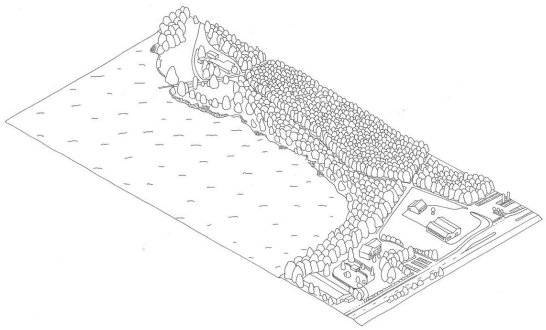
Situation at the Katzensee in Agritopia



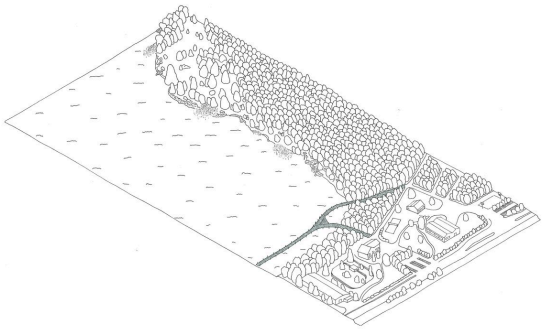
Current Situation at the Katzensee



Situation at the Katzensee in Agritopia

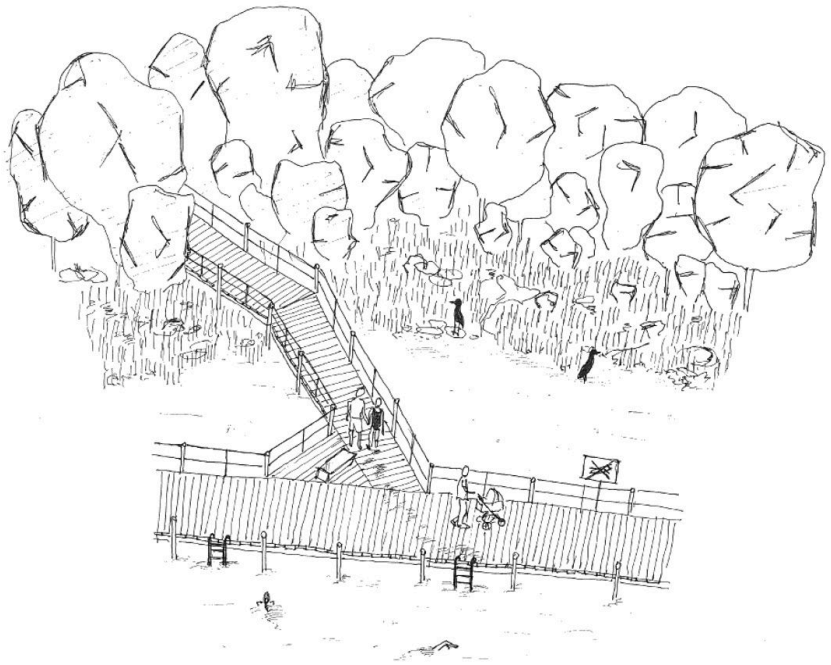


Current Situation at the Katzensee



Situation at the Katzensee in Agritopia

Currently the Katzensee, as well as its surroundings are very frequently used, in the summer often even overcrowded. It functions as an area for walking, cycling and to explore the nature. The Katzenseebadi is popular for swimming and resting. Firepits in the forest create intensively used spaces and different destinations like the event location or the Dampfbahn Katzensee attract users from further away.

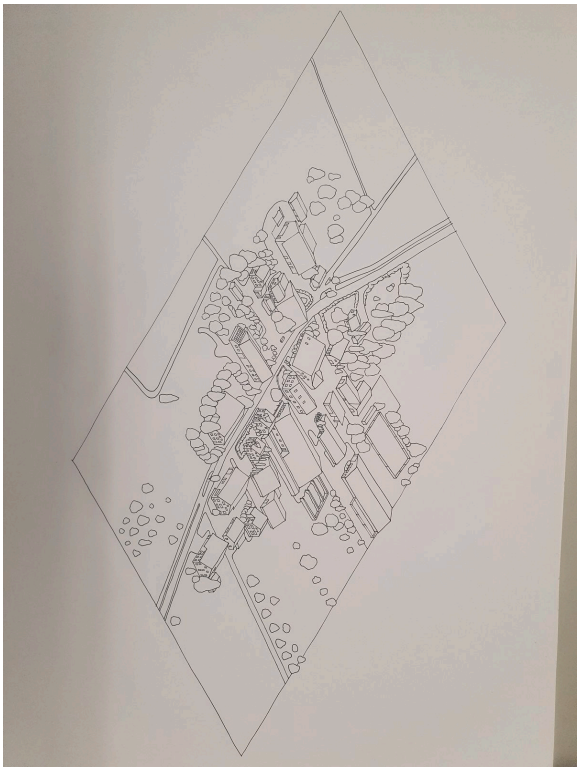


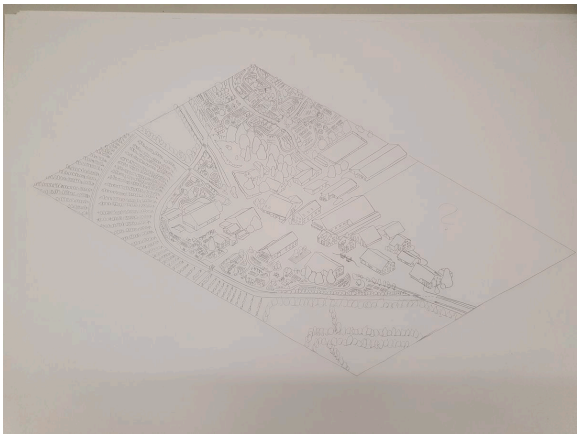
Located in a sensitive area regarding biodiversity and nature protection, the increasing use for recreation poses challenges. Respecting the interests of Nature the decision was made to close the existing Katzenseebadi. The protected areas were expanded and paths through the forest shut down to ensure quiet and uninterrupted spaces for wildlife.

To still allow people to swim in the beautiful Katzensee, a less invasive way of granting access to the lake was created. The Badi is now located in the south, along the Wehntalerstrasse and next to the existing restaurant, which is now only used by bikes and public transport. This is also an improvement for the wildlife crossing the street, together with small underpasses for small animals.

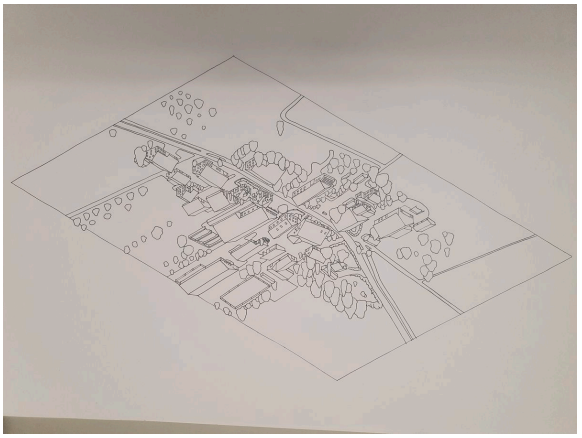
The existing parking spaces along the streets are reused as bike parking and for sport grounds. People who visit the area to swim or for other recreation can use the lawns between the street, buildings and the forest to relax.
Swimming is only possible from the boardwalk which crosses the lake. This reduces the impact of humans on the nature along the lake shore. The boardwalk is also closed between January and March, which is the breeding season of birds and thus a sensitive time for wildlife.

Katzenrüti

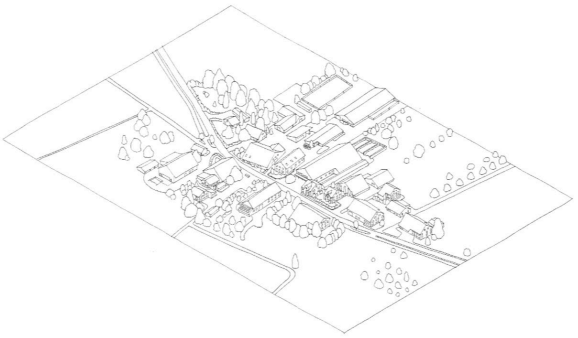




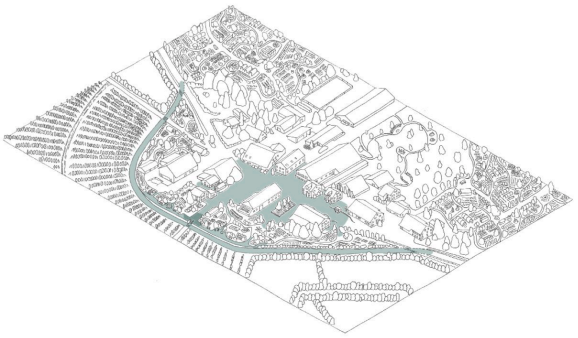
Situation at the Katzenrüti in Agritopia



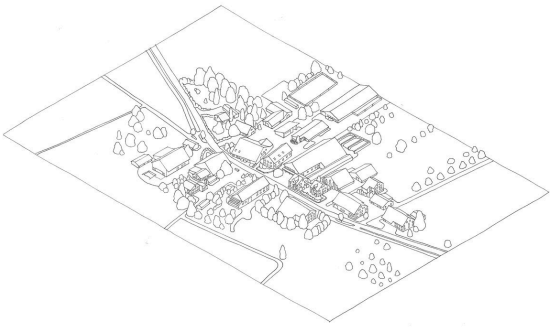
Current Situation at the Katzenrüti



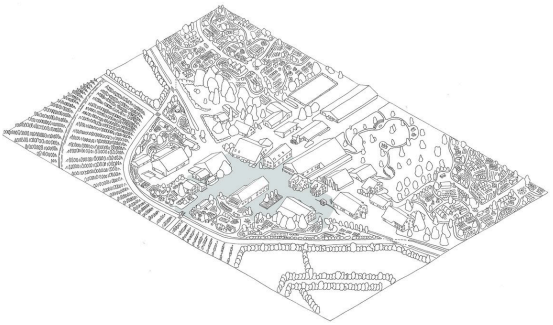
Current Situation at the Katzenrüti



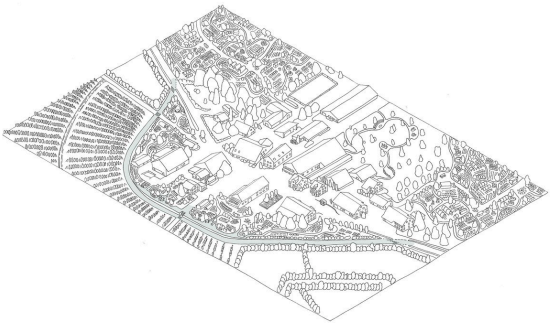
Situation at the Katzenrüti in Agritopia



Current Situation at the Katzenrüti



Situation at the Katzenrüti in Agritopia



Situation at the Katzenrüti in Agritopia

Looking at the current situation we can see how the highly used main Rümlanger-/Katzenrütistrasse cuts through the Hamlet. Many buildings are abandoned and have lost their functions.

Katzenrüti in Agritopia is to become the vibrant centre of Agritopia. By reusing the abandoned building and bringing in new jobs, homes and uses, the hamlet is revived. New institutions like the educational kitchen also bring local children into Agritopia. The areas around the buildings have also changed and are used for different kinds of agriculture.

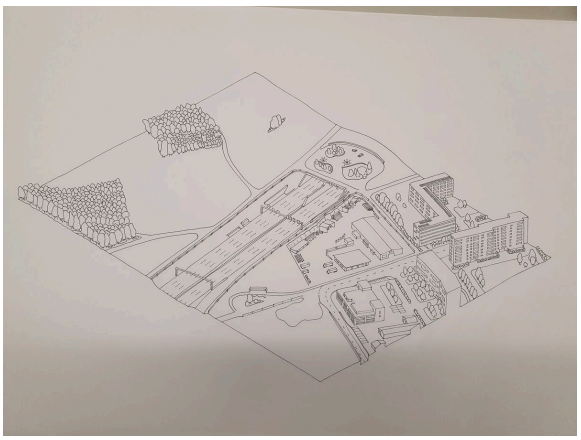
The main road which cut through the hamlet in 2023, and that is now the highspeed biking and transport route through Agritopia, is redirected around the buildings. This allows for uninterrupted travelling of cyclists and e-bikers, and at the same time eliminates the existing cut.



The public space in the middle of Katzenrüti is changing into a Plaza. In this area, many different temporary and also spontaneous uses find space to happen. Here the community can gather and enjoy the new life in Agritopia.

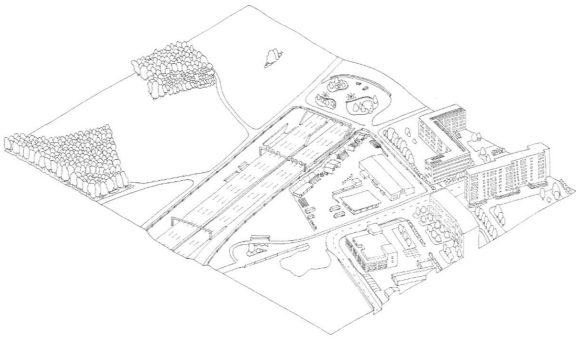
The new route at the southern side of Katzenrüti can be overlooked by people enjoying the view over the Vineyards and Zurich Nord. By creating this height difference, the visual boundary of the street is blurred and no longer perceived as an obstacle.

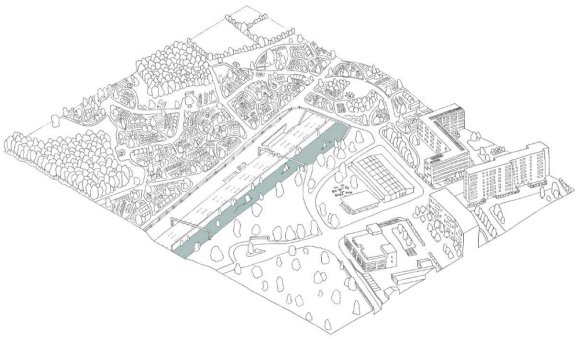
City Edge



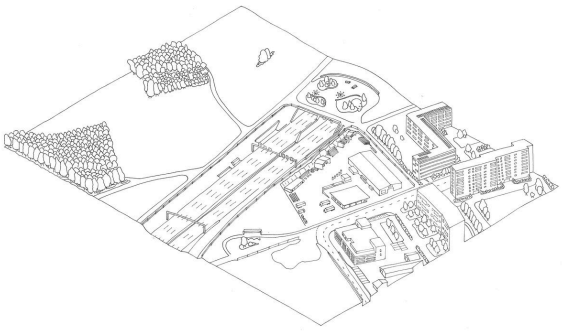
Current situation at the city edge

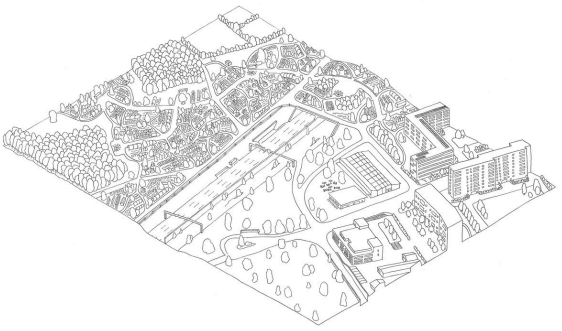
Situation at the city edge of Agritopia

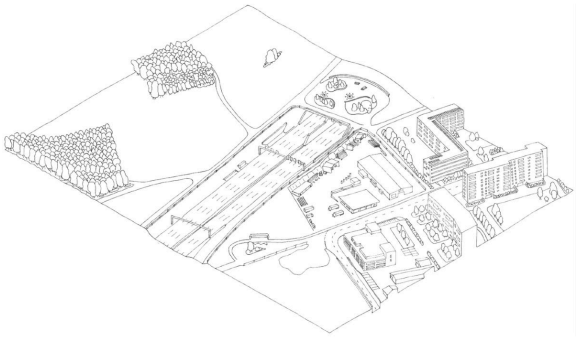


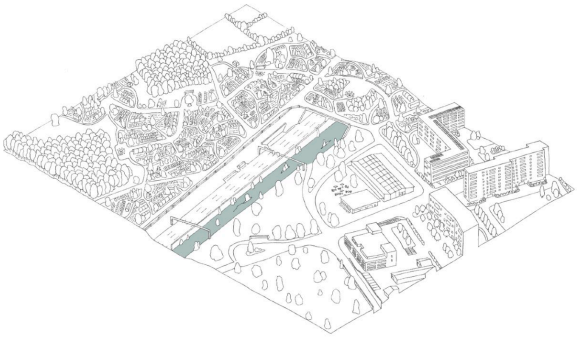


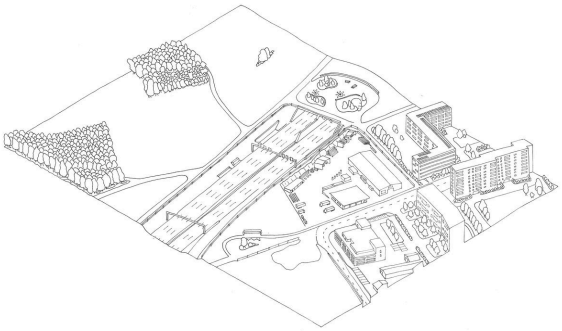
Current situation at the city edge

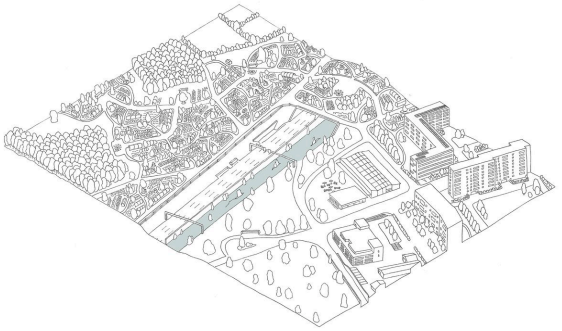












Current Situation at the city edge

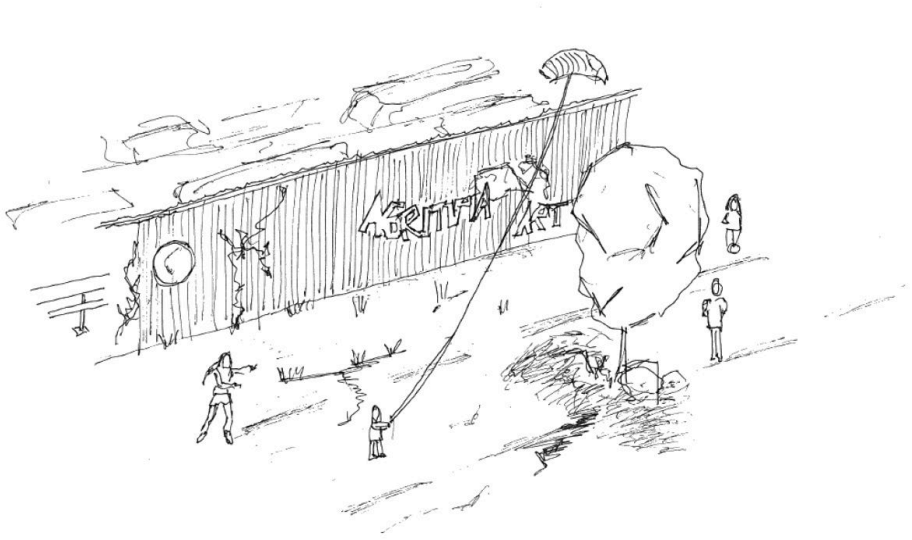
Situation at the city edge of Agritopia

One of the most intensely used highway section of Switzerland is crossing the site. And as Affoltern has grown the city has been getting closer and closer to the highway. The highway as a large impassable infrastructure divides the landscape in two.

Looking at the area between Affoltern and the Katzensee, one can see how close the settlement, agriculture, recreation and the highway are. Today, this area is mostly used by industry, but is becoming more and more a residential area.

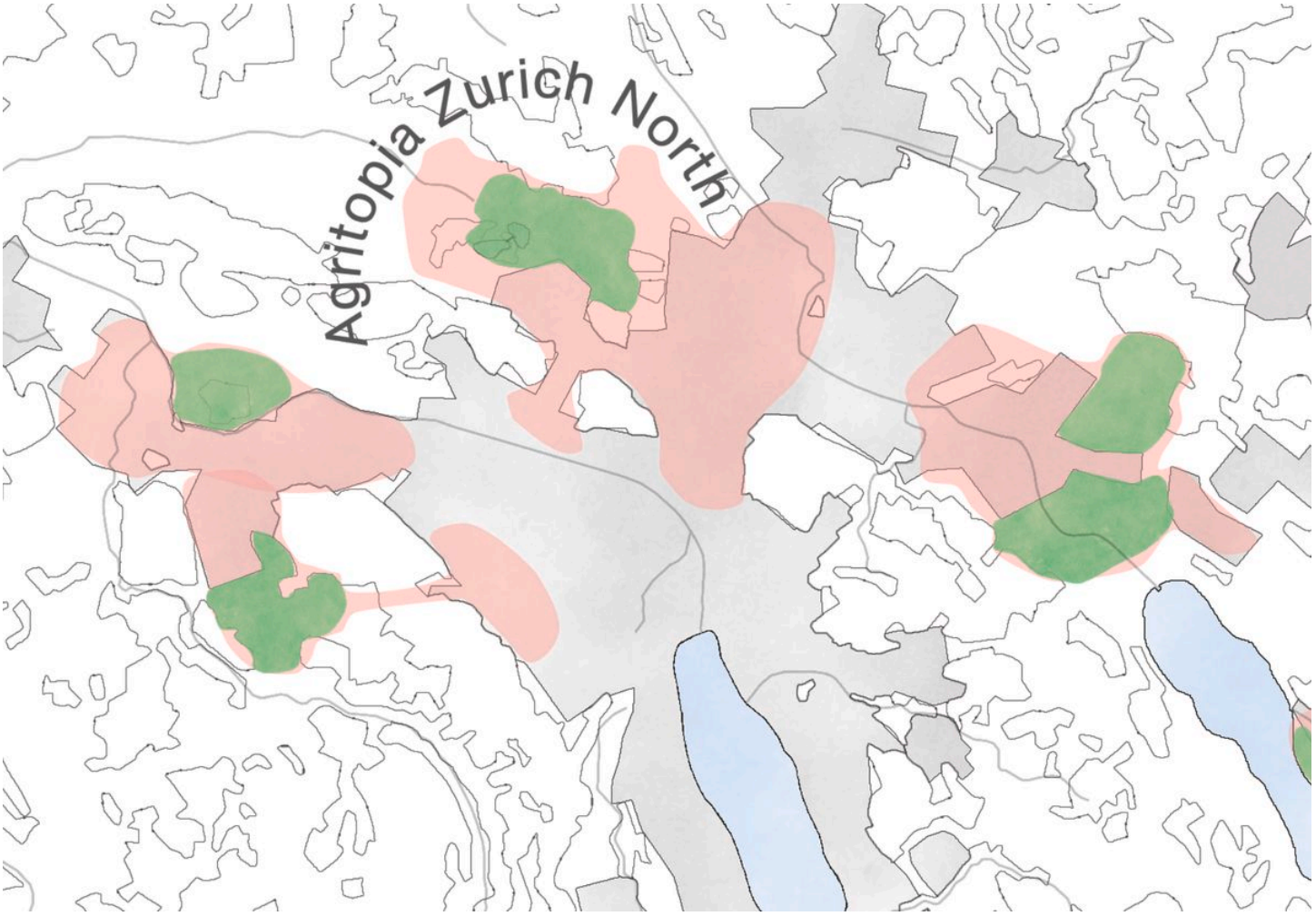
The new highway is to be embedded better into the landscape. Additional and diverse highway crossings provide a better connection for humans, herd animals and wildlife in between the areas. As mobility changes to reach a net-zero Switzerland, so will the highway change.

The existing lanes will be reduced and condensed. The now fewer lanes can be adapted flexibly, allowing additional lanes in one direction depending on traffic volume.
The newly unused lanes can decay in a controlled manner and will be made accessible to the public. The tarmac of the highway therefore can provide space for cycling, skating or flying dragons, whereas the controlled decay may allow the highway to also become a habitat for plants and animals. By reducing the width and number of lanes, the visual barrier also becomes smaller.



With the newly created depot, a new community area can develop, connecting the people of the neighborhood. Highly flexible free areas, on the highway and around the hub provide space for art and culture, nature and recreation, as well as the possibility for events.
Surrounding permaculture gardens let the neighborhood appropriate the agricultural land close to the city edge for productive gardening.

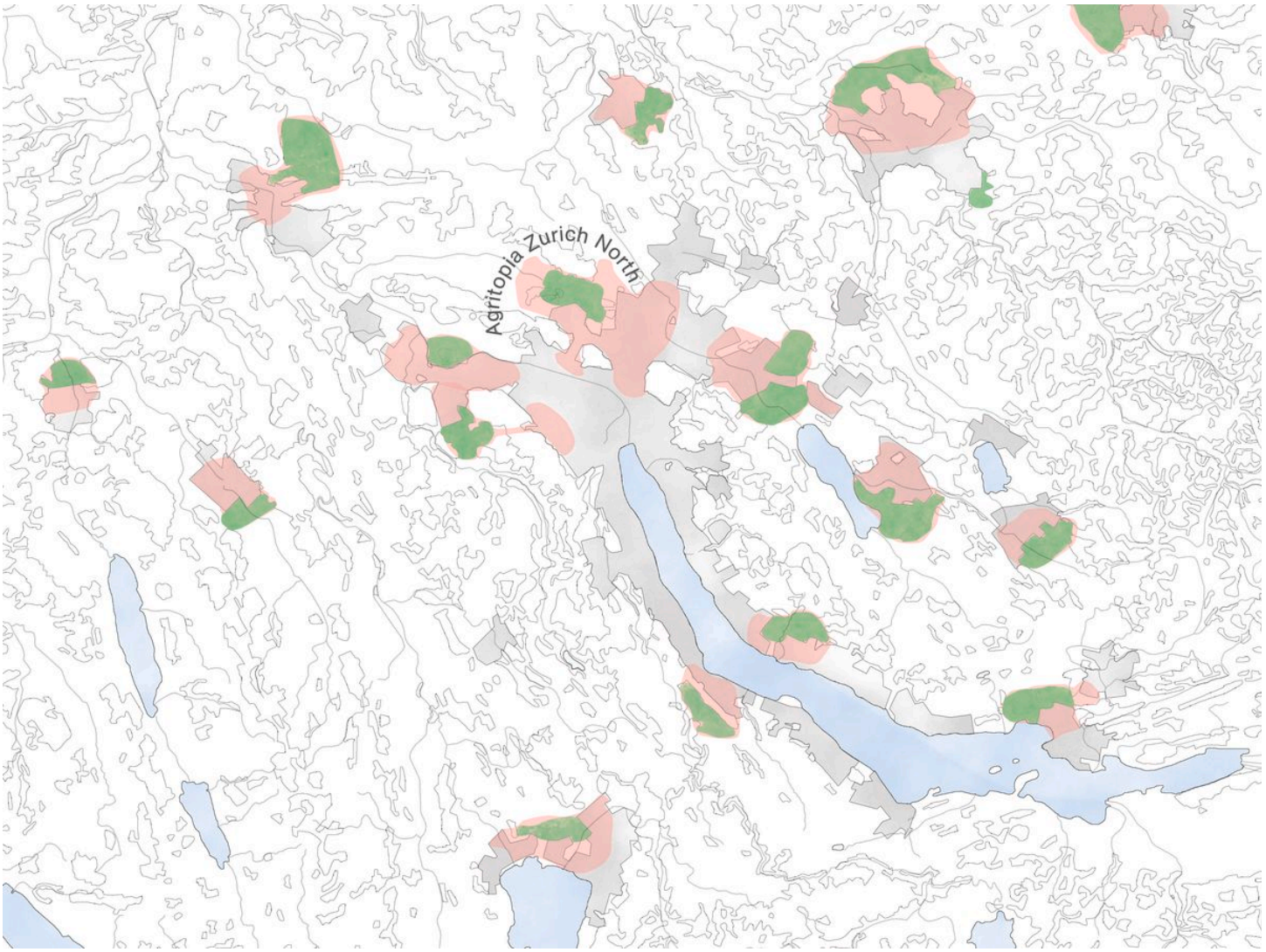
Agritopia as Prototype



The site of Zürich Nord can be a prototype for more agriculturally accessible and participatory landscapes at the city edge.

The concept of Agritopia will be an adaptable model for agricultural leisure areas close to growing cities of the future. While the circumstances and needs of the inhabitants change from city to city, the concept of bringing together different participants stays the same. By providing Agritopias for every big settlement, the distance to reach the next Agritopia becomes shorter and therefore the travel creates less pollution and traffic.

Agritopia of Zurich Nord shall therefore not be an exception, but much more an example for an inclusive, participatory and accessible landscape. The common needs and rules are defined by Agritopia's Constitution.



Possible locations for Agritopias in the region of Zurich.

Agritopias
Served area
Settlement area
Waters

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the kind people we met on our research walks for their personal informations, as well as Prof. Dr. Kay W. Axhausen for providing us with insightful knowledge on transportation in the future.

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