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The Production of Cloud
Fall 2025

The Swiss Cloud: A Thought Experiment on Digital Sovereignty

Timo Feddern, Joanna Druey, and Valentin Egger

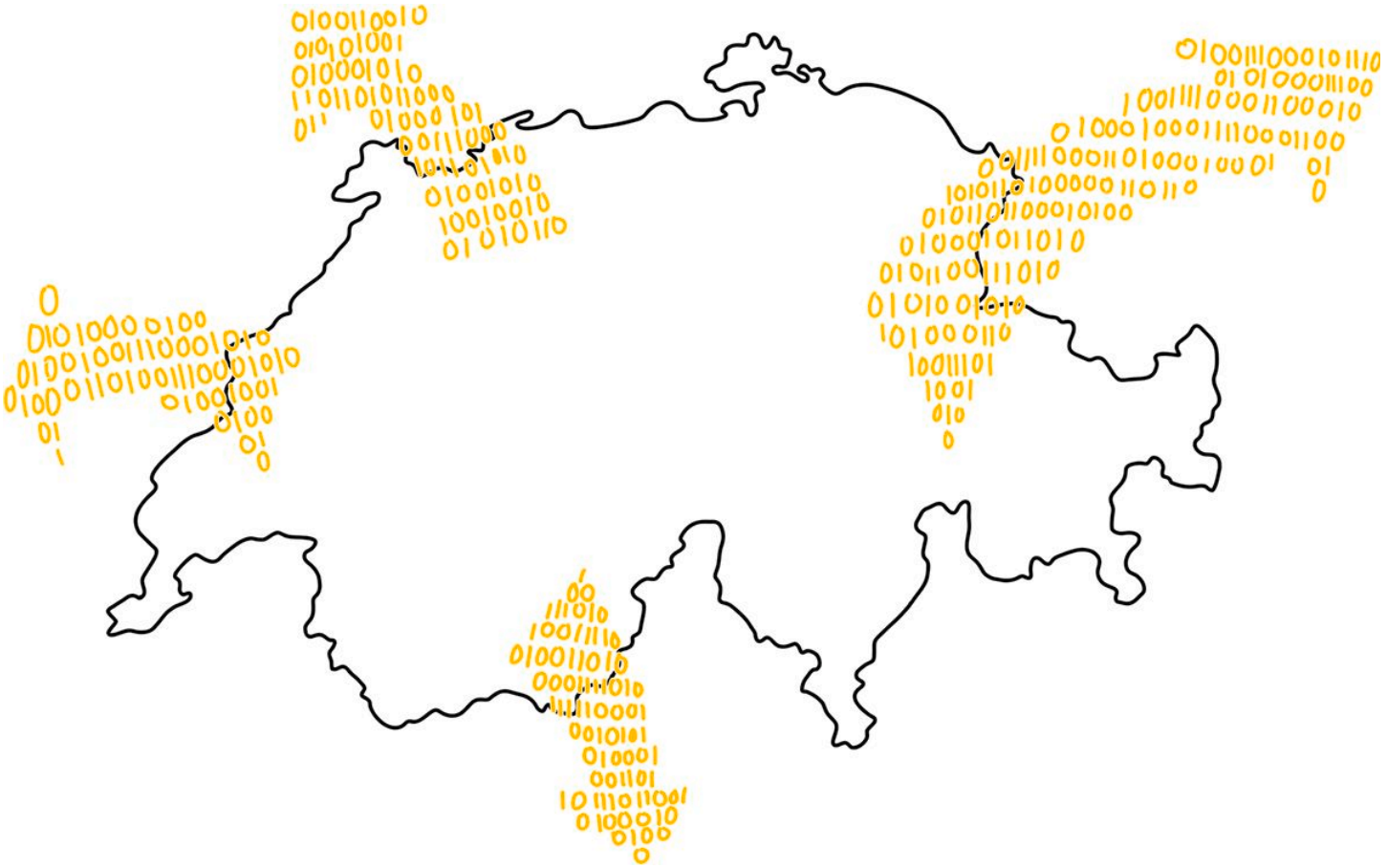


Hidden in the alpine territories of Bern, a former military bunker in the small, idyllic Swiss village of Saanen was repurposed into a data centre. Acquired by Christof Oschwald, it became known as Swiss Fort Knox in 1996, hosting mainly backup data and international customers from the private sector. In contrast, the Swiss state entrusts its data to hyperscalers, whose locations are spread around the world. This raises questions about digital sovereignty, as geopolitical tensions rise and our dependence on foreign third-party providers becomes more evident.



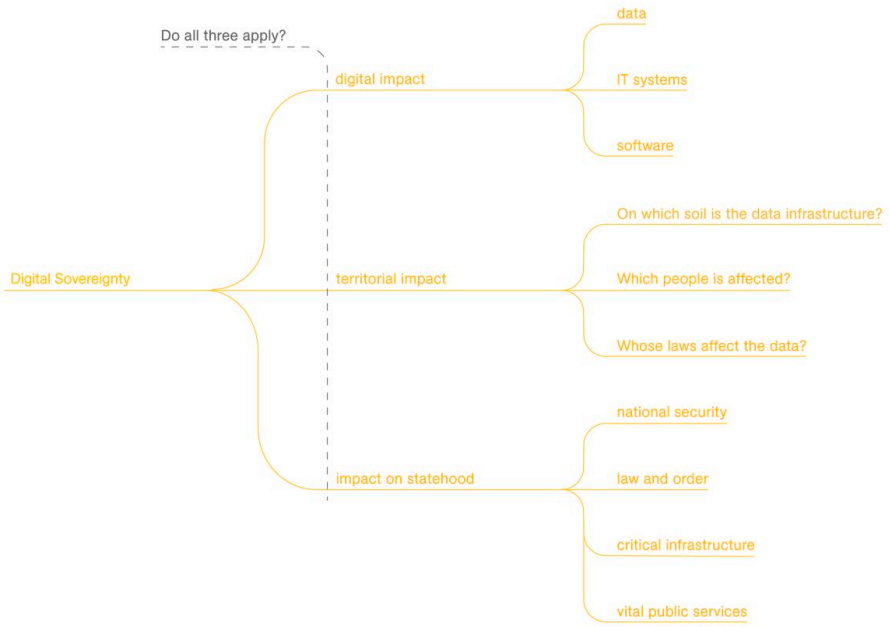
Saanen and the Swiss Fort Knox, the authors, 2025.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdH7rHlmgJY

Microsoft Microcomfort



The Swiss Confederation has taken different measures in order to ensure digital sovereignty. To this goal, the state has a contract with five different external providers to achieve their vision, among them Microsoft, which owns data centres around the world. Reliance on external providers poses certain dangers to Switzerland’s digital sovereignty, including insufficient privacy statements and classification deficiencies.

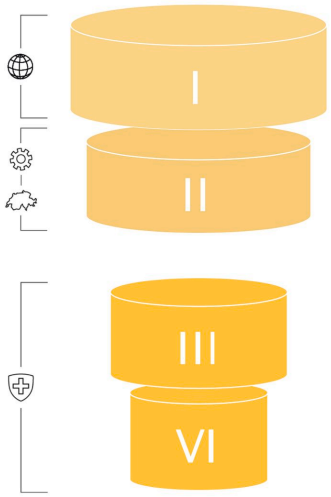
Tales of Swiss Digital Sovereignty



DEFINITION OF DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY
Source: swissdataalliance.ch
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/643f9805a9dd3137751e41ae/t/666aa87191a3cf03dc9cff38/1718265970892/Digitale+Souveränität+%28Whitepaper%29+final.pdf], 2024. Scheme: the authors, 2025.

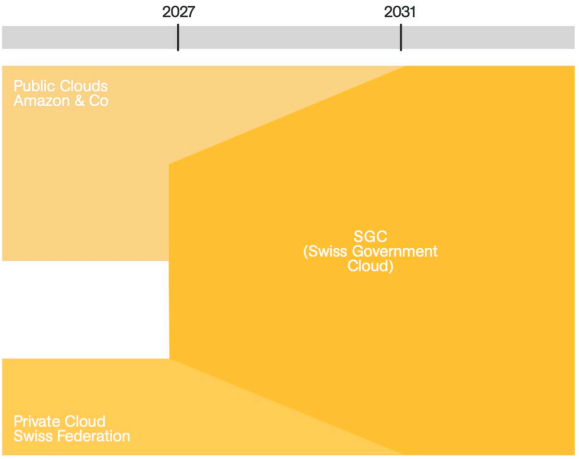
The term “digital sovereignty” applies when three conditions are met: activities in the digital sphere that concern the territory and statehood of Switzerland. If one of these components is not affected, the term loses its meaning. In this context, statehood refers to the activities of public authorities, institutions, and organisations. If activities in the digital landscape concerning Switzerland’s territory or institutions are threatened, the digital sovereignty of Switzerland as a state is also threatened.

In order to ensure digital sovereignty, the Swiss Confederation has taken various measures. These include classifying data into different levels of sensitivity and storing sensitive or secret data in data centres located in Switzerland. These data centres currently account for around 7 % of Switzerland’s total energy consumption. It is estimated that around 16 % of this energy is used by the government, with the remaining 84 % of computer power being outsourced to external providers.



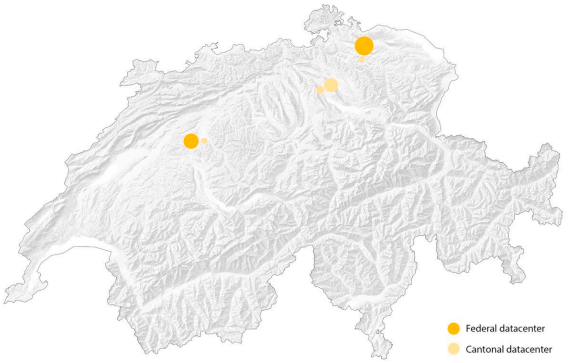
DATA SENSITIVITY CLASSIFICATION
Source: admin.ch
[https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/en/home/digitale-transformation-ikt-lenkung/bundesarchitektur/cloud.html], 2024.
Scheme: modified by the authors, 2025.

Stage I of the Data Sensitivity Classification contains non-sensitive data that can be stored anywhere in the world. Stage II contains non-sensitive data that must fulfil specific requirements to be stored in Switzerland or with additional measures. While stages I and II are stored in public clouds, stages III and IV contain sensitive and secret data and are therefore stored in private clouds.



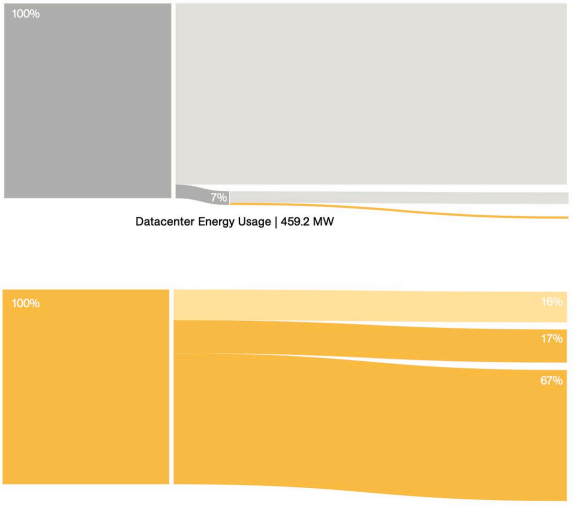
SWISS GOVERNMENT CLOUD
Source: admin.ch
[https://www.bit.admin.ch/de/sgc-de], 2024.
Scheme: modified by the authors, 2025.

The Swiss government also intends to create a platform that encompasses all governing bodies, and has introduced the Swiss Government Cloud to this end. The intention is to migrate data from private and public clouds to this unified platform.



EXISTING PUBLIC DATA INFRASTRUCTURE
Source: admin.ch [https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/digitale-transformation-ikt-lenkung/vorgaben/sb022-strategie-rechenzentren-der-zivilen-bundesverwaltung.html], 2025. Map: the authors, 2025.

The necessary hardware is already available in Switzerland. The data centres in Frauenfeld, which are run by the Swiss government, are one of the two currently available data centres that can store up to level III data. This data centre has around 400 highly available racks. There are other government and canton data centres. There are two in Bern (one federal and one belonging to the canton of Bern), two in Zurich, and another one in Frauenfeld. Together, they supply an estimated power of around 1,162 racks, or 11.62 megawatt, averaged over a year. This is comparable to powering as many as 20,000 households over the same time period.



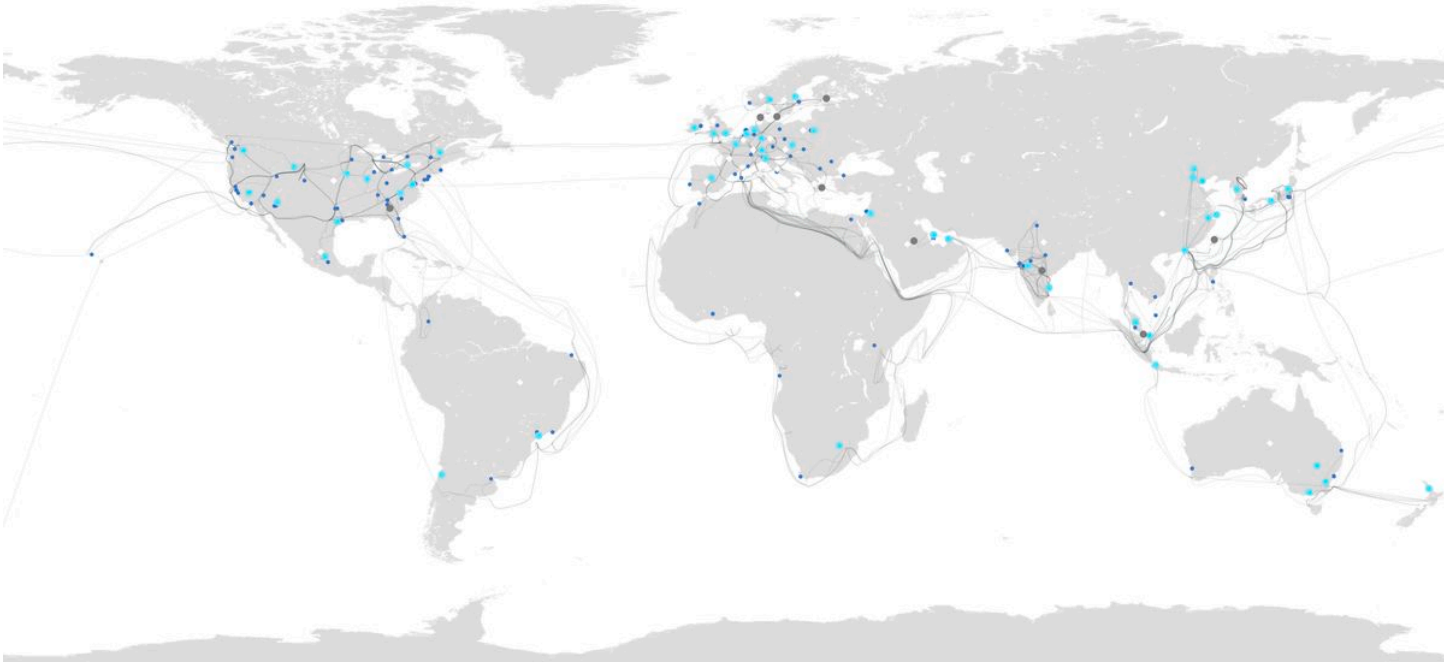
POWER CONSUMPTION
OF SWISS PUBLIC CLOUD
Source: srf.ch [https://www.srf.ch/news/wirtschaft/digitale-infrastruktur-stille-stromfresser-immer-mehr-rechenzentren-in-der-schweiz], 2025. Diagram: the authors, 2025.

In Switzerland, the average energy consumption in 2024 was approximately 6,560 megawatt (MW). Around 7 % of this consumption was assigned to data centres. According to the size of the IT market, the government would require around 16 % of this power budget, equivalent to 74 MW, which is the same amount consumed by 150,000 Swiss households per year. Subtracting the existing computing resources of 11.62 MW leaves 62.5 MW of computing power currently being outsourced to external cloud providers.

Switzerland’s Cloud Providers

To achieve their vision, Switzerland has entered into contracts with five different external providers: Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, Oracle, IBM and Alibaba Cloud. Alongside AWS, Microsoft is one of Switzerland’s largest providers for hosting Swiss data across different locations outside the country at Microsoft Azure sites. Microsoft also provides widely used application software such as the Office 365 suite. From 2025, the Swiss government will be migrating to Microsoft’s cloud-based solution. Despite sensitive data being stored on-premises in federal data centres, there are still concerns among public figures regarding Microsoft. The former chief of the Swiss army is one of the most critical voices, suggesting withdrawal from Microsoft applications.

His complaints about insufficient regulations and data classification reaffirm the concerns of the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO), which had previously raised similar criticisms. However, the government remains unphased and confirms that, even though they are testing alternatives, they will not be able to withdraw fully from Microsoft solutions.



MICROSOFT AZURE DATA CENTRES
Source: microsoft.com [https://datacenters.microsoft.com/globe/explore/?view=map], 2025.

The map shows data center locations of Microsoft Azure. They are concentrated in the US and across Europe with few being on the peripheries of Asia.

- Azure locations
- Azure local access points
- Azure geographies
- Azure locations under development



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Magazin Feed Dialog

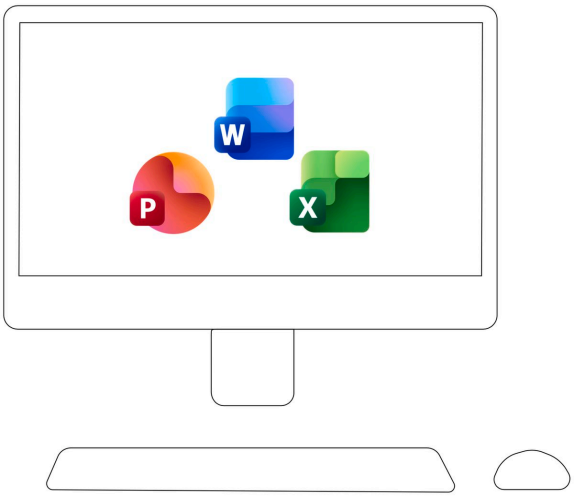
Der Armeechef stemmt sich gegen Microsoft

Thomas Süssli fordert von der Bundeskanzlei eine eigene IT-Infrastruktur für sensible Daten. Diese gibt sich unbeirrt.

Von Adrienne Fichter, 31.10.2025

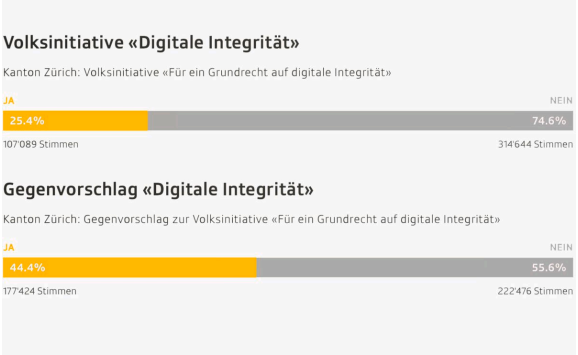
Die Eidgenössische Finanzkontrolle hat diesen Prozess bereits mehrfach kritisiert – wegen der fehlenden Datenschutzabklärungen und der unzureichenden Sicherheitsvorkehrungen des Bundes. In einem Bericht bemängelte sie auch die Vertraulichkeitsklassifizierung der Dokumente

MICROSOFT DEPENDENCY
Source: Republik.ch
[https://www.republik.ch/2025/10/31/der-armeechef-stemmt-sich-gegen-microsoft], 2025.



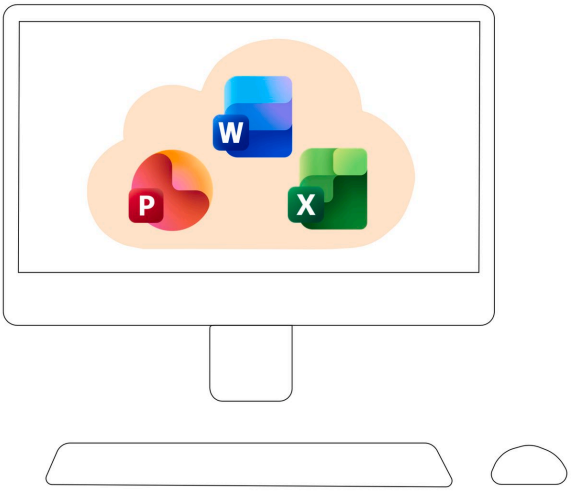
MICROSOFT DEPENDENCY
Source: Republik.ch
[https://www.republik.ch/2025/10/31/der-armeechef-stemmt-sich-gegen-microsoft], 2025.
Illustration: the authors, 2025.

Even though the classification into different sensitivity levels and the unified Swiss Government Cloud platform promise control over Switzerland's sensitive data, there is still a reliance on external providers. The absence of adequate privacy statements and classification deficiencies suggest a lack of legal frameworks for dealing with critical data, which compromises Switzerland's digital sovereignty. The lack of awareness among the general public regarding digital issues and their complex layers and dynamics is evident in failed attempts at digital regulation, as demonstrated by the vote in the Canton of Zurich in November 2025.



GOVERNING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE
ON THE LACK OF LEGAL BASIS
Source: srf.ch
[https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/abstimmungen-30-11-2025/abstimmungen-30-november-so-hat-die-schweiz-abgestimmt#toc_24], 2025. Scheme: modified by the authors, 2025.

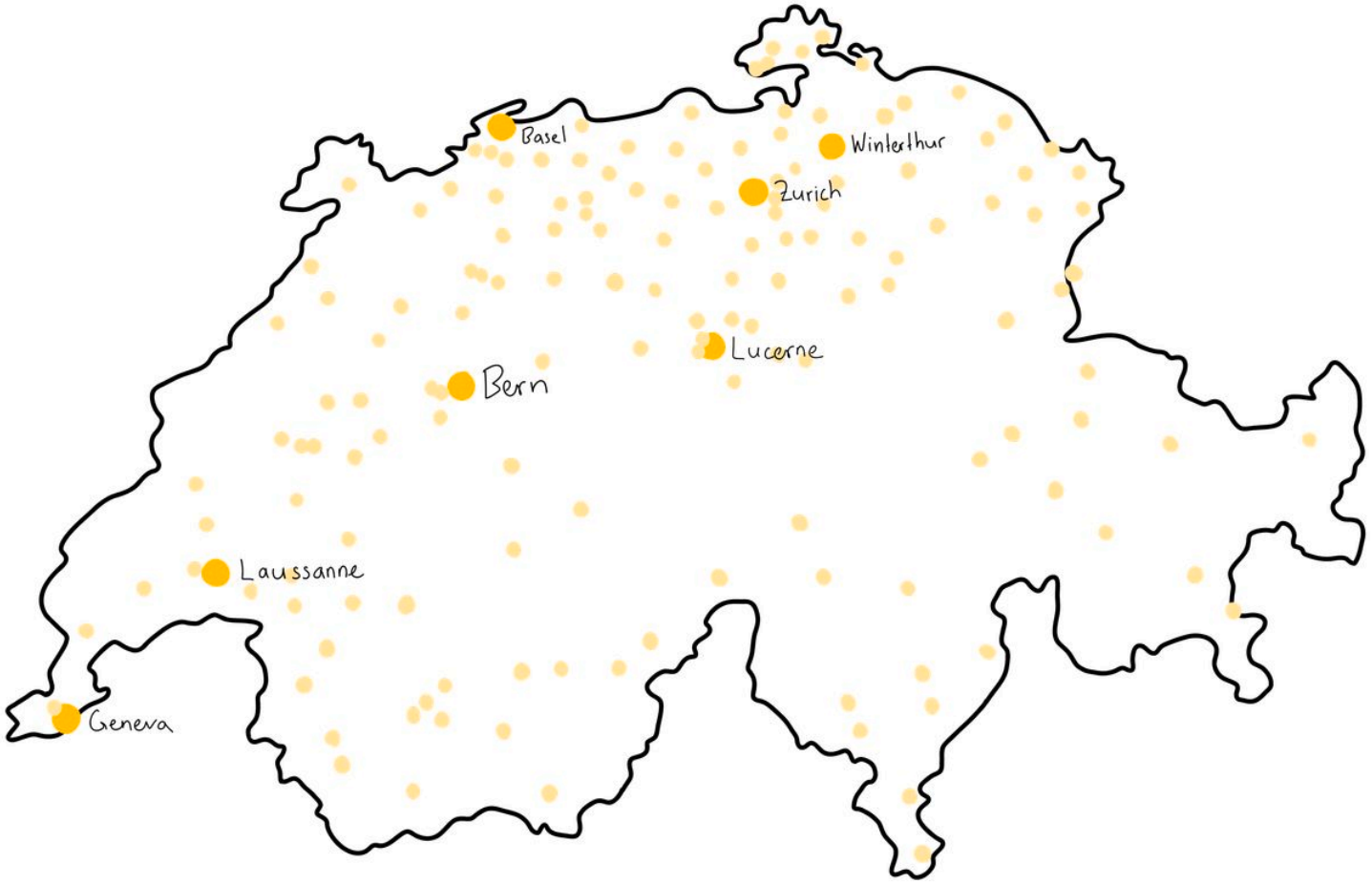
The initiative on legal frameworks for digital integrity in the Canton of Zurich in November 2025 was rejected by the electorate.



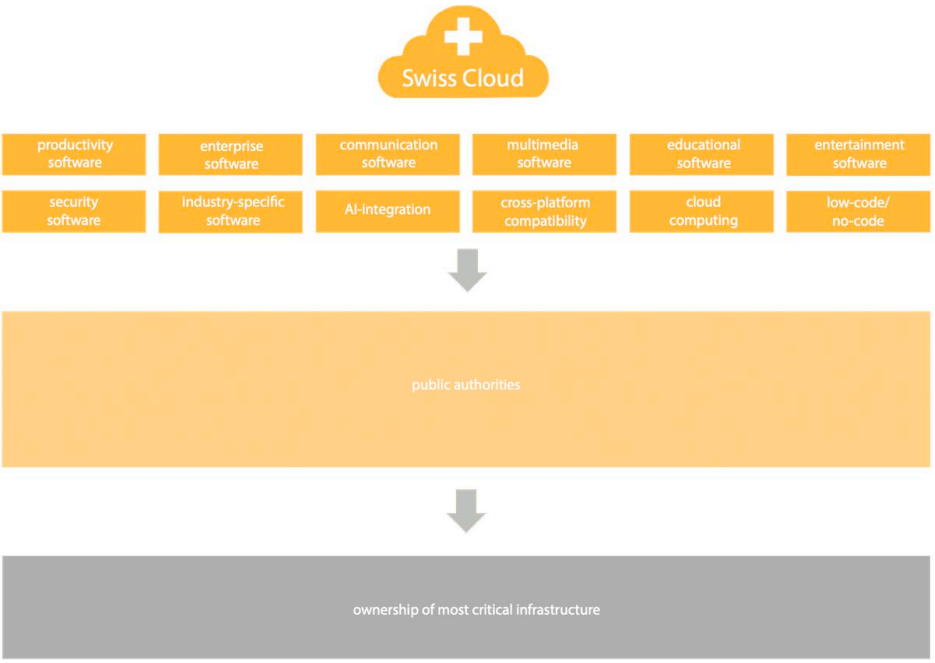
THE GOVERNMENT GOES CLOUD
Source: admin.ch
[https://www.bit.admin.ch/de/nsb?id=102770], 2024. Drawing: the authors, 2025.

Dependence on the Microsoft 365 suite threatens Switzerland's digital sovereignty, as all data edited or developed using their software is under their control, regardless of its classification. This makes Switzerland heavily dependent on Microsoft and exposed to the risk of critical data being used without control by a private party.

Rédu-IT National—
Designing the Swiss Cloud



In light of the research conducted on digital sovereignty we propose The Swiss Cloud as a first step towards reclaiming control over critical data. The proposal focuses on physical infrastructure embedded in a decentralised territorial layout, as well as software solutions. Furthermore, the aim is to make the cloud infrastructure more visible in public spaces and community areas, raising awareness among the general population of the digital realm and the existing dynamics surrounding the topic of digital sovereignty.



THE SWISS CLOUD
Source: Innovate Switzerland [https://innovate-switzerland.ch/de/innovate-switzerland-community-calls-for-six-action-areas-to-achieve-swiss-digital-sovereignty/], 2023. Proposal diagram: the authors, 2025.

Even though there is no legal basis to justify a public cloud operated by the government, we want to envisage one–The Swiss Cloud—to reduce the public authorities' dependency on Microsoft, for example. To facilitate the project, software and infrastructure are necessary, as well as a strategy that promotes digital sovereignty and raises awareness among the population about it.



CRITICAL DATA
Source: punkt4 [https://punkt4.info/nachrichten/detail/news/kernkraftwerk-goesgen-liefert-bis-februar-2026-keinen-strom/], 2025.

Example: Power Plant Gösgen.



NON-CRITICAL DATA
Source: wikimedia [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6e/Bundesratsfoto_2022.jpg], 2022. Collage: the authors, 2025.

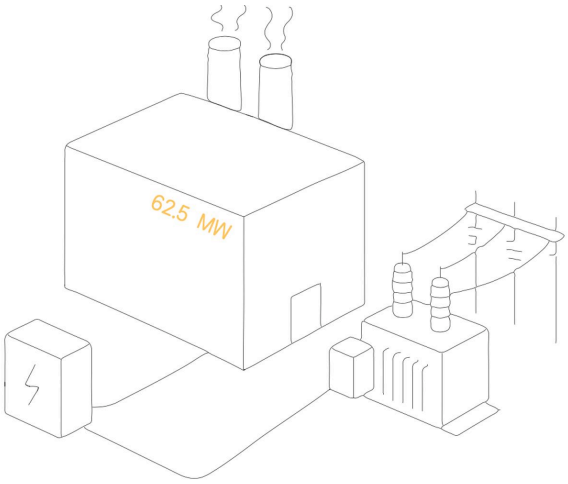
Example: Annual Picture of the Federal Council.

In this example, since the Swiss Cloud aims to gain independence from Microsoft 365, the cloud should offer functions that replace those of Microsoft, such as document editing, presentations and email exchange. In addition, functions containing critical or non-critical data would also be on the public cloud, such as Swisstopo or Swiyu.

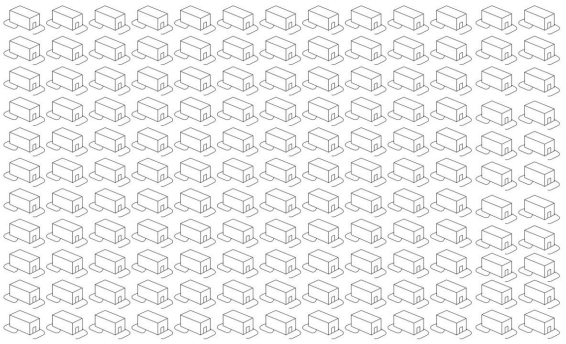
Data should be categorised as either critical, which must be highly available, such as for emergency services, hospitals and critical infrastructure, or non-critical, which does not need to be highly available, such as identity data and local laws. It is assumed that the general security of all data is in place. The only possible differentiation was via municipal and governmental/cantonal data. Taking into account expenditure at all government levels, non-critical data accounts for around 20 % of computing power, while critical data uses around 80 %. Subtracting the power of the existing data centres, we find that an additional 12.5 megawatt (MW) or 1,250 racks would be needed for non-critical workloads, and around 5,000 racks for critical workloads. This would total around 6,250 racks to run all currently outsourced tools, such as Office 365, within the Swiss cloud.

As previously mentioned, to fully reimport all outsourced computing power from external cloud providers, with a focus on Microsoft, we would need to increase Switzerland's own cloud computing power by 12.5 MW for non-critical data and 50 MW for critical data. There are different ways to achieve this.

New Swiss Data Centres in Different Sizes for Critical and Non-Critical Data



CENTRALISATION: ONE BIG DATA CENTRE
Drawing: the authors, 2025.



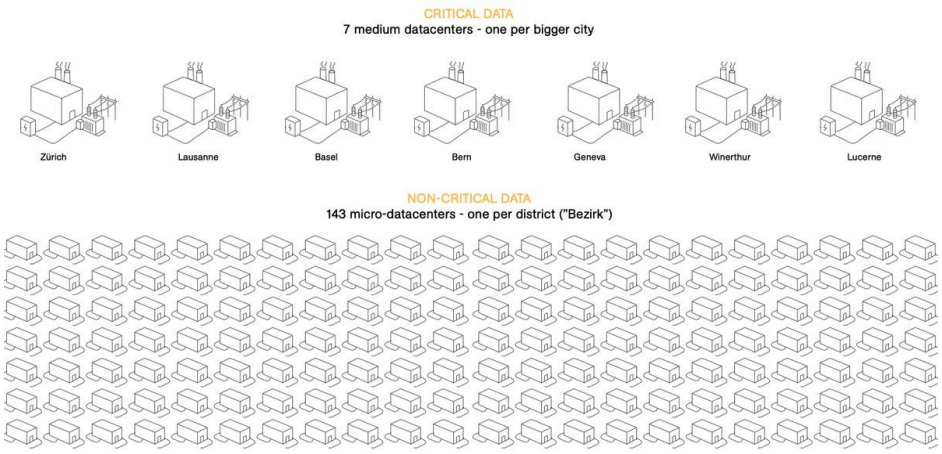
DECENTRALISATION: MANY SMALL DATA CENTRES
Drawing: the authors, 2025.

We could combine all this computing power in one data centre. This would reduce the environmental impact caused by the need for diesel generators to ensure the data is highly available.

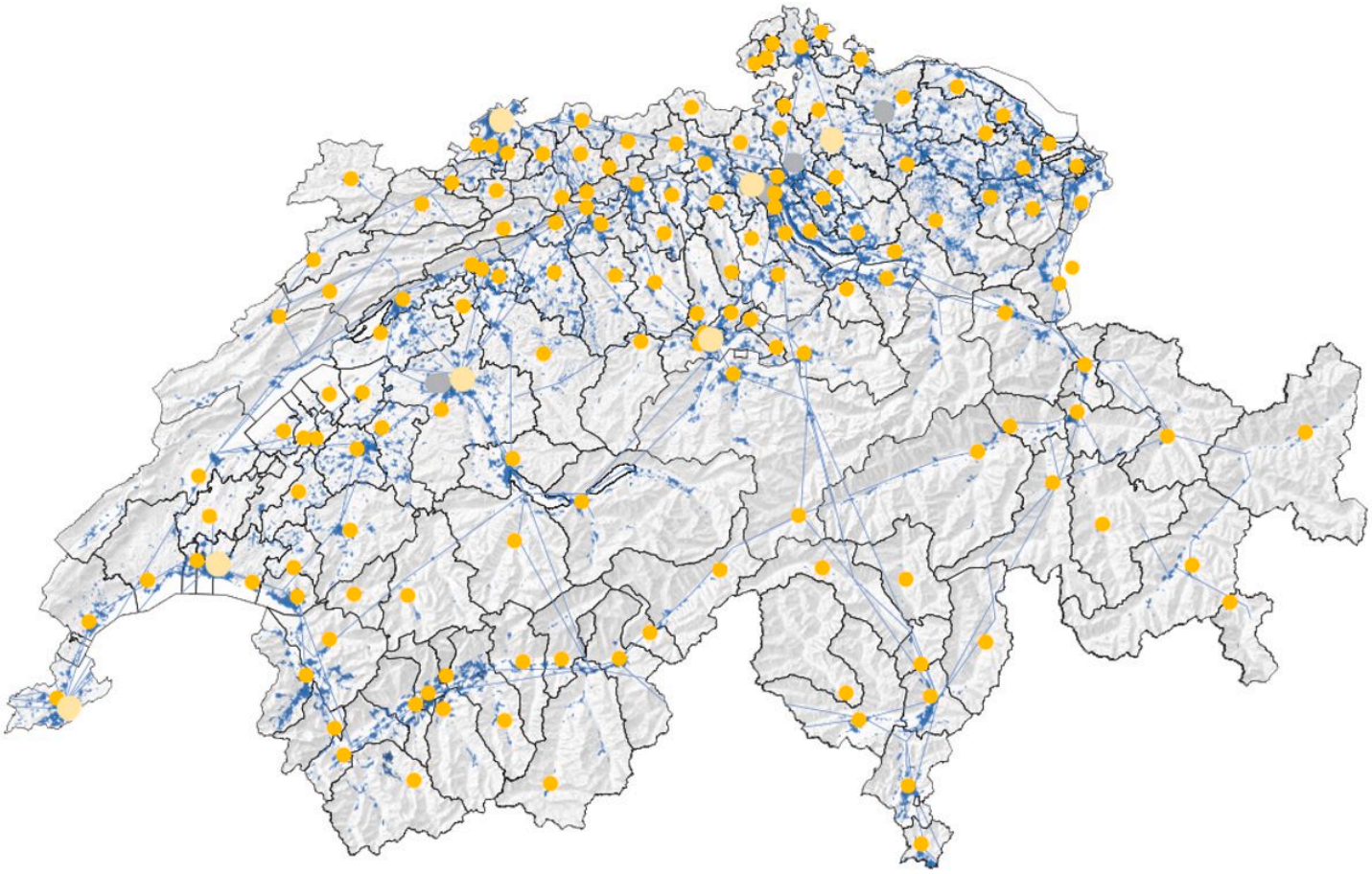
However, as it would be a single instance, it would need to be highly protected, possibly even kept secret, and it would also be an easy target for bringing down the entire Swiss cloud. To avoid the issues associated with centralisation, we could use a fully decentralised system comprising many small data centres to create a highly available, interconnected network. Due to the small footprint of each data centre, we could limit the local environmental impact and easily integrate them into existing infrastructure. But this would mean no power backup for any of the centres, making them vulnerable to power outages, or creating a much bigger environmental impact due to the need for a diesel generator at each site.

To balance the advantages and disadvantages of both, we propose separating the data into critical and non-critical categories. The first level includes critical data, which requires emergency services and has to be highly available. A data centre for such data requires its own power backup and energy supply system. All of these data centres can replicate and back up each other, offering high redundancy in terms of both technology and geology. In total, there are seven data centres, conveniently located in the biggest cities in Switzerland. The estimated size ranges from around 700 racks in Lucerne to 760 racks in Zurich, which can also support the needs of all its inhabitants. With an estimated heat output of 7–7.6 megawatt per data centre, we can supply heat for up to 3,000 households, reducing the environmental impact and creating opportunities for environmentally friendly heating solutions in these areas.

In comparison, the second level only stores non-critical data only. We propose splitting these data centres into 143 smaller centres, one for each official district, not just for plain decentralisation and geo-redundancy. Each of these district data centres shall also act as an educational centre, offering services to the public to raise awareness of digital sovereignty, data storage and processing, and data centres themselves. Due to their very small footprint of nine racks, which can be accommodated in a 18 m^2 room, they can easily be added to existing infrastructure. Additionally, due to their high density across Switzerland, the security of each data centre can be lowered, enabling citizens to view the racks themselves and allowing these micro data centres to serve as local event venues. Due to their relatively low power consumption, it is also possible to use the generated heat to heat up to 900 m^2 of space, which is ideal for public centres and events.



A COMPROMISE IS NECESSARY. Drawing: the authors, 2025.



SWISS CLOUD DATA CENTRES
Source: Studio Resources, 2025. Drawing: the authors, 2025.

The proposal results in a network of bigger city-level data centres next to existing data centres as well as district data centres. They are strategically placed in regions where both energy and network connectivity can be provided without an elaborate intervention.

Existing data centres
District data centres
Big data centres
Fiber backbone

The proposal of a Swiss Cloud is one answer to the question of digital sovereignty in Switzerland. The attached PDF includes an essay about a different proposal, questioning the top-down approach of the Swiss Cloud.

Servers in the Train Station—A Case Study



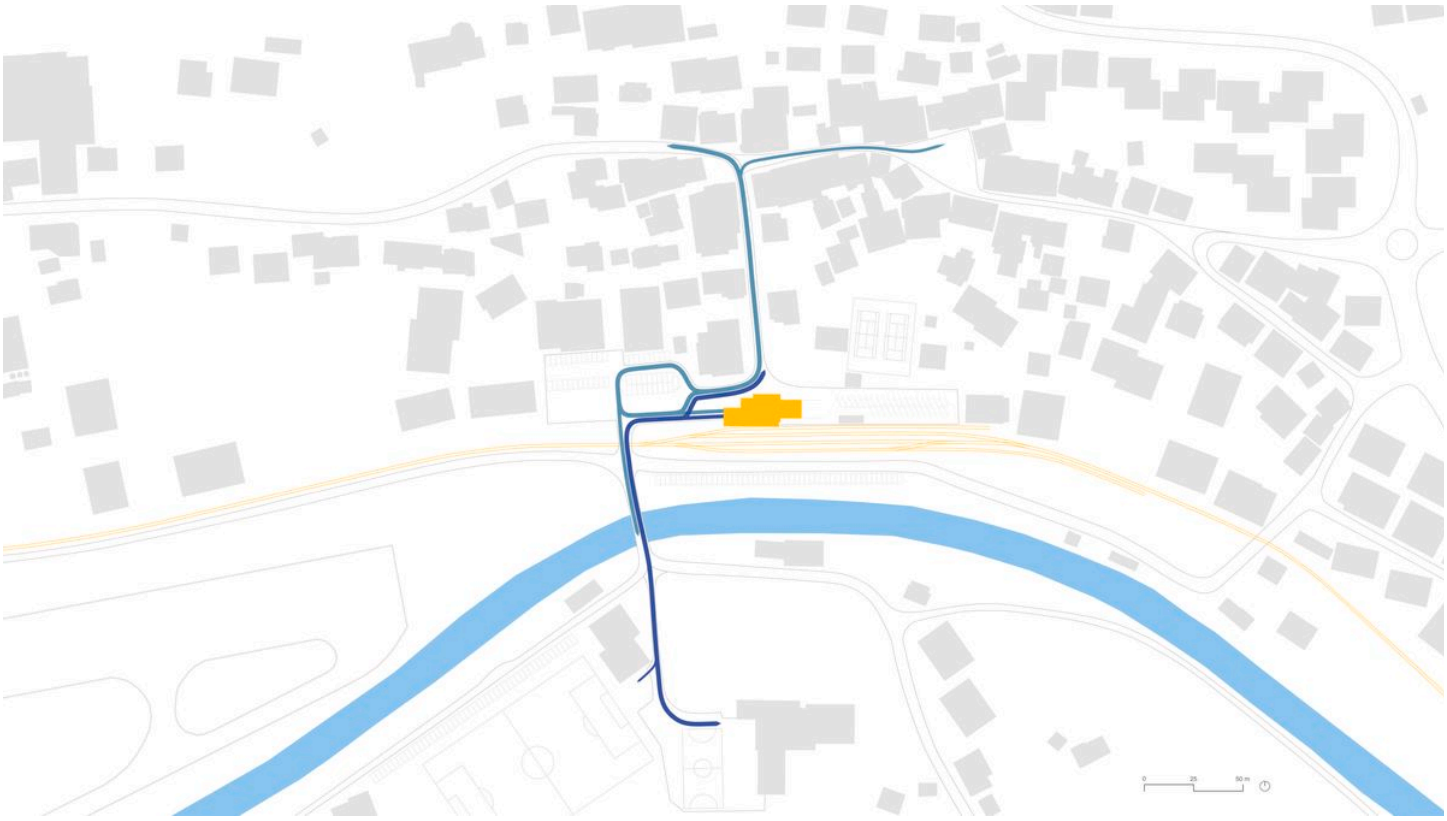
One of the proposed district data centres is located in Saanen. The project involves installing nine servers in an underused space of the train station, with the aim of raising awareness and contributing to the local community.

The Saanen airport, bunker, and train station have been identified as interregional infrastructures and therefore the most suitable locations for the new district data centre in Saanen.

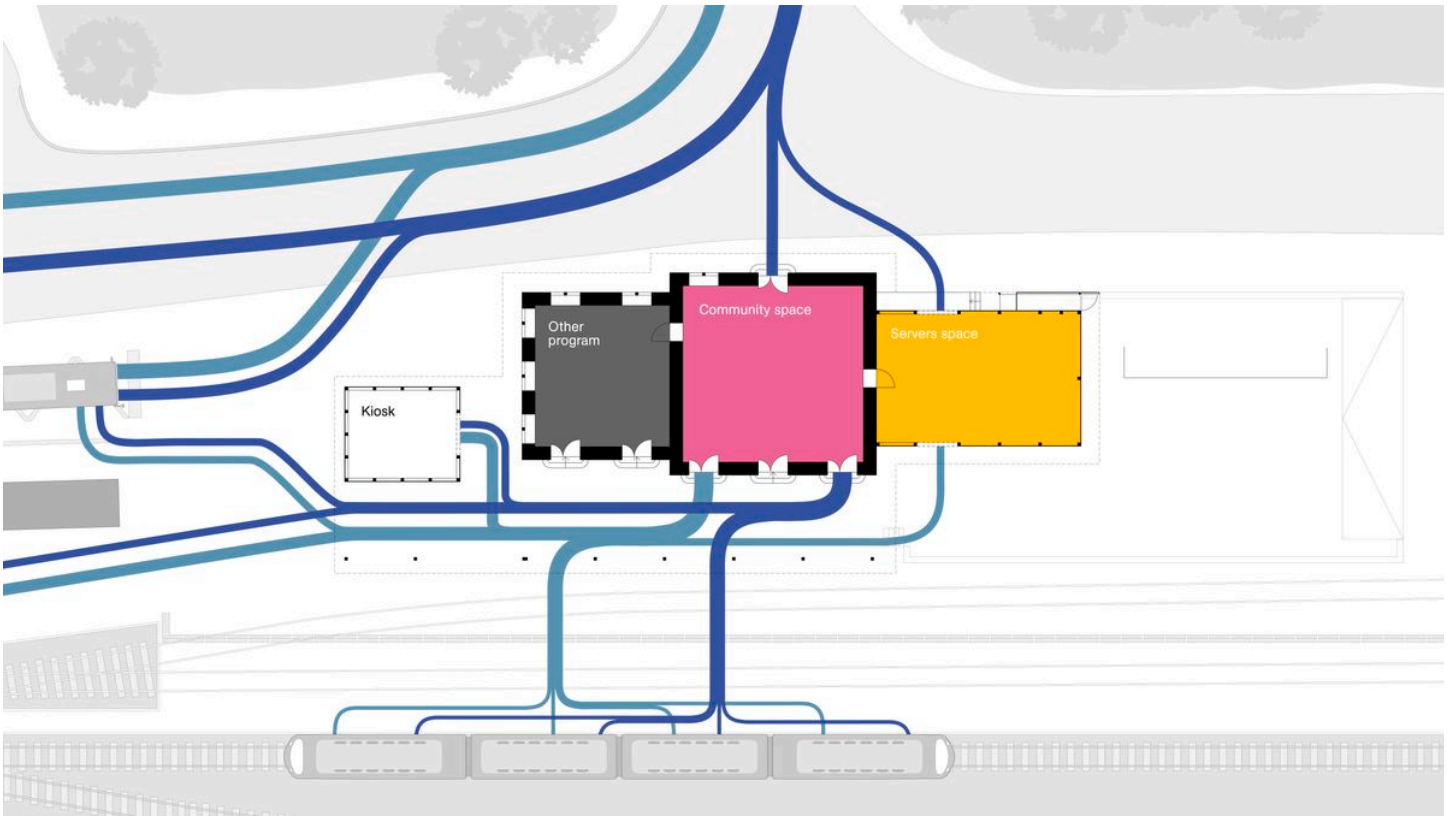
We chose the train station as one of the possible sites due to its underused spaces on the ground floor and because it is a major public site in the centre of the village. Both tourists and locals use it to travel or commute. Moreover, it os located centrally between the village and the primary school, the sports centre and the bridge which is famous for appearing in a Bollywood film. This makes the station a crossroads for different groups of people.



PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE IN SAANEN
Source: geo.admin.ch [https://map.geo.admin.ch/index.html#/map?lang=de&center=2646554.67,1204601.08&z=1.094&topic=ech&layers=ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-pk50.metadata@year=2025,f;ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-pk25.metadata@year=2025,f;ch.bafu.wrz-jagdbanngebiete_select;ch.bafu.wrz-wildruhezonen_portal;ch.swisstopo.hangneigung-ueber_30,f,0.35;ch.swisstopo.swisstlm3d-wanderwege,f,1;ch.swisstopo-karto.skitouren;ch.bav.haltestellen-oev,f&bgLayer=ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-farbe], 2025. Drawing: the authors, 2025.

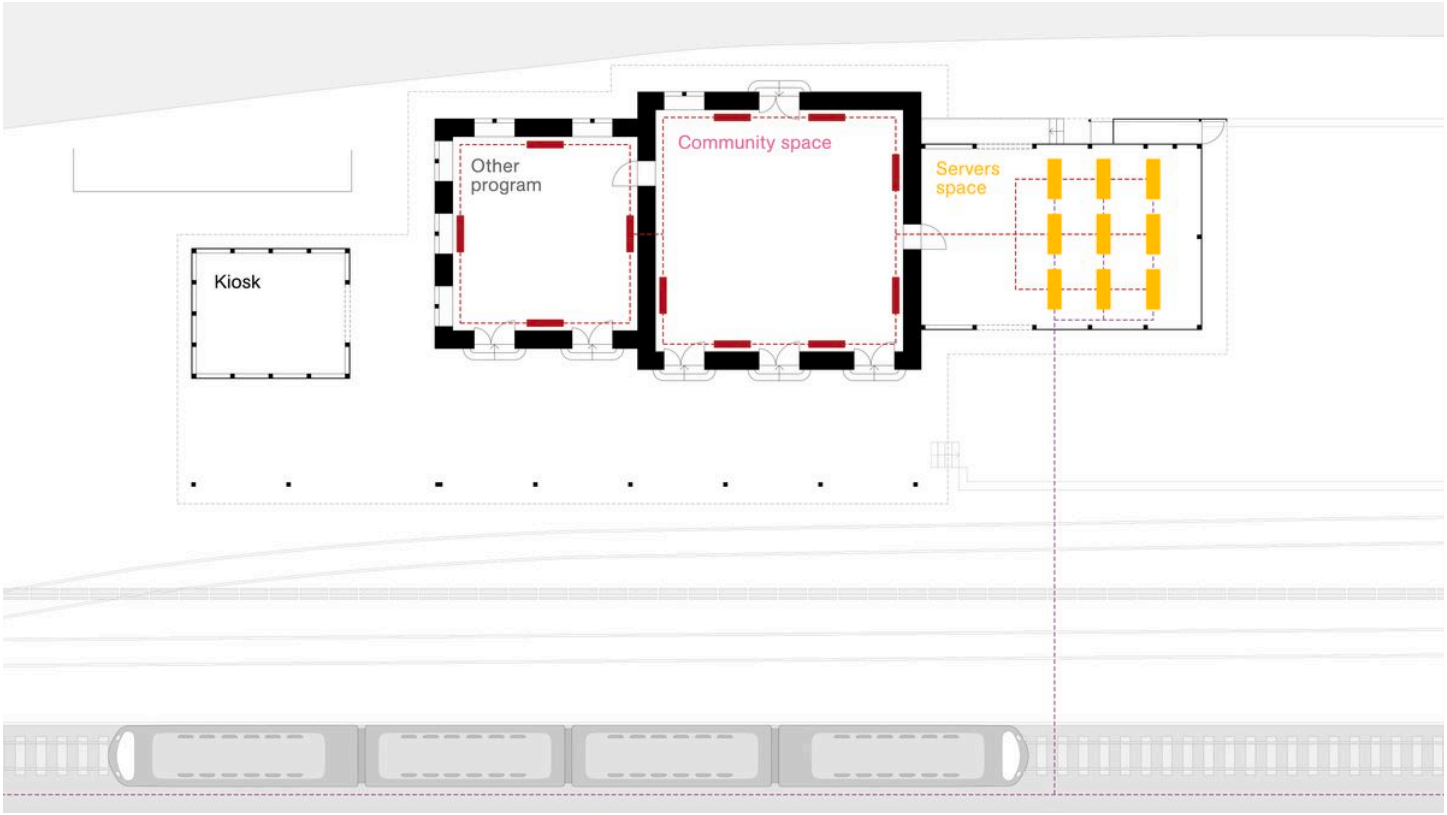


PASSENGER FLOWS AROUND THE TRAIN STATION
Source: geo.admin.ch [https://map.geo.admin.ch/index.html#/map?lang=de&center=2646554.67,1204601.08&z=1.094&topic=ech&layers=ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-pk50.metadata@year=2025,f;ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-pk25.metadata@year=2025,f;ch.bafu.wrz-jagdbanngebiete_select;ch.bafu.wrz-wildruhezonen_portal;ch.swisstopo.hangneigung-ueber_30,f,0.35;ch.swisstopo.swisstlm3d-wanderwege,f,1;ch.swisstopo-karto.skitouren;ch.bav.haltestellen-oev,f&bgLayer=ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-farbe], 2025. Drawing: the authors, 2025.



SERVERS CHANGE THE PROGRAMME
Source: geo.admin.ch [https://map.geo.admin.ch/index.html#/map?lang=de&center=2646554.67,1204601.08&z=1.094&topic=ech&layers=ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-pk50.metadata@year=2025,f;ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-pk25.metadata@year=2025,f;ch.bafu.wrz-jagdbanngebiete_select;ch.bafu.wrz-wildruhezonen_portal;ch.swisstopo.hangneigung-ueber_30,f,0.35;ch.swisstopo.swisstlm3d-wanderwege,f,1;ch.swisstopo-karto.skitouren;ch.bav.haltestellen-oev,f&bgLayer=ch.swisstopo.pixelkarte-farbe], 2025. Drawing: the authors, 2025.

We have placed the nine server racks required for the district data centre in the underused cold storage area. This is ideal, as no cooling will be required. The temperature in Saanen normally never rises above 20°C. However, the heat generated by the servers could be used to heat a community space and the offices on the ground floor of the train station. The communal room could house an affordable café, which would counteract the high prices in Saanen caused by high-class tourism. Furthermore, digital workshops could be held for elderly people, or events could be organised about digital sovereignty and different technologies, such as VR. The server room could not only fulfil this function, but also actively contribute to raising digital awareness. One example of this could be acting as an exhibition space for schoolchildren's art projects on the topic.



SERVERS HEAT THE NEW COMMUNAL SPACES IN THE TRAIN STATION
Drawing: the authors, 2025.



SERVER ROOM AND CIRCULATION OF PEOPLE
Model and photograph: the authors, 2025.



TRAIN STATION SAANEN
Model and photograph: the authors, 2025.

The Charter of Saanen

Placing the Cloud: A Guideline for Architects

- Identify underused spaces within public infrastructure buildings.
- Analyse their urban and social context and backbone connection.
- Develop an architectural program for a datacenter that raises digital awareness and contribute to the local community

As part of the Swiss Cloud we propose guidelines for an ethical architecture of data centres. The case study of the Saanen train station is a first step in conveying the complex layers of the digital sphere to a broader public. By making the digital sphere accessible, people will become more familiar with the concept of digital sovereignty and all its dynamics, as well as Switzerland's position within it.

The case study of the new data centre in Saanen has resulted in the creation of guidelines for architects to adhere to when constructing Swiss Cloud data centres. They should utilise underused spaces within existing public infrastructure in order to integrate themselves into Switzerland's ongoing interregional and national infrastructure network. The subsequent points in the guideline should help architects to build more ethical data centres that consider their urban and social impact. Most importantly, they raise awareness of their existence. It is striking how little the Swiss population knows about data sovereignty and Switzerland's current position within it. Raising awareness is the first step to activating the democratic system and provoking change on this complex subject.

Democratic Objective

Data centres have become critical infrastructure comparable to the railway, hydraulic, and energy networks that shaped the Swiss landscape. Yet they remain largely invisible, both physically and politically. This invisibility fosters a collective lack of awareness regarding data sovereignty, technological dependency and territorial impact. The Swiss Cloud project therefore advocates a paradigm shift, moving data centres away from isolation, concealment, and closed autonomy and repositioning them as distributed public service infrastructures that are legible, responsible, and territorially embedded. A study of the Swiss Fort Knox data centre reveals its inherited protective infrastructure's strengths and limitations: the absence of local benefits, the extraction of resources without circular reuse, and disconnection from mobility networks and everyday life. In contrast, integrating a data centre within a railway station—an infrastructure that has historically played a central role in Swiss territorial cohesion—would anchor digital infrastructure within existing human, social, and tourist flows. And architecture could become a tool for civic engagement, capable of turning a technical infrastructure into a shared political issue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Please note that the arguments stated in this work do not necessarily reflect the personal views of all group members.

Declaration on use of AI: artificial intelligence was used to compile the list of sources in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style.

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