



HOUSEEUROPE! THE RENOVATION PRACTICE

Image: Midjourney, Anton Krebs

HouseEurope! The Renovation Practice A Collective Project

As of the previous semester, this studio has become part of HouseEurope!, a European Citizens' Initiative that advocates for legislative change on a European level. As an initiative, our aim is to boost the renovation of existing buildings and, by doing so, prevent their demolition driven by speculation. By choosing this studio, you will join the initiative and become part of the collective effort for real political change.

Therefore, this semester will be operated as a collective research & design project. Its structure foresees a series of exercises that begin individually and in small groups, culminating in individual projects, which then merge into one common result – similar to a film production, where all students work and contribute towards a collective goal. Your contribution is valuable and matters to the initiative!

How to Build an Alternative Practice?

“The biggest challenge for architects today is to design a self-sustaining practice in times of post-growth.” This quote by architect and transformation scientist Saskia Hebert (ARCH+ 251: Unternehmen Architektur, 2023) aptly summarizes the challenges we, as architects, are facing today. Aware of the construction sector's consequences for the climate crisis and our role in it, we ask: how and what to practice in the future, to no longer contribute to this damaging practice and yet, earn and enjoy a living of practicing architecture.

As our latest film “The Demolition Drama” illustrates, the renovation sector holds a great potential for the social-ecological transformation of the existing building stock. Currently, only 1% of Europe's existing buildings have been renovated. With an annual renovation rate of 1%, it would take 100 years to renovate Europe's building stock. This is four times longer than we have and agreed to in the 2050 climate goals. Similarly, in Switzerland it will take 125 years to renovate Switzerland's building-stock existing building stock

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at its current rate (vgl. Sascha Nick, EPFL). Unless we would reroute the Swiss labor force within the construction sector, it could be possible to do so in only 14 years. Thus, we don't only have to renovate and transform our building stock but also the practice of building itself. In short, we have to: “Fix the office!” (vgl. Charlotte Malterre-Barthes, Moratorium On New Construction.)

How to Tell an Alternative Story?

We aim to tell stories about alternative approaches to practicing and constructing architecture, emphasizing methods that involve preserving, adapting, renovating, and transforming existing buildings. Our focus is on practices from various countries that have successfully implemented projects for social-ecological transformation. These practices, often overlooked for a long time, span a range of scales from small to large and encompass both private and public usage. The diverse examples we showcase aim to raise awareness about the untapped potential inherent in existing structures. Our objective is to conduct comprehensive research into these practices, exploring their projects along with the stories and facts that underlie them.

Semester Goal, Modus and Deliverable Formats

Phase 1: Ecosystem Renovation

During the research phase, we will look into the “ecosystem of renovation” from a social, ecological, and economic perspective. In groups of three, students will investigate different buildings that were transformed into housing instead of being demolished and replaced. Together, we will research 12 cases: 12 buildings by 12 practices in 12 different socio-economic contexts. By analyzing these different cases, we try to find answers to their systemic relevance: How do these renovation projects and practices operate? How are the projects and practices financed? Which stakeholders are involved during the process? How do resident and ownership structures of buildings change after renovations? What demographic effects do conversion projects have

with Severin Bärenbold, Olaf Grawert, Pan Hu, and
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on a larger scale? What is the difference of CO2 emissions between renovation versus demolition and new construction? In parallel, students will be attending the technical seminar “Access to Tools” to learn about filming and editing, and to produce their own footage for the second phase.

Phase 2: Renovation Stories

The research phase is followed by a production phase in which the findings and learnings are consolidated and translated into a video format, the so-called “Renovation Stories”. Each story tells about an alternative architecture practice and its social, ecological, and economic dimensions. By zooming out from their individual case, students will contextualize their findings on a larger scale, looking into potentials for the entire “ecosystem of renovation.” In parallel, students will be attending storytelling and writers' sessions to translate the specific aspects of their research into a narrative for their films. The footage collected in the first weeks of the semester will be used to create the renovation stories.

Phase 3: HouseEurope! Trailer

The final phase of the semester will be dedicated to a common project, the production of a trailer for HouseEurope!. We will reflect on the past weeks: our learning and roles, and reorganize the teams to start with the production. The collective knowledge will be synthesized into one text that brings together all the arguments and sources and merged into one trailer whose format is still open and shall be the result of common discussions throughout the semester. We envision a maximum two-minute clip that explains the initiative, its goals and objectives, the legal proposals, their consequences and benefits, and most importantly, calls for action. This common project will require all of us, students and teaching team, to define clear roles and responsibilities aligned with our objective to work together as a team to achieve the result. The trailer will be shown at the HouseEurope! press conferences taking place in Berlin and other European cities (to be determined) in June 2024.

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