

Offenbach



Studio Spring 2021

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We need to
talk about
Infrastructure

Dear Student,

Do you know Offenbach? At first sight it might seem like a rather small and unimportant city. Yet Offenbach is a city of extremes: It is the city with the highest debt per capita in Germany, it has the highest unemployment rate in the state of Hessen, and according to official statistics it is the most international and culturally diverse city in the country – about 63% of the inhabitants have a so-called migration background (which in itself is a rather ambiguous definition). Offenbach is a poor city in a rich region. Situated in the middle of the metropolitan region Frankfurt-Rhein-Main it is inevitably part of bigger global dynamics and forces that shape our cities. With NEWROPE we are interested in these edge conditions where things collide, energy is unleashed, and radical change can happen.

Maybe you know the famous rapper “Haftbefehl”. When he rhymes “Offenbach bleibt hart [...] forever Nordend [...] Bruder, dieser Ort brennt” he draws an image of his home town as a rough place, a place “on fire”. This is for sure only one perspective on the city’s reality, and it has not always been like that. Until the 1970’s Offenbach was a rather wealthy place. Yet many of the city’s promises were built on its infrastructures: It grew with its industry and the decay began with the industry’s departure: Around the 1970’s a large part of the vital leather industry moved either to Italy or was replaced by imports from Asia. Around the same time the dogma of the car-friendly city drastically re-shaped Offenbach. The remnants of these infrastructural visions are up to this day defining the everyday experience of the city. The same goes for the harbor, which during the last few years has largely been transformed into a residential area benefiting from the proximity to Frankfurt.

We see Offenbach as a prime example of a medium sized city which has been shaped and re-shaped by infrastructure in an extractive way: The infrastructure which was built after the industry’s decay does not primarily serve the city, but rather its surroundings. Infrastructure here is thought mainly from an engineering perspective and rather from an idea of physical connectivity than a sense of collectivity and community. We would like to search for entry points to turn this perspective around, and to adapt the existing infrastructure as a living environment where new infrastructure investments adapt to changing conditions.

For this endeavor we team up with a group of planners from both Offenbach and Zurich who will be the co-hosts of our studio. We will situate our work within existing transformations, by trying to design in dialogue and being strategic with the output. This studio challenges you to think – and move – beyond traditional conventions about the role of architecture and urban planning and will allow you to try out things and develop new ideas.

We will transform our Lab into a film and TV studio in order to work on a collective short film, using the short film as our touchstone we will develop new ideas, design interventions and integrative visions to re-connect Offenbach to its decaying infrastructures. These interventions can take many different forms: from an architectural proposal to a public campaign, and from a site inventory to a stakeholder roundtable.

We look forward to welcoming you to this experimental exploration of Offenbach!

Sincerely,

On behalf of the entire NEWROPE team, Seppe De Blust and Lukas Fink

