

# APRÈS-SKI



## ERST- WOHNUNGS INITIATIVE

Masterthesis Fall Semester 2024

Chair of Construction Heritage and Preservation, Prof. Dr. Silke Langenberg +  
Chair of Architecture and Design, Prof. Alexandre Theriot

team: Silke Langenberg, Alexandre Theriot, Adrien Comte, Eva Ruof, Reto Wasser

picture: andermatt-realestate.ch

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picture: Olivier Maire, Crans-Montana, 2017

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## WHAT COMES AFTER THE SNOW? APRÈS-SKI?

The Alps are no longer—and probably have never been—a savage natural dream. These territories are a major economic force, a refuge for global capital, a place for isolated political decision-making, and above all, a highly profitable, urbanized fun park for the whole world.

The operation of cable cars in the Swiss Alps alone has generated a turnover of 741 million Swiss francs, resulting in an added gross value of roughly 500 million in 2022. Skiing Day passes rise to above 100 CHF. At the same time, this winter season has been the mildest Swiss winter since the beginning of records.

Acknowledging that the mountains are no longer a counterworld of our cities but have become their offspring, we speculate on a functional and programmatic reinterpretation of these landscapes. With the disappearance of snow, the region will face major economic challenges and vast available building stock. New concepts of use will be needed.

Do we retract from the territories, leaving our ruins to the increasing natural catastrophes? Or do we change, transform, and develop a new habitat?

## ERST-WOHNUNGS-INITIATIVE

The imaginary Erst-Wohnungs-Initiative is an experiment to rethink the use of the existing building stock collectively. It is a speculative proposal for a legal shift and sets the common ground for our experimental explorations.

The proposed legal shift is a radical continuation of the Zweit-Wohnungs-Initiative, which resulted in the national law on secondary homes (ZWG), also called Lex Weber, in 2016. Together with the Lex Koller—the federal Act on the Acquisition of Immovable Property in Switzerland by Foreign Non-Residents—the two Acts aim to regulate the influx of foreign capital into the Swiss real estate market.

The ZWG or Lex Weber generally prohibits the construction of additional secondary homes as soon as their share in a commune exceeds 20%. Due to a lack of enforcement power, it is not an absolute ban, and numbers show a different reality. In Crans Montana, just after the introduction of the Act, nearly 500 new “primary residencies” were built while the permanent population decreased significantly. In the Oberengadin or the Berner Oberland, the Act resulted in a sudden increase of primary residencies on paper linked to built structures, showing suspiciously low occupation rates.

We speculate on a different reality; one where our imaginative Erst-Wohnungs-Initiative effectively led to an end of rarely occupied luxury chalets and holiday complexes used only a few months of the year.

What does it take to transform a vacation resort into functional year-round spaces, providing homes instead of only beds?

Can we transform obsolete tourist infrastructures to host civic functions? Where do your children go to school or take a bus if you permanently move into a former vacation colony?

Will we suffer from a sudden retreat of foreign capital or do we find new economic potentials?

## HOLES, SUMMITS AND EXPRESS GLACIERS

To choose our sites we follow an infrastructural line; the glacier express. We will look at places along this transportation axis which show a current share of secondary residencies above 50%.

This takes us to different case studies, which you will be free to choose from or to extend the territory according to your personal field of interest and your research focus.

### SNEAK PEEK OF WHAT YOU MIGHT FACE

- A. The commune of Crans Montana faces a 150.000m<sup>2</sup> large hole. After financial struggles and the stop of the local cable car due to a decrease in demand, the project Aminona Luxury Resort and Village was meant to revive the village and refinance a new telecabin station through foreign capital. However, geopolitical developments have put the project on hold. Putin's call to keep capital within the Russian state and international sanctions stopped the influx of money from the East. "Le trou" remains.
- B. Every year, heads of politics and finance and other celebrities flock to the city of Davos for the World Economic Forum. Set in a remote mountain resort, the Summit transforms the village into a geopolitical and highly capitalized curated stage for the duration of the event. The strongly military-protected conclave hosts a selected elite to discuss worldly problems without unwanted real-life interruption.
- C. Many of us have been to the average ski station, located just above the limit of snowfall - die Schneefallgrenze. School trips, family vacations, and holiday camps; these places have made skiing popular and subject to mass consumption. It is not the sparkling panorama peak restaurants and helicopter tours that await but down-to-earth, functional locker rooms and ample parking lots to accommodate the cars of those who cannot afford to stay overnight. Here, the cost of maintaining artificial layers of snow will soon make businesses unprofitable- if it has not already.

Can we rethink, distort, and reinvent how to live together - high up?

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH PHASE

As part of this diploma studio, you will be asked to find your own method of accessing the chosen site and its themes. Determining your own approach to the research project, including the choice of tools for investigation and representation, and drawing up a timetable are the first steps in the research phase. Are you working on site? Alone or ingroup? Through fieldwork, archival research or by *dérive*? Through photographic documentation, physical models, film or oral history?

We encourage you to use all the tools you have in your toolbox to find the right approach for your research project. The aim is to immerse yourself in the chosen field as quickly and effectively as possible in order to rapidly achieve a productive depth of knowledge. The chosen methodology should have a fruitful effect on the overall project. Within the precise framework of the building site and challenges, you are free to define your field of action and your attitude. How do you proceed?

We start by spending 48 hours on site.  
+ introductions by Silke Langenberg  
& Alexandre Theriot  
+ inputs by experts and guests

### ELABORATION PHASE

In the elaboration phase you will develop your architectural intervention based on your beforehand defined program, scale and type. What does the place need, what does your statement need to be taken into action? Anything could be a project. As in the research phase, you will be asked to choose the means relevant to develop and represent your proposal. Different experts will accompany you, depending on your needs.

Both chairs will meet you for discussions regularly.

Grading Ratio :	
Chair Langenberg	50%
Chair Theriot	50%

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The background is a detailed aerial orthophoto of the Swiss Alps, showing rugged mountain peaks, green valleys, and blue lakes. A dashed white line traces the path of the Glacier Express through the region, connecting several major ski resorts. These resorts are marked with yellow crosshair symbols and labels: DAVOS, ST. MORITZ, CHUR, FLIMS LAAX, DISSENTIS, ANDERMATT, OBERWALD, BRIGUEGGLIO, VISP, ZERMATT, and CRANS MONTANA SION. The text 'APRÈS-SKI' is prominently displayed at the top in large, white, sans-serif capital letters.

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picture: orthophoto with glacier express line +