

ETH Zürich
D-ARCH Departement Architektur
Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur gta

Symposium

Organizer: Chair of Prof. Ursprung

Date : Thursday the 11. October 2012 to Friday the 12. October 2012

Location : HIT E51

Organisation: Anne Kockelkorn, Susanne Schindler, Fabian Furter, Patrick Schoeck-Ritschard and Philip Ursprung.

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The programm is ready for download (see the menu above).

1972 was a pivotal year for architectural education at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, or ETH, in Zurich. Despite significant student opposition, president and department directors cancelled the contracts of three lecturers who had been teaching at the department of architecture in an immediate reaction to their critical studies of the large-scale housing estates developed by the Ernst Göhner corporation. To calm further student protest, the university engaged the Italian architect Aldo Rossi as a visiting professor, who was at this time member of the communist party. This move institutionalized the shift from an architectural pedagogy open to the social sciences toward one that privileged design. In the following years, this approach was further institutionalized and is referred to today as «autonomous architecture».

This exemplary episode serves as the point of departure for the conference «The Göhner Case. On the crisis of large-scale housing production in the 1970s» which will study the structural changes in values taking place in the industrialized western countries before and after the economic crisis of 1973. The conference participants will discuss how the crisis has influenced housing production, urban planning, and architectural discourse to this day.

How did the housing needs of western societies change in the early 1970s? How was this structural change addressed in the architectural discipline? Which media and which scientific research contributed to altering the general and disciplinary perception of large-scale housing so fundamentally within less than a decade?

Presentations will be held in French or German, panel discussions in English.

Programme

11.10. 2012, 14:00 Introduction: Anne Kockelkorn, Susanne Schindler, Philip Ursprung

11.10. 2012, 14:15-14:45 Keynote speech: Fabian Furter, Baden und Patrick Schoeck, Zürich: Living in «Göhner Style». Prefabricated Highrise in Capitalism

Panel 1. Housing Science 11.10.2012, 15:00-17:15, Moderation: Anne Kockelkorn

Speakers:

15:05 Christian Schmid, d'ARCH-ETHZ: Göhnerswil: Scientific Research and Political Debate

15:30 Ignaz Strebel, Wohnforum-ETHZ and Jane M. Jacobs, University of Edinburgh: Bringing the Occupants into Focus: The Dawn and Failure of the Science of Living in Large-Scale Housing Estates

15:55 Thibault Tellier, Université de Lille III: The State and the Crisis of Housing Estates in France during the 1970s

16:20 Jean-Michel Léger, ENSA Paris-Belleville: Architects and Sociologists in the 1970s : Seduction, Betrayal, Abandonment

16:45-17:15 Discussion

What were the reasons for social sciences and design disciplines drifting apart during the 1970s? And in how far can large-scale housing development serve as a case in point for this tendency?

Towards the end of the 1960s, critically-minded players of urban production began to question accelerated post-war urbanization increasingly vociferously and assertively. While the utopian core of modern design attitudes remained unchallenged until the economic crisis of the 1970s, many prominent architects, urban planners and politicians were already criticizing modern design doctrines, the planning logics of the car-friendly city and the effects of urban sprawl.

In the period from 1965 and 1975, between the new critique of postwar-modernism and the avantgarde's heroic convictions – the possibility to shape urban growth and to predetermine fields of social action via architectural form – a brief, but intense area of architectural, urban and social experiments unfolded. In this time, high hopes were pinned on social scientists, who thus assumed a crucial role. Not only were they expected to enable occupants to participate in the planning discourse with a voice of their own. They were also expected to bridge the divide between architecture, urban planning, the real estate market and the social system, and to provide synthetic explanatory frameworks that reconcile the conflicting mindsets of these disciplines. While on this mission, social scientists were permitted to voice opinions considered positively outrageous, such as fundamentally questioning the conditions of capitalist production inherent in urban development or the formal poverty of modern architecture.

The economic and social upheavals of the 1970s put a definitive end to this brief period of open-mindedness, as was the case with the closure of Jörn Janssen's experimental studio at the ETH Zurich by order of the directorate in 1972. Social sciences, architecture and urban planning drifted increasingly apart as disciplines, while the early 20th century belief in progress was shelved together with the hopes in the societal effectiveness of interdisciplinary cooperation.

As an introduction to the debate about the crisis of large-scale housing development, the contributions of this panel aim to explore the nature of social scientists' influence on architects, planners and politicians, and in how far large-scale housing development can serve to illustrate the separation of social sciences and design disciplines during the 1970s.

Panel 2: Projects and Projections, 11.10.2012, 17:45-20:00, Moderation: Sandra Parvu

Speakers:

17:50 Hélène Jannière, Université de Rennes: Political and Social Critique and "Architectural Quality" in the Critique of Large-Scale Housing Estates. Grigny la Grande Borne, 1970s

18:15 Olaf Gisbertz and Sebastian Hoyer, TU Braunschweig (gta-Tragwerkslehre): Experiments in Urban Development - Wolfsburg-Detmerode: Epilogue to a Model Building Project

18:40 Maren Harnack, FH Frankfurt and Sebastian Haumann, TU Darmstadt: Mainfeld, mon amour

19:05 Marie Glaser, Eveline Althaus, Claudia Mühlebach (ETH Wohnforum – ETH CASE): Dealing with the Swiss Large-scale Housing Estates. A Look at the Legacy of the Crisis: The Example of Zurich, Unteraffoltern II.

19:30-20:00 Discussion

In the course of the 1970s the large-scale housing estates lost their economic base and government support, while public criticism increasingly targeted their living environments. And it was precisely the alternatives and

experimental developments of the large-scale form, previously so highly praised, that were most severely criticized. The media representation of projects such as Grigny-la-Grand Borne south of Paris or the Wolfsburg-Detmerode estate in northern Germany changed radically, together with the goals of the participating players: Their aesthetics were now portrayed as epitomizing the failure of urban development and culture.

Regardless of their differences in form, scale, construction or political context, the drastic transformation of many large-scale housing developments in Western industrialized nations from a positive model to a negative case study seems almost identical. The second panel takes this apparent uniformity of a collective image as a point of departure to investigate the mechanisms by which the image of large-scale housing development was constructed between reality and imagination - in the media, in politics, in the occupants' everyday life and by means of its building fabric. In what way did these circumstances contribute to the failure of large-scale housing development? Who were the players that fashioned the image of large-scale housing development in the 1970's - and what were their arguments?

Panel 3: The Enterprise 'Large-scale Housing Development', 12.10.2012, 10:00-12:30, Moderation: Laurent Stalder

Speakers:

10:05 Jacques Lucan, EPFL: 1953-1962: The Pouillon Alternative – or: What if „the French Hard“ had been the Only Possibility?

10:40 Thomas Gnägi, Zurich: „Is that a Werkbund Housing Estate?“ The Development Sonnhalde by the Firm Göhner in Adlikon-Regensdorf as a Model Estate of the Swiss Werkbund

11:05 Juliette Spertus and Susanne Schindler, New York: Co-op City: Herman Jessor, the UHF, and the End of New York City's Grands-Ensembles

11:30 Anne Kockelkorn, ETHZ-gta: Concrete Dreams. On the Political Instrumentalization of Ricardo Bofill's Housing Projects.

12:00 Discussion

The establishment of large-scale housing estates was not only a goal of the welfare state fulfilling its social responsibility. Their construction also provided lucrative business opportunities for various sectors of the economy.

The third panel investigates the role of the construction industry and its influence on the societal acceptance of architectural form and aesthetics. These crucial interactions between construction industry, real estate market and architectural production were, and still are, frequently underestimated in architectural discourse, despite their significant influence on the viability of architectural projects. What kind of links and connections can be traced between the search for alternative forms of housing and available instruments of public funding on the one hand, and the rationale of building construction and expected profit yields on the other?

The four contributions deal specifically with those architects and developers that have neither wholly supported alternatives to large-scale housing development nor uncritically conformed to the realities of the real estate market and the construction industry. These architects were often looked at skeptically by their colleagues: on the one hand, because they were building on profit-oriented terms and cooperated with the construction industry, on the other, because they pursued experiments in form and construction alongside modern design doctrines, be it along neoclassical or popular lines, or determined by specific construction methods. Such distinct players as Fernand Pouillon, Ricardo Bofill, Herman Jessor or Ernst Göhner all share the fate of having made themselves rather unpopular in professional circles owing to their unconventional building activities.

Why did their design attitudes and buildings attract so much critical attention in the architectural debate of their day? What were the motivations and strategies of the players involved - and how much room for manoeuvre did they have?

Panel 4 : The Renaissance of Architectural Autonomy 12.10.2012, 14:00-16:30, Moderation: Philip Ursprung

Speakers:

14:10 André Bideau, Zurich: Discontinuities, Fragments and Continuities. Ungers' Work in Berlin before and after 1967)

14:35 Kim Förster, ETHZ-gta: The Housing Prototype of the IAUS (1973-1976)

15:00 Jean-Louis Violeau, ENSA Paris-Malaquais: Marne-la-Vallée: The Successive Revisions of a Policy of Architectural Innovation

15:25 Angelika Schnell, AdbK Wien: The Propitious Moment (or: The Anti-Sociologists). Rossi and the Göhner Affair at the ETH)

15:50 Discussion

As a concluding forum, the fourth panel will focus on the connections between construction demand, architects' careers and specific housing construction projects around 1973 in the mirror of institutional architectural debate. In this period, the socio-political and technical conditions of mass housing development served as a relevant argument to revoke the connection between social and formal questions and to strengthen the primacy of the project as the core competence of architecture as a discipline: a debate that was to shape several generations of architects under the label of "architectural autonomy".

Large-scale housing development projects became the turning point in the careers of well-known architects who dominated the discourse and the orientation of architecture in the 1970s and 80s in Germany, the USA and Switzerland. They include Oswald Mathias Ungers (Märkisches Viertel in Berlin), Aldo Rossi (Gallaratese in Milan), the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) with Kenneth Frampton and Peter Eisenman (Markus Garvey Village in New York), as well as, under specific French conditions, architects who were active in the Marne-la-Vallée such as Ricardo Bofill, Antoine Grumbach and Léon Krier and Christian Portzamparc.

How do theory production, design doctrines and construction demand correlate in the second half of the 1970s both with regard to the broad discussion of housing issues and to the socio-political and economic development of "the most dispiriting decade of the 20th century" (Tony Judt)?