

HouseEurope!

A citizens' initiative for an EU-legislation that boosts the renovation of existing buildings and stops their demolition driven by speculation.

You rent an apartment? You own a building? You care about the environment? You work in the building sector? Almost everyone is or will be affected by speculative real estate practices and the harm they cause. Because here's the deal: every building is up for demolition, you just don't know yet! In fact, speculation fuels demolition and new construction. This comes with a loss of homes, a loss of jobs, and a loss of energy.

The Speculation Drama

Today, buildings are treated as investments rather than spaces for people to live. Due to financial speculation, millions of square meters sit empty and ruin, are being demolished and replaced: from abandoned industrial and office spaces to functioning family homes. This practice creates social and environmental problems, as people are left without livable spaces. While the public eye is focused on areas such as mobility and energy, the buildings sector accounts for 38% of global CO2 emissions. In fact, the building sector plays a significant role in the problems we face today. All the parties involved – from the real estate industry to architects and the construction industry – have immense influence over the reality we live in.

We are all witnessing the never-ending destruction of our environment and the wasting of valuable resources. Yet we maintain a system in which buying something new is cheaper than caring about the old. A system, that prioritizes financial speculation over the well-being of the people and the planet. A system, in which renovation and adaptation have taken a backseat to demolition and new construction. All in disregard for the dramatic social, economic, and environmental consequences.

So, why is it like that? It boils down to the public awareness, our value system, and the existing legislation.

Awareness, Value, Legislation

In Western markets, buildings have not only become an investment but a focal point for financial speculation. Many investors buy up properties not with the intention to inhabit or rent them out, but rather in anticipation of financial appreciation. This speculative drive is intensified by various factors, and the ripple effects can be profound.

Our system is designed to demolish and build anew. This worked in the past, because we had all resources at hand and new construction was cheaper, faster, and easier than dealing with the constraints of existing buildings. The current material and energy shortages show us that this system does not work anymore and that resources are limited.

But we, the public, simply don't know enough about it. We are missing an awareness of these issues. Other important demands like: "Save the bees!" can build on common sense, but the building industry's role in the problems we face today, is not part of our daily conversations. Yet it should be, because its impact on our lives is dramatic.

The Demolition Issue

By 2050, we will have demolished 2 billion square meters of existing space in Europe. From Amsterdam to Athens, from Riga to Rome, we will demolish the equivalent of half of Germany's building stock and more than Paris or Berlin in

their entirety. Instead, we will have built billions of square meters of new space as replacement for what was already there. This leads to three main issues: Home Loss, Job Loss and Energy Loss.

Social Issue = Home Loss

We demolish existing buildings that could comfortably house more than 50 million people, while the harsh reality is that every year, countless people lose their homes due to demolition and rising prices of new construction.

Economical Issue = Job Loss

We demolish existing buildings that could be renovated and adapted by small and medium businesses, while the harsh reality is that mainly big players benefit from the demolition and new construction.

Ecological Issue = Energy Loss

We demolish existing buildings with all their embodied energy, while the harsh reality is that with every building, countless tons of CO2 are emitted due to demolition and new construction. So, how to fix it?

The Renovation Story

The answer is, we need a social-ecological transformation of the existing building stock. This means we need to change our attitudes and practices by seeing and recognizing the value of existing buildings and boost their renovation. Renovation is a great answer to ensure affordable living spaces, support small and medium scale businesses in the building sector, while massively reducing CO2 emissions. The renovation wave, initiated by the European Union as part of the European Green New Deal can help people to live in much better conditions, and even be economically preferable in the long run.

This transformation takes time, but we came up with a simple yet specific roadmap: Preservation, Adaptation, Renovation, Transformation

To achieve the social-ecological transformation of the existing building stock we must activate what is already there. Through measures focused on building preservation, adaptation, renovation, and transformation.

1. Preservation: Reuse, don't demolish!

We call for the preservation of existing buildings and the energy already invested in them. By doing so, we can save valuable resources and maintain social and cultural values. Our aim is to prioritize reuse over demolition, taking the first step towards achieving affordable living spaces for all.

2. Adaptation: Adapt, don't abandon!

We call for the adaptation of existing structures and underused spaces. In doing so, we can give Europe's building stock a new purpose and narrative, reframing the perception of value in the existing. Our aim is to adapt buildings that have fallen out of use, thereby activating the potential of the existing building stock.

3. Renovation: Build for the future!

We call for the renovation, repair, and care of existing buildings. This reduces waste and CO2 emissions. Our aim is to renovate future-proof, meaning we need to (re)build in a long-lasting way, limiting the unnecessary use of additional material and new construction now, and in the future.

4. Transformation: Shift the Value!

We call for the transformation of existing structures in a social, environmental, and economic sense. Our aim is to implement policies that ensure equity, resilience, and community-building. We need new cultural narratives: from viewing spaces as commodities to seeing them as necessities.

Within the scope of the HouseEurope! initiative, this research and design studio will focus on the subject of preservation. We'll explore its history and principles, as well as relevant European legislation. The goal is 1. to understand what we consider 'valuable' and 2. to reframe preservation as a tool for social-ecological transformation.

To "preserve" (German: "erhalten") means to maintain an existing structure. Fundamentally, preservation ("Erhalt") emphasizes the adaptability of buildings, in contrast to protection ("Schutz"), which aims to retain a building's original state. This perspective on preservation introduces concepts like adaptive reuse, where aging structures are repurposed while preserving their core characteristics.

How much can be changed often depends on guidelines set by preservation bodies and local authorities. Some rules allow only minor changes, while others permit larger transformations, provided the building's primary character remains. Which boils down to the question: what are the main characteristics that we want to preserve, and how do we value them? In times of climate change, can we still afford to preserve buildings exclusively based on their cultural value - their aesthetic, their style, their relevance - when culture brought us into that dilemma in the first place? How do we give value to the things often overlooked or seen as ordinary: the banal, the worthless, the ugly? And in a dynamic world, how can preservation maintain an openness that allows for future development of buildings and structures, that will fall out of use (see: <https://obsolete-stadt.net/forschung/>)?

Collaborative Studio & Goal

To unpack this complex subject, between theory and practice, we will collaborate in a joint studio between TU Innsbruck (Chair for Architectural Theory, lead by bplus.xyz (Arno Brandlhuber, Olaf Grawert, Jonas Janke, Roberta Jurčić, Jolene Lee) and TU Vienna (Chair for Gebäudelehre lead by KOSMOS architects: Artem Kitaev). Together with his students, Artem Kitaev built a research and teaching practice focused on the adaptive reuse potential of existing structures. Within this framework, students pinpoint the material and design possibilities of existing buildings, proposing adaptation and renovation as alternatives to demolition and new builds.

In our collaboration, we'll broaden their approach by introducing two additional components: legislation and narrative design. Consequently, we'll pair students from Innsbruck and Vienna, who will collaboratively address the same building from varied perspectives. The buildings will be presented at the beginning of the semester and are prototypical typologies found across Europe, ensuring each structure has a counterpart (sibling) in both Innsbruck and Vienna.

Together, students will formulate a strategy for each typology/pair, comprising a design proposal and a narrative grounded in legislation, on how to adapt and repurpose the existing building.

Language:	English
Format:	Hybrid Classes offline and online
Modus:	Group Work approx. groups of three students: 2 Vienna + 1 Innsbruck
Time:	Wednesday, 10:00-16:00
Start:	04.10.2023
Midterm:	29.11.2023
Finals:	01.02.2024