Habitat Research Center

28.03.2022
13:30 - 18:30
Foyer SG + Zoom
ID 626 5169 6527

Baukultur and the culture of Transition
Public Seminar

EPFL Architecture
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The notion of Baukultur marked a fundamental step towards a comprehensive understanding of the environment. The idea that landscape, historical architectural heritage and existing built environment could converge to portray the richness and complexity of our future habitat is now pointing to a comprehensive strategical approach to design. Nevertheless, the culture of the built environment, as inherited from the last century, is not yet aligned with the emerging culture of the socio-ecological transition. At the same time, the critical condition we are now facing demands an imaginative effort. This particular crisis affects the design process very specifically, putting at risk its chance to evolve into a new form of practice. The struggle to emerge from an impellent ecological emergency has pushed the architectural discipline towards techno/normative quick fixes, leaving aside a broader reflection on long-term thinking.

Transition is not an unprecedented nor unexpected condition. The unlikely scenario that describes this passage as a gentle conversion from one condition to another, and the consequent effort to mitigate its contradictions, does not contribute to a reliable understanding of the situation we are now facing. On the other side, the alternative scenario of a neat fracture performs the clearance of fundamental cultural continuities. What if we rather imagine transition as recurring opportunity for awakening and reaction, for reading and redefinition, accommodating both tensions and fruitful vitalities? Then how to recognize and balance the inherent conflict to every changeover? And how a critical gaze on the existing built environment can inform the project of contemporary and future transition(s)?

Architectural and urban design has proved to be an effective tool to understand the complexity of the existing context while unveiling how variously its materials and elements react to manipulations. What values and criteria this transition gaze should mobilize? How can we explore the unfolding of scalar, technological, and formal issues within the culture of a built environment?

The public seminar intends to put forward the ongoing reflection carried on by a group of EPFL Laboratories with the coordination of HRC and widen the debate through lectures, open discussions, and round tables during one long afternoon dedicated to architecture value in the context of emerging transitions.