MIT, Department of Architecture, Summer 2020 Workshop
4.s26 Special Subject: City Form—
Cooperative Conditions: Boston

Credit Units: 4 G

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TAs: Ana Arenas, arenas@mit.edu, Hugh Ebdy, ebdy@mit.edu

Class Times: July 14 to August 11, 2020, Tuesdays, 10–1 EST, via Zoom
Office Hours: Thursdays, 10–1 EST, via Zoom

Zwicky Süd, Dübendorf (near Zurich), 13 ¼ room, 430 m² apartment, completed 2016.
Kraftwerk1 housing cooperative, developer; Schneider Studer Primas, architects.

Class Description

COVID-19 has revealed, among many other things, how inadequate and architecturally limiting a primarily market-based housing system is, especially in high-cost coastal areas like Boston. In contrast, Zurich, Switzerland, a similarly high-cost city, has recently realized a number of highly experimental new forms of permanently nonprofit housing cooperatives in the past 25 years. These experiments—clusters of micro-units, large households for up to 50 residents, but also more conventional apartments with access to generous shared amenities—build on a century-old tradition. What is of interest here is not only the architecture, but the fact that this housing is available at “cost rent” to anyone irrespective of income, that it is financed through conventional lenders, and that it has been successfully scaled. Today, more than twenty percent of Zurich’s housing stock is decommodified, cooperative housing.

What would it take to adapt Zurich's cooperative conditions to work within the Boston context?
The goal of this workshop is to articulate a series of questions (as well as short answers) to consider if aiming to transfer the Zurich model to Boston. What happens to public land? How much equity is required to take out a mortgage? How are architects selected? Students will analyze and compare Zurich and Boston-area precedents; dissect planning regulations, fiscal, legal, and financial frameworks; consider architectural plans and interview key actors. The outcome will reveal both the opportunities for and limitations to a large-scale, non-commodified form of housing for all in the Boston area. Students will jointly develop a textual and graphic format to convey these findings for an audience of architects, planners, policy makers, and voters.

The class builds on research conducted together with Anne Kockelkorn and students of the MAS program in history and theory of architecture at ETH Zurich in the spring of 2020, “Cooperative Conditions: A Primer on Architecture, Finance, and Regulation.”

**Key Questions**

- If we are to transfer the model of permanently de-commodified cooperative housing, at scale, without limitations on income, from one context to another, what can be built on? Which precedents exist? Which institutions, organizations, agencies, or networks have an interest in this form of housing? Which models already exist which may go by a different name but share similar concepts, for instance, Community Land Trusts or co-housing?

- What are impediments for such a transfer? Culturally, politically, financially, fiscally, legally, in terms of zoning, in terms of mindset and rhetoric? For instance, if limited-equity cooperative housing primarily considered a means to the end of low-income homeownership, or alternately, a way for “intentional communities” to maintain their exclusivity, how can we make an alternate, more inclusive argument toward a form of housing that moves beyond the market for long-term stability?

- What opportunities arise for architecture when rethinking the development model? What role can architecture play in making alternate housing development models tangible, feasible, and desirable?

**Learning Objectives and Pedagogy**

- To learn to analyze architecture in its interplay with legal, regulatory, financial, and other factors

- To develop criteria for the comparison of housing practices between different cultural, political and economic systems while being aware of the limits of such an approach

- To articulate a question of specific interest which will guide short, intensive research toward the production of an easily accessible answer to the question “why not here?”
Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Each Class will be broken down into three parts: a (guest) lecture followed by discussion; a discussion of readings (there are posted on Dropbox or available online) and precedents; and a discussion of students’ research projects, conducted individually or in pairs. TAs Ana Arenas and Hugh Ebdy are active collaborators in this articulating and coordinating the individual research questions and will be responsible for curating the format and outcome of the workshop.

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<td>Readings, 5-minute presentation of a Zurich precedent</td>
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<td>July 21</td>
<td>Boston’s Landscape</td>
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<td>July 28</td>
<td>The Question of Scale</td>
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Requirements and Evaluation Criteria

Attendance of all class sessions and active participation in the discussions is required. Participation in the office hours is voluntary, but recommended. Completion of the small, self-designed research project that will be part of the overall output of the workshop.

Absence Policy

Given the brevity of the workshop, unexcused absences are not accepted. If you know that you will have to miss a class, email the instructor and TAs in advance.

Grading Policy

A Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

B Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

C Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.

D Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

F Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Massachusetts Institute of Technology students are here because of their demonstrated intellectual ability and because of their potential to make a significant contribution to human thought and knowledge. At MIT, students will be given unusual opportunities to do research and undertake scholarship that will
advance knowledge in different fields of study. Students will also face many challenges. It is important for MIT students to become familiar with the Institute's policies regarding academic integrity, which is available at Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students.

NAAB Student Performance Criteria

A1. Communication Skills: Ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively

A3. Visual Communication Skills: Ability to use appropriate representational media, such as traditional graphic and digital technology skills, to convey essential formal elements at each stage of the programming and design process.

A5. Investigative Skills: Ability to gather, assess, record, apply, and comparatively evaluate relevant information within architectural coursework and design processes.

A7. Use of Precedents: Ability to examine and comprehend the fundamental principles present in relevant precedents and to make choices regarding the incorporation of such principles into architecture and urban design projects.

A10. Cultural Diversity: Understanding of the diverse needs, values, behavioral norms, physical abilities, and social and spatial patterns that characterize different cultures and individuals and the implication of this diversity on the societal roles and responsibilities of architects.

B7. Financial Considerations: Understanding of the fundamentals of building costs, such as acquisition costs, project financing and funding, financial feasibility, operational costs, and construction estimating with an emphasis on life-cycle cost accounting.

Session 1 / July 14
The Zurich Model: Non-speculation and Typological Innovation

Class Goals

- To understand the principles and history of the Zurich model of cooperative housing
- To understand cooperative housing in relation to broader debates in housing and architecture: to own vs to rent, state control vs private actors, central city vs peripheral sites, a legal and financial model vs a social model, alternative vs conservative, market rate vs affordable
- Clarification of terms and debates: shared equity, limited equity, limited dividend // resale restricted // commons, collective, cooperative // nonprofit, public interest, collective, commons
- To give an overview of the categories of analysis used in the Cooperative Conditions project at ETH Zurich, discuss how the Boston projects builds on and adjusts these to our needs, and to sketch out possible forms of graphics
Lecture

Susanne Schindler, What can Boston learn from Zurich’s Housing Cooperatives?

In Preparation of Class 1

Read. // Pick one Zurich cooperative project from the list provided. Pick one architectural or urban feature to present to the class—a particular floor plan, a section, a choice of façade materials, the relationship of private-shared-public space. Articulate three questions that follow from these observations and might serve you as your prompt in moving your research further. Explain why you chose this feature and these questions in light of your past experience with housing—as a resident, as a designer, as an investor, as a neighbor, as a voter, or any of these, or other roles, in combination. Note: Please work with material we have provided and you can find online rather than reaching out to the architects or cooperatives directly.

Required Readings


Further Reading


Session 2 / July 21: Boston’s Cooperative Landscape: Intentional Communities, Low-income Homeownership

Class Goals

- To understand the origin of cooperative housing in the United States, with a particular focus on the 1920s and 1930s (first wave of cooperatives, primarily in New York City)
- To consider the institutional actors (labor unions, artists, tenants, CDCs, … ) who have advanced a range of cooperative housing toward different ends
- To get a basic overview of the landscape of cooperative housing in the Boston area

Guest Lectures

Teresa Gallagher, Director of Asset and Strategy, City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development (DND); Member of the Board of MAHC; Resident of Fenway Cooperative.

Taylor Cain, Director, City of Boston, Housing Innovation Lab.

In Preparation of Class 2

Read and prepare questions for discussion with guest speakers.

Identify a Boston area case study, from the list provided or of individual choosing. A case study can be a project (realized or unrealized), a program, a policy (tax rate, zoning guidelines, etc), or a person or group of people—or any other way to capture and question the particularities of cooperative housing in Boston.

Students will analyze each project (or ask a question) and give a short overview presentation of their research in relation to a number of key topics:

1. Ideas of sharing (self-help, self-governance, mutual aid)
2. The rule of law (laws, ordinances, ballot measures)
3. Ideas on value (individual wealth or social stability?)
4. Land (ownership or lease or .. ?)
5. Finance (equity and debt)
6. Taxation
7. Zoning and building regulations
8. The production of architecture (who selected the architects, contractors, developers?)

Required Readings


Huron, Amanda, Carving Out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C., Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018. *Skim the book and read parts you’re more interested in closely to understand (a) Huron’s conception of the commons
within capitalism, and (b) how LECs have evolved and been in Washington, D.C. *Available online at MIT Libraries.

Further Reading and Resources


On Boston Housing Coops (selection)

https://www.boston.coop/
http://www.masshousing.coop/
https://www.boston.gov/departments/new-urban-mechanics/compact-living-pilot

Newsletters and online resources on U.S. Housing, Urban, and Architectural Policy

CityLab, https://www.bloomberg.com/citylab, especially coverage by Kriston Capps
Furman Center, Housing Starts, biweekly newsletter, https://furmancenter.org/signup
NextCity, Housing: Backyard, https://nextcity.org/
Shelterforce, https://shelterforce.org/
Urban Institute, Housing Matters, https://housingmatters.urban.org/
Urban Omnibus, Housing Brass Tacks, https://archleague.org/project/housing-brass-tacks/

For Inspiration (selection)

https://www.ted.com/talks/alastair_parvin_architecture_for_the_people_by_the_people
https://www.ted.com/talks/esther_sullivan_america_s_most_invisible_communities_mobile_home_parks
https://www.ted.com/talks/alejandro_aravena_my_architectural_philosophy Bring_the_community_into_the_process
Session 3 / July 28: The Question of Scale

Glass Goals

- Discuss questions of policy, financial, design, and strategic questions around scale: access to land, what kind of urbanism is being proposed, who is considered eligible, whether to promote new construction or conversion
- Consider difficulties in scaling initiatives like Community Land Trusts (CLTs) today in light of historical large-scale programs as exemplified by New York’s Mitchell Lama program (1955–75)
- Student presentation and discussion of first findings, ideas, and structure of their case studies

Guest Lecture

Adam Tanaka, Senior Analyst H&RA Advisers, New York; Lecturer in Urban Planning and Design, Harvard GSD

In Preparation of Class 3

Read and prepare questions for discussion with guest speaker.

From the questions and examples brought up in both Class 1 and Class 2, students may pick a topic or question that interests them. Students will work to frame this study under one of a number of the headings/topics that are being looked at in the class.

Present the question in a precise manner and propose an associated research method to work on your case study. Research methods should consist of a combination of textual and graphic/visual output and should identify a specific audience and goal of the final product. Sketch out a plan and end goal in the form of a story board, and identify precedents or examples of intended final output format and style.

Required Reading


Further Reading

Community Service Society of New York, Reinventing the Mitchell-Lama Housing Program (Policy Brief by Thomas J. Waters, Victor Bach), April 2015
https://www.cssny.org/publications/entry/reinventing-the-mitchell-lama-housing-program


Session 4 / August 4:
Global Variations and the Challenge of Translation

Class Goals

Class time is dedicated to discussing student proposals in relation to the issues raised in the readings contextualizing the Boston models in light of global developments, including models of cooperative housing as advanced in Latin America, Asia, and Europe. No guest lecture.

In Preparation of Class 4

Read and prepare questions for discussion //
Further refine your case study as a mock-up for the final presentation.

Required Readings


Further Reading


Session 5 / August 11:
Final Presentation and Discussion with Guests

Confirmed Guest Critics

Anne Kockelkorn, ETH Zurich
Jay Cephas, Northeastern University, Boston