

Why to (Not) Demolish a Building. A Experimental Teaching Approach to Question Demolition in Architecture

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The transformation of mid-twentieth century social housing is a key issue in contemporary Europe, raising several architectural, environmental and social questions. While some examples show the potential of renovating public housing, demolition is unfortunately still considered commonplace, leading not only to the loss of architectural heritage and affordable housing, but also to the destruction of communities built over decades.

In this context, architects have an important role to play in proposing alternatives. In addition to the design-based strategies taught in architectural schools, students need to be confronted to critical analysis of real and complex demolition processes.

The course “Transformation Strategies” at the HEIA Fribourg proposes an experimental teaching format in the form of a collective research, exploration and analysis aimed at questioning the stakes behind 20th century heritage demolition processes and developing a critical and sensitive approach towards its conservation and transformation.

The case study to be presented is the Toulouse le Mirail project by Candilis Josic and Woods, which is threatened by the demolition of about 1400 dwellings. In the context of climate change, it is absolutely necessary to build the city from its architectural and social heritage, to reveal and develop its qualities, to question the decision-making processes and to imagine new levers for projects and actions to transform the city in a truly sustainable way.

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