

Forschungswerkstatt *Krise und Transformation des Eigenheims*

Sub-project *Krise als Chance oder Weiterentwerfen des Eigenheims: Von der Empirie zu baulich-räumlichen Transformation*

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The Single-Family House for Disposition

Empirical knowledge and designing further

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In Germany, there are 16 million single-family homes, each with one or two apartments (Destatis) 2022 p. 16). To grasp the vast scale of these existing buildings, consider this illustrative calculation: If each house accommodated five individuals, the 83 million residents of Germany could theoretically all have a roof over their heads. This scenario highlights a significant potential for transformation within the realm of urban planning. However, such a transformation can only be achieved in collaboration with the residents.

A significant proportion of space in single-family houses remains unoccupied, largely due to demographic changes. Specifically, 3.2 million single-family homes are inhabited by pensioners, each occupying over 80 square meters of living space per person. Additionally, there are households currently residing in single-family homes with less than the average per capita living space. Many of these households are likely to experience an increase in unused space in the near future as children move out (Kenkmann et al. 2019). Consequently, a substantial amount of space in these homes is expected to remain vacant. The critical question then arises: how can we activate and utilize this space for the purposes of socio-ecological transformation?

Examining existing buildings for potential activation offers tangible benefits, not only in conserving natural resources (Blum et al. 2022, p. 104 ff.) but also in enhancing living quality through potential reorganization of use. The transformation of single-family homes into multi-occupancy dwellings is currently a topic of discussion as a viable action plan. The Federal Environment Agency, for instance, recommends considering the subdivision of single-family houses into multiple residential units, in light of potential future funding programs (Blum et al. 2022, pp. 104 ff.). Specifically, Kenkmann et al. (2019, p. 70 ff.) propose the division of such buildings. However, these proposals are primarily quantitative considerations. The practical question of how to realize this transformation of the housing stock with the participation of residents remains unanswered. The underlying issue is encapsulated in the phrase: *Housing*

is conservative (Selle 1996, p. 7). This is particularly true for the single-family home, a structural embodiment of traditional gender roles and a contributor to social inequality.

In addressing the question of 'how' to implement such a transformation, the implicit knowledge and informed actions of residents themselves, spanning multiple generations, can prove invaluable. Therefore, it's crucial to understand the residents' perspectives: How do they feel about potentially transforming their housing practices? What are their views on their current living arrangements? Are they open to adjustments, perhaps even to the idea of sharing living spaces or reallocating them?

Assuming the interdependence between residents and their physical-material surroundings, structural transformations should always be in relation to the resilience of social practices, and vice versa. This interplay becomes apparent through the perspective of the residents. As architects, our focus is on these latter two aspects, particularly the question of structural transformation. We view it as our responsibility to uncover and understand this perspective before beginning the design process.

Our empirical research aims to leverage insights into housing practices and their spaces to identify transformative levers, thereby gaining qualitative insights into the range of existing buildings. Our goal is not to concentrate solely on specific individual metrics. Instead, we aim to identify spatial-programmatic possibilities, such as sharing spaces, outsourcing or consolidating functions, or creating synergy effects through the temporal and spatial interweaving or reallocation of resources.

The pursuit of qualities that either persuade residents to embrace new concepts or alleviate their existing challenges is more crucial than merely reducing space or advocating for renunciation. As Harald Welzer and Bernd Sommer (2017, pp. 111-112) suggest, the starting point for a transformative design in this empirical approach involves re-evaluating the 'familiar' (von Mende, 2023).

The empirical exploration of the existing single-family houses sector was conducted in collaboration with students as part of a research-based teaching format. A research report detailing the results is currently in preparation, evaluating the material from the multi-method survey, which includes drawings, interviews, and model photographs. The insights and subsequent questions derived from this field research will inform architectural design projects to be developed at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar starting from October 2023.

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