

Denkraum #13

Inconvenience

We are the Ministry for the Future



Pieterjan Ginckels, S.P.A.M. Office, 2011 - photo Olmo Peeters

In his sci-fi parable *The Ministry for the Future* from 2020, Kim Stanley Robinson brings the impact of climate change into the very near future. The book is set in Zurich, and posits ETH as an important agent for change. In the upcoming four semesters we will use this narrative as an invitation to ask this inconvenient question: is ETH actually working in the interest of future generations?

For this first semester, we start with ETH's built reality and its real estate strategy, by taking stock of the buildings, campuses, public spaces and landscapes it develops and maintains as a federal institution. Holding 211 buildings in Zurich alone, accounting for five billion Swiss Francs, ETH's real estate portfolio has a huge impact on the city, the region and even the country. Which architectures, financial constructions, strategies, actors and policies constitute ETH's real estate?

To this end, with you, we will set up and run a Competence Center that scrutinises ETH's real estate politics. Five different departments of the Competence Center each focus on a specific aspect and develop an in-depth understanding of it. From here, the Center will develop feasibility studies that propose and test out spatial strategies, priorities and briefs through design research.

By dressing up as a Competence Center, we take the perspective of the institution seriously. We try to understand and tackle the inconvenient questions and realities it is facing from the inside, by embodying it, through roleplay and empathy. What if we are the Ministry of the Future? What would we do?

Introduction 19 September 2023, 9:30am, Octavo, Oerlikon

An Fonteyne, Ties Linders, Els Silvrants-Barclay, Camiel Van Noten in collaboration with ETH Real Estate

Competence Center for ETH Zurich Spatial Politics ETH-SP

The Center

The Center works toward the vision of an ETH Real Estate strategy taking into account future generations and representing non-human interests. What would they say if they could voice their concerns?

Dept. of Built Matter and Urban Behaviour

The Dept. of Built Matter and Urban Behaviour gathers in-depth knowledge on the past, current and future buildings in which ETH houses its various activities, employees and students. Square metres, programmes, scales, architectures, materialities, ownerships. How did these shift over time, and what is in the pipeline? By setting up a practice of walking, this department also expands its method of investigation from desktop research into the real-life reality of the 211 buildings of ETH in Zurich.

Dept. of Numeric and Other Values

The Dept. of Numeric and Other Values looks into the economic realities in which ETH organises, develops and maintains its real estate portfolio. How does ETH finance its real estate operations? Which ownership models and public-private partnerships are at play? What is the value of this portfolio, compared to other developers such as pension funds or public agents such as Liegenschaften Stadt Zürich? By looking into strategy papers, annual reports, procedures of architecture competitions, as well as the compositions of juries, commissions and boards, this department also researches how - and by who - ETH priorities are set. Which values and networks of power underpin and structure ETH's real estate policies?

Dept. of Affective Spatial Experience

The Dept. of Affective Spatial Experience takes up the position of the user to give weight to the actual, day-to-day experience of working and studying in an ETH building. Who is welcome and how do you enter and find your way in an ETH building? By cleaning, making home, role playing, mis-using or doing internships in different spaces provided by ETH, this department seeks out first-hand information on the kinds of activities and userships that ETH allows, stimulates, tolerates, complicates and prohibits through its spatial means.

Dept. of Historical, Architectural and Current Institutionness

The Dept. of Historical, Architectural and Current Institutionness looks into the role that ETH and its building patrimony has played - and continues to play - in the shaping of the Swiss nation state. What kind of architectural institutionness, understood as an architectural esthetic or character, has this produced over time and today? This department combines research into the architectural history of ETH in helping to build and represent the nation state with a study of the glossy ETH magazines, website and marketing campaigns that outline its real estate actions. How does this play out spatially through its representational infrastructures of institutionness such as lobbies, board rooms and reception halls?

Dept. for the Future

The Dept. for the Future engages with the ETH real estate portfolio from the perspective of the future, in which climate change and its myriad effects urge us to reconsider a building culture anchored on extraction and demolition, our relationship with non-humans as well as changing labour conditions, to name but a few. How will ETH engage with circularity, biodiversity or digitization through the development and maintenance of its building stock? This department engages with the question on how to make ETH real estate exemplary and future-proof.