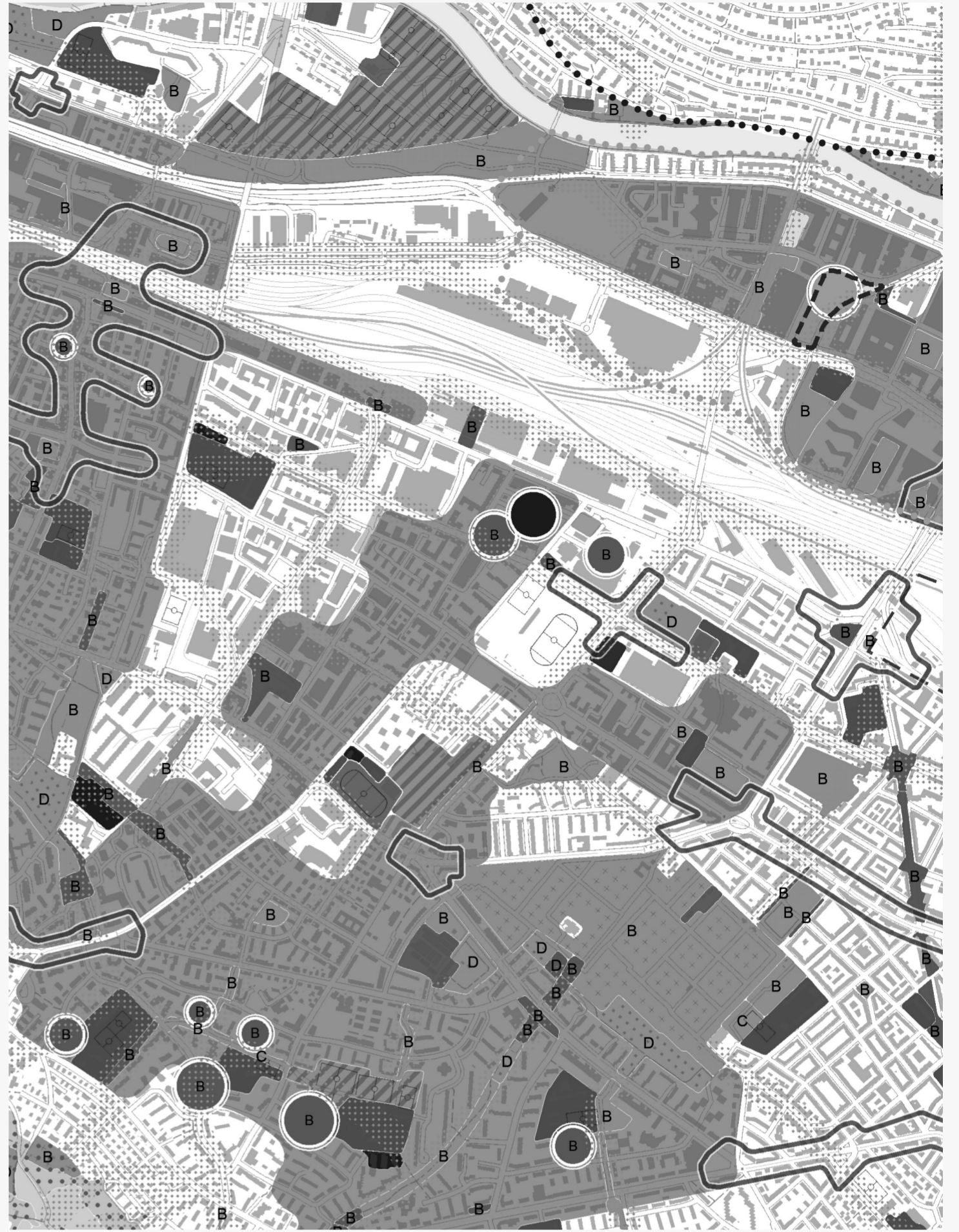


Studio Altstetten



Studio Spring 2022

contact: fink@arch.ethz.ch



A Room of Entanglements

Dear Student,

We hope this letter finds you well.

Densification often feels like a threat: buildings get demolished and residents displaced – for the sake of more square metres, but not always more or a larger diversity of inhabitants. We started our investigation on inner city densification in Zurich last year, when we organised a shared master thesis on Triemlifussweg. In the upcoming semester we would like to continue working on the question how densification could be turned into an asset to tackle and renegotiate pressing socio-environmental conditions and needs, without losing existing qualities of urban life.

To continue this investigation we choose to work on Altstetten. Altstetten is one of the largest districts of Zurich, and the most populous. It lies between the foothills of Uetli- and Käferberg and has extensive and valuable landscape qualities. Moreover the district is strongly defined and structured by different infrastructures: The Highway A1, the railways and the Limmat. And the new Limmattalbahnhof connects the area with the larger region. During the last decade Altstetten has already undergone an immense transformation and densification. Due to its strategic location in the new “Richtplan” for Zurich – a guiding plan on a city scale for any future development – Altstetten is still designated as one of the areas with high potentials for further inner city densification. The resulting pressure and dynamism is omnipresent and many transformation projects are ongoing. These projects – like schools, housing, retirement homes – that today and in the near future shape Altstetten, are the ones we will start from.

We will approach these places by looking closely and by oscillating between different perspectives: One will be a very subjective and intuitive view on the characteristics of the site and its everyday urban life. Another one an analytic yet personal perspective on the question how spatial settings influence behaviour and trigger specific reactions. And another one tries to deconstruct and challenge cultural habits and implicit societal agreements through action.

All your work will grow into a collection which creates a context to inspire different stakeholders involved in urban transformation and development in Altstetten, to analyse and rethink their approach. How can additional values be integrated in the projected developments? How does or can densification contribute to a neighbourhood in transformation? What kind of design instruments and approaches can help to maximise positive effects? In her latest book “Medium Design” Keller Easterling tries to formulate alternative approaches to the world’s dilemmas and refocuses on the relation between objects, rather than on objects themselves. Inspired by this new perspective we will try to understand the mechanisms that define densification. How are current frameworks inviting to contribute to an existing landscape? Does design have the potential to become such an invitation? How can infrastructure become a new framework and pre-condition to react to?

The physical environment to discuss these questions will be at the core of our studio. Together we will transform our lab at ONA into a room that is inviting and inspiring and helps us and others to transgress current ways of thinking. We imagine this room as an immersive spatial setup that encourages to think beyond the plot, to think in relations, to think in long(er) time spans, and to reconnect with the actual lives of people living and working in Altstetten. The room will be a playground to develop, test and discuss new scenarios at a 1:1 scale and in real-time. We call this space the “Room of Entanglements”.

Hoping to meet you soon!

On behalf of NEWROPE, Lukas Fink, Seppe De Blust, Marica Castigliano, Chloé Nachtergaele