

EMANUEL CHRIST & CHRISTOPH GANTENBEIN  
PHILIP URSPRUNG

# KOMMUNALKA

## N°II

MASTER  
THESIS

SPRING SEMESTER  
2025



CHRIST-GANTENBEIN.ARCH.ETHZ.CH  
URSPRUNG.ARCH.ETHZ.CH

**Title and short description**

**KOMMUNALKA N°II**

“Kommunalka part II” continues our exploration of densifying existing building stock, reimagining shared spaces, and rethinking how we live together. How much space does a person need? What spatial infrastructure is required for living and dwelling? Are one's own four walls sufficient? And is the loft still a valid model - a large, empty, entirely private living space where quality is measured by the amount of superfluous space that allows individuals the freedom to develop and express themselves? This inquiry into the space of living arises amidst a demographically challenging situation: As architects, do we see it as our task to continue producing 40,000 apartments per year in response to Switzerland's anticipated rapid population increase of an additional million people by 2050, and do we believe in unlimited growth?

Or, can we develop cultural and typological alternatives that reimagine living, thereby using increasingly expensive resources more sparingly and counteracting growing economic inequality? Could the answer lie in the collectivization of certain infrastructures for living? Throughout the history of living, the relationship between one's own private space and the communal or public offering has been negotiated again and again in new typological designs: The assembly of the French nobility at the court of Louis XIV, a type of monarchical communal living, was a means of the king to maintain political control and was a forced alternative to the scattered noble estates across the land. The Phalanstère was a vision to find an organizational and architectural form for the growing proletariat as an alternative to the worker's apartment, in which the new class was to be isolated. Or the KOMMUNALKA, a colloquial term for a communal apartment, which remains prevalent to this day, was a pragmatic and programmatic solution in the face of housing shortages in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution in 1917: Bourgeois apartments were expropriated and allocated to families on a room-by-room basis. It led to an extreme densification, coupled with conflict-prone shared use of kitchen and bathroom by randomly assembled individuals, which also fostered and still fosters community and social structures, enabling living in the urban center.

Which infrastructures for living can be collective Is a contemporary interpretation of the KOMMUNALKA a viable counter-model that redefines privacy in Switzerland? In the upcoming semester, we aim to develop answers to this question through scenarios of densification from within. Typological discoveries in the post-Soviet cities of Tbilisi and Tashkent, as well as the work of the artist Ilya Kabakov (1933-2023), can serve as inspiration and a starting point for designing a master's thesis. Radically situated in our time and culture, it generates living spaces within the existing building stock, turns necessity into virtue, and creates an architecture of living that generates added societal value.

## **Description of preparation and elaboration phase**

### Preparation phase:

- Conduct typological study on precedents of collective living across cultures and times to understand the evolution of living forms.
- Perform literature research on critical texts addressing communal living.
- Develop a precise understanding of social, demographical, or cultural realities concerning housing and possible developments in the coming years.
- Identify conflicts and potentials of shared infrastructure based on the research, from various perspectives. This includes, but not limited to, examining private vs. shared spaces, mono-functional vs. multi-temporal use, external expansion vs. internal densification, etc.
- Develop a thesis to reimagine alternative living forms, which will serve as the foundation for the design project throughout the semester.

### Elaboration phase:

- Implement the developed thesis into a radical design project.
- Develop the project across all scales, from urban configuration to specific details, including architectural types, models of living, and construction methods.

## **Work to be done in preparation phase**

### Teaching formats:

- Individual feedback / desk crit
- Input lectures by Design and History of Art & Architecture Chairs
- Ca. 3 group discussions with the two Chairs

### Inputs:

- Input on typological research and graphic representation of information
- Input on close reading of texts and developing critical positions

### Research and working formats:

- Individual research on communal housing typologies and current housing conditions in Switzerland
- Fieldwork and surveys conducted on site

### Expected outcome:

- A thesis presenting a radical position on alternative forms of living in Switzerland
- Selection and documentation of a site for the design project
- An architectural scenario envisioning the potential housing of tomorrow

## **Ratio of grading by cooperation partners**

### Preparation phase:

Collectively graded by the Design Chair and the History of Art and Architecture Chair

### Elaboration phase:

Collectively graded by the Design Chair and the History of Art and Architecture Chair