

# ***“WIR BAUEN EIN PARADIES”***

Masterthesis Spring Semester 2024

Chair of Construction Heritage and Preservation, Prof. Dr. Silke Langenberg +  
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# “WIR BAUEN EIN PARADIES”

## SPREITENBACH EINE STADT DIE DER KANTON NICHT WOLLTE <sup>1</sup>

In the frenzy of the 1950s a farmer's village, just outside the borders of the canton of Zurich, took the vote to become a “model city”. After some years of uncontrolled, unregulated building activity around the village, where single-family houses suddenly sprouted out of the ground, a bigger construction site grasped the attention of the inhabitants. Not knowing what would come, they observed a building site where the slabs were growing taller and taller, floors being stacked one on top of another. The architect Mario della Valle had a 20-floor-high-rise in mind and had started its construction. Inhabitants and the commune were not informed and had no legal means to prevent the construction. The village did not have a zoning plan at the time.

## EUPHORIC BOOM

It was the time of modern ideals, time of the economic boom, time of liberation for some, and of gigantic experimentation for others. A foreseeable growth of the population of Spreitenbach was due to widespread suburbanization at the time coupled with the canton of Aargau offering refuge for unmarried couples, which were prohibited by the Zurich Konkubinatsverbot, to rent living space together. Cheaper rents met the quest for more liberal forms of living.

## “LIKE EASYJET, SKODA OR IKEA, WELL DONE BUT AFFORDABLE” <sup>2</sup>

The small village decided on a large-scale and radical plan to become an exemplary modern city with more than 30'000 inhabitants. Pushing them towards this large-scale approach was not only the incident of their very first (unwanted) high-rise and the continuous growth in population but also plans of the SBB to build an immense marshaling yard in the area.

## “TOO DENSE FOR A VILLAGE NOT DENSE ENOUGH FOR A CITY” <sup>3</sup>

The some 20'000 people of the village at the time were driven by a spirit of optimism to become a modern city. The desire for light, air and green space for everyone was to be satisfied with a new high-rise housing estate. Totally inexperienced with the scope of their own project, the commune decided to adopt an urban plan developed by a 25-year-old architect from Zurich, Klaus Scheifele.

## “TO THE OLD VILLAGE? OH YES, I THINK I WENT THERE ONCE” <sup>4</sup>

A new, clean airy high-rise housing complex should be built on the long fields (“Langäcker”) outside of old Spreitenbach while preserving the existing village center as it was. Neu-Spreitenbach was to house its new inhabitants in punctual high-rises on a fully modern plan. Both areas of the town never got to touch or mix, with the once-intended linking community zone remaining unbuilt. Only one of the planned functions was realized: paradise.

## **“WIR BAUEN EIN PARADIES”<sup>5</sup>**

The new city needed a new center. The founder of the retail chain Denner intended to offer just this to Spreitenbach. He published an ad in the newspaper, looking for an architect with “American experience” to build Switzerland’s first shopping mall. Following the American examples of consumerist temples for the owners of motorized vehicles, the developed aimed at nothing less than building paradise (see slogan). Paradise is what the new center of Spreitenbach should be: 155 free parking spaces, a fully air-conditioned indoor street with over 50 shops and evening opening hours, 7 restaurants, 8 bowling alleys, an indoor swimming pool, a prayer room, and a fountain. It was unseen before, a typological novelty in Switzerland.

## **NEW WORKFORCE AND GRASS WIDOWS<sup>6</sup> IN CONCRETE CASTLES**

The Shoppi asked for a new workforce, further increasing the attraction of Spreitenbach even beyond the borders of the country. Sociocultural questions arose, and negative headlines of Spreitenbach soon flushed the news. The meant-to-be airy, clean modern estate was now referred to as “Albanian towers”, as a concrete castle with soulless high-rises, as a source of aggression and social problems, as a dormant satellite city, isolating stay-home wives in the peri-urban green.

## **LIMMATVALLEY AND MÄNHÄTTN<sup>7</sup>**

Economic pressure, further growth and rising prices bring new dynamics to the whole Limmatvalley. Infrastructural projects improved the connection to the center of Zurich, attracting new investors. In the Langäcker areas, many buildings are today in need of renovation. Properties in shared ownership have failed to show a long-term concept of maintenance. The area today shows one of Switzerland’s most diverse structure of inhabitants but with the majority of its inhabitants not having a Swiss passport and thus no right to vote, it is the minority taking all democratic decisions.

While the social reputation remains critical, positive headlines in 2022: Lorena Saten from Spreitenbach is nominated Miss Universe Switzerland. The major congratulates.

## EXPLORATION ONSITE WITH OPEN OUTCOME

We will venture into the multi-layered, complex terrain, we will explore, we will be on-site, we will document, walk, question, see, seek, try, and experiment.

How should we act on this former battlefield of modernity?  
What do we envision for a shopping center with 155 free parking slots ?

Where should we meet if not around the fully climatized indoor fountain?

Do we understand what it means to live on the 20th floor overlooking an urbanized valley and gazing into your neighbors living room ? Am I in the city or on the field?

How can we, or should we at all, update housing typologies? Do we want to work where we live, do we want to live where we work?

Which part of this modern heritage should we preserve?

Do we have to change its reading?

Can we find a way to energetically refurbish without wrapping the structures in carbon-intensive coats?

How much is *enough*?

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH PHASE

As part of this diploma studio, you will be asked to find your own method of accessing the chosen site and its themes. Determining your own approach to the research project, including the choice of tools for investigation and representation, and drawing up a timetable are the first steps in the research phase. Are you working on site? Alone or ingroup? Through fieldwork, archival research or by *dérive*? Through photographic documentation, physical models, film or oral history?

We encourage you to use all the tools you have in your toolbox to find the right approach for your research project. The aim is to immerse yourself in the chosen field as quickly and effectively as possible in order to rapidly achieve a productive depth of knowledge. The chosen methodology should have a fruitful effect on the overall project. Within the precise framework of the building site and challenges, you are free to define your field of action and your attitude. How do you proceed?

At the beginning we will spend 48 hours on site in Spreitenbach.

+ introduction by Silke Langenberg & Alexandre Theriot  
+ introduction to Spreitenbach by Philip Ursprung.

### ELABORATION PHASE

In the elaboration phase you will develop your architectural intervention based on your before-hand defined program, scale and type. What does the place need, what does your statement need to be taken into action? Anything could be a project. As in the research phase, you will be asked to choose the means relevant to develop and represent your proposal. Different experts will accompany you, depending on your needs.

Both chairs will meet you for discussions regularly.

Grading Ratio :

Chair Langenberg

50%

Chair Theriot

50%

#### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> Arnet, Hélène (2019): *Eine Stadt die der Kanton nicht wollte*, Tagesanzeiger, <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/eine-stadt-die-der-kanton-nicht-wollte-343774162145> (22.11.23)

<sup>2</sup> Arnet, Hélène (2023): *Er behauptet: das Limmattal wird chic - Ikea-chic*, Tagesanzeiger, <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/er-behauptet-das-limmattal-wird-chic-ikea-chic-386279809056> (22.11.23)

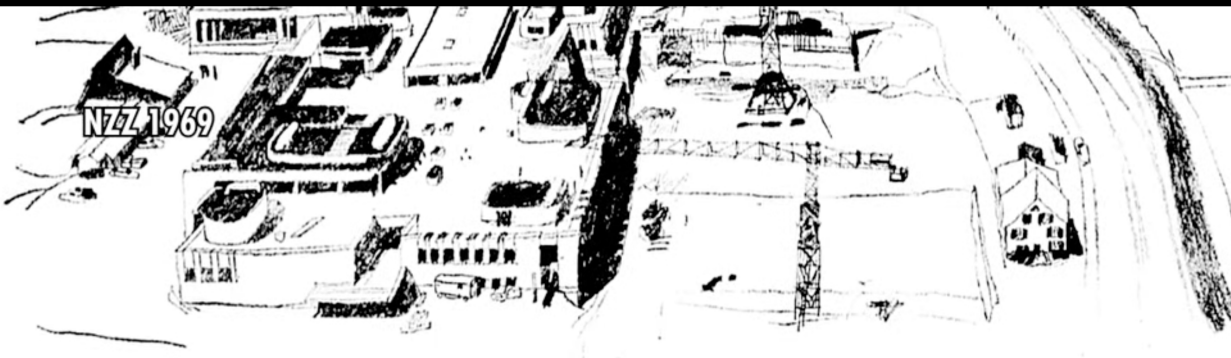
<sup>3</sup> Roderick Hönig (2023): *Zu dicht für ein Dorf, zu wenig dicht für eine Stadt*, Hochparterre, <https://www.hochparterre.ch/nachrichten/presseschau/zu-dicht-fuer-ein-dorf-zu-wenig-dicht-fuer-eine-stadt#> (31.10.23)

<sup>4</sup> oral quote from: Lenherr, Beat, Oehninger, Thomas (1998): *Spreitenbach - Wie aus einem Dorf eines blieb* (Film), Switzerland Panimage GmbH

<sup>5</sup> "Wir bauen ein Paradies": advertisement slogan for the Shopping Tivoli, Spreitenbach

<sup>6</sup> Grüne Witwen (eng. grass widows): german term referring to women that were left behind in the peri-urban green outskirts while their husbands went to work

<sup>7</sup> "Manhättn - oder nöd": advertisement slogan for Langgäcker, Spreitenbach



aber nicht einfach darum zu kopieren, ein Shopping Center für typisch schweizer Bedürfnisse zu schaffen.

Welches waren nun die spezifischen architektonischen Gesichtspunkte, die Sie berücksichtigen mussten?  
*Es galt vor allem, auf dem gegebenen Gelände 2 Warenhäuser, 2 Supermarkets, 2 grosse und weitere 50 kleinere Läden unter einen Hut zu bringen. Die Aufgabe war zu gestalten, dass die kleinen Läden gross profitieren. Ein weiteres Problem: teurer Boden. Dies zwang uns, das Shopping Center dreigeschossig zu bauen. Daher Sie im Zentrum viele Vertikalverbindungen wie 4 Rollbänder, 9 Rolltreppen, etwa 100 und ca. 40 Treppen. Die Parkplätze für über 1500 Autos sind ebenerdig rund um das Center angeordnet. Die Anlieferung erfolgt direkt ins Untergeschoss. Dort haben wir eine modern ausgebaute Busstation.*

# Wir bauen ein Paradies.

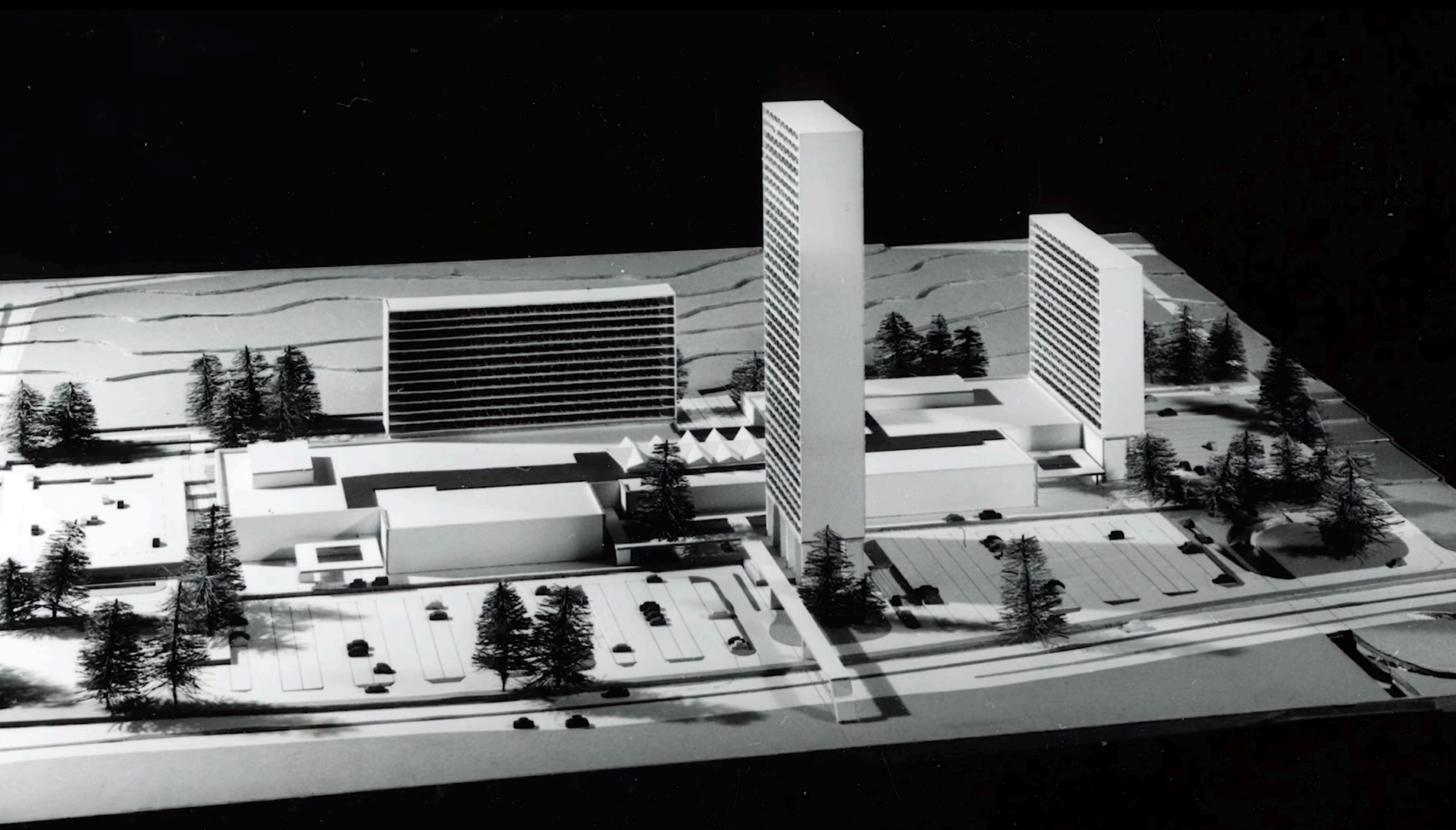
Herr Rebmann, wie würden Sie Ihren Bau kurz charakterisieren?  
*Der Bau ist vor allem nach innen orientiert. Nach aussen wirkt er eher schlicht, lockert durch ein voll bepflanztes Dach, integriert mit dem davorstehenden dreigeschossigen Hochhaus. Im Innern haben wir zwei Ebenen eine lange Ladenstrasse, Grün. In der Mitte befindet sich ein gedeckter Innenhof mit einer Volle Aquarien und einem Wasserspiel. Ausserdem viel Grün: Palmen, Blumen und schenndurch Bänke zum Ausruhen. Kunden haben das Gefühl, auf einer richtigen Strasse zu gehen.*

*Ein Paradies für Sie. Ein Paradies für modernes und gemütliches Einkaufen. Wir bauen Tag und Nacht. Und wir hören nicht auf, bis es steht: das erste Shopping Center der Schweiz!*

*haben gefragt, geforscht. Wir haben festgestellt. Und wir handeln danach. – Wir bauen für morgen. Und künftig kaufen Sie im Shopping Center. Zum Beispiel in Spreitenbach.*

Steht das Shopping Center für sich oder ist es ein weiterer Zusammenhang?  
*Es handelt sich hier um ein integriertes Shopping Center. Es wird zum Mittelpunkt der zukünftigen Stadt.*

**2.**  
**Also: Sie brauchen nicht me...**



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Image credits: Movie still "Wie aus einem Dorf eines blieb", ThomasOehninger, 1988

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