

The power of neighborhood – rethinking the way of life within co-housing projects in Switzerland

Sanna Frischknecht, Bern University of Applied Sciences in Social Work

Social movements questioning the hegemonic logics of competition and growth focus their interests on the fundamental parts of living, housing, nutrition and mobility in urban contexts, try to establish a new, alternative (and maybe better) way of life. Their focus on alternative ways of living together within the context of the existing degrowth debate makes them interesting for questions such as the conditions and possibilities of the "good life".

For this reason, one point of reference of the planned study is the double crisis of the economic and the ecologic in western postindustrial societies (Leggewie/Welzer 2009), which results in doubts and questioning the prevailing logic of increasing capacity, competition and growth and which was developed by the proceeding of capitalism through the last few decades, marks one of the starting points of research interest.

The other point of reference can be found in the long lasting debate in urban studies, which focuses on the question of city planning and its impact on living within cities and the relationship of cities with their surrounding areas and the impact on cities and landscapes. The aim of this project is to focus on the question, if and how social movements and co-housing projects, emerging from movements, try to establish a new, alternative way of life, by rethinking the structuring of cities and the county area and the way they interact in the cities respectively in the neighborhood on the one hand and referring to degrowth theories on the other hand.

In Switzerland an association called "Neustart Schweiz" was founded around 2008 and is part of a broader housing movement. The aim of the association is an ecological and social renewal according to or rather in reference to the 2008 published book "Neustart Schweiz" written by P.M. (Hans E. Widmer). Referring to theories such as subsistence economy, aspects of critical theory referring to Karl Marx or approaches facing ecological aspects, which are based on Meadows and others "The Limits to Growth" (1972) they draw a picture of a world beyond growth. As a second point of reference they refer to urban studies. Jane Jacobs "the Death and Life of Great American Cities"

(1961) is one of the earliest writings, but also publication in the field of critical regional planning in Switzerland (Diener et al. 2006, Loderer 2012) are mentioned.

To solve the problems emerging from the logic of progression, competition, growth and its reproduction in urban planning "Neustart Schweiz" presents a concrete and activity-oriented proposal for solution: "the power of neighborhood" and the "commons", which focuses on neighborhoods as the smallest modules of a subsistence strategy and a way of life (Widmer 2013: 3). In this sense the term commons refers to the essay written by Garret Hardin "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968). The aim of the concept is a denser neighborhood which builds (according to Neustart Schweiz) the fundament for more activity and communication and the desire for collective events (Neustart Schweiz 2011: 6). But there is also seen a necessity of a re-localization of resources and labor, as well as finally a need of new planning cultures which follows the concept of planning in modules: First apartments then neighborhoods afterwards districts and then city and region. On every step the interactions between different actors has to be taken into account.

Since the 1990ies some residential building-cooperatives, which refer directly or indirectly to the neighborhood concept of "Neustart Schweiz" and the other above-named theories, have been founded. They are trying to build their projects based on those concepts and theoretical references and they are now trying to bring this vision into reality. Focusing on the question of how people live and interact in times beyond growth, alternative co-housing projects, such as "Kraftwerk1", "Nenal", "mehr als wohnen" or "Warmbächli", to name a few of an increasing number of such projects in Switzerland, are interesting examples to study.

This workshop focuses on this shifting from theory to practice and asks questions like: What are the theoretical and ideal references on which the idea of „the power of neighborhood“? How do the projects articulate their ideal of change? And how (regarding architecture, design, rules for and the practice of living together) are they trying to establish and build up an alternative way of life in their real projects, which goes further than one's home?

References

Diener, Roger et al. (2006): Die Schweiz, ein städtebauliches Portrait. Basel: Birkäuser.

Hardins, Garret (1968): The Tragedy of the Commons. In: Science, New Series, Vol. 162, No. 3859 (Dec. 13, 1968), pp. 1243-1248 .

- Jacobs, Jane (1961): the death and life of great american cities. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Leggewie, Claus and Harald Welzer (2009): Das Ende der Welt, wie wir sie kannten. Klima, Zukunft und die Chancen der Demoratie. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer.
- Loderer, Benedikt (2013): Die Landesverteidigung: eine Beschreibung des Schweizerzustands. Zürich: Edition Hochparterre.
- Meadows et al. (1972): The limits to grwoth a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind. London: Earth Island.
- Neustart Schweiz (2011): Konzept Nachbarschaften Entwickeln. Zürich: Neustart Schweiz.
- P.M. (1984) bolo'bolo. Zürich: Paranoia City.
- P.M. (2008): Neustart Schweiz: so geht es weiter. Solothurn: Edition Zeitpunkt.
- Widmer, Hans E. (2013): “The power of Neighborhood“ und die Commons. Zürich: Neustart Schweiz.