

Cooperative housing and living in Zurich, Switzerland

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How does the citizens' right to the city, particularly the right to difference, manifest in the European cities? Is community building a precondition for the sustainability of collective housing? Or rather is the mere supply of multiple housing units clustered together sufficient for the manifestation of community over time, probably also if targeting specific categories of residents? In context what political actors play today critical roles in building urban sustainability? We propose a first step in answering these questions through current grass-roots initiatives that work in parallel on both the social and material provision of collective housing and cooperative living. In this paper thus we present political processes regarding the conception and implementation of collective forms of housing, workspace and living in Zurich, Switzerland. Nevertheless, these grass-roots processes imply social innovation, while following the cooperative housing tradition developed in Zurich during the industrialization age, and the new movement of cooperatives for sustainable lifestyle in cities that started in the 1990s inspired by p.m.'s utopia bolo'bolo. Of these latter political constructs Kraftwerk1 Genossenschaft was the first material consequence. As a pilot-project it created a place where various forms of housing, work and public services can coexist and benefit from this cohabitation, leaving room for experimentation with new ways of making a living between waged work and the mostly unpaid housework. It was seen as a solution to a societal crisis generated by increased difficulties to provide waged work, through a new type of extended home economy and the recreation of local communities in the form of intentional communities. More than twenty years after the beginnings of this process, we revisit critically the

implementation of its vision, by looking at shortages, achievements and possible futures. A revival of Kraftwerk1's vision within an ongoing political process is a recent cooperative in Zurich, NeNa1 Bau- und Wohngenossenschaft, which explores various manifestations of the collective, self-organized, environmentally and economically sustainable urban alternative, and that at the same time aims to generate ecological and socially integrated neighborhoods. That means an urban insertion that takes into account multiple perspectives, based on the cooperative principles and responding the necessities of the community at large, including the immediate proximity in the neighborhood. From this point of view, NeNa1 is a contemporary experiment within a broader process of building new understandings of urbanity, urban lifestyle and urban commons, based on self-organization and the affirmation of diversity within an ideal of sustainable city life. At present NeNa1 manifests as multiple gatherings, citizen initiatives, and participatory conception processes. Through participant observation we engage in some of these activities, and argue here that, before a concrete spatial materialization, such processes themselves produce the experience of Lefebvre's understanding of the lived space, with the potential to shape over time appropriated social spaces of difference.

The illustration of the collective housing and community building processes in Zurich brings forward a twofold contribution of this paper. On the one hand, it shows that participant field notes from NeNa1 political processes together with inquiries into the spatial practice of existing experiments, such as Kraftwerk1 in Zurich, have the potential to shed light upon manifestations of the rights to difference, appropriation and participation in contemporary cities. On the other hand, the paper aims to reassert the spatial design professions as activism. Rather than totally depending either on the free market choices or on the public authorities that are, if not passive, mostly reactive to market-driven development processes, design practitioners may act in the city empowered by their very own craft. We suggest that their civic presence has the potential to revive the relevance of the spatial design professions as communication vessels for civil and democratic urbanity, and they have a key role in providing contemporary citizens the right to the city.

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