

STRUCTURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS
Overview for linking the documents of the raw material to the TOPICS summaries (Extended table of contents).

EXTENDED TABLE OF CONTENTS
As contents there are short summaries of differents TOPICS extracted from the raw material.

RAW MATERIAL
The raw material consists of three booklets: CONTEXT, ACTORS. VERTICAL EXTENSIONS. Each booklet represents the work in progress.

CONTEXT
The Context chapter seeks to understand the planning, legal, and political conditions that shape the city. Vertical extensions have the potential to overlay the existing fabric with new spatial and urban logics, while simultaneously reinforcing those already present. To discern which of these logics should be amplified or continued, a hermeneutic engagement with the theoretical and physical environment is essential.

ACTORS
The chapter Actors examines which individuals and institutions play a role in the extension of the existing urban fabric through vertical additions.
It seeks to understand their attitudes toward the existing built environment, as well as the aims and motivations of each stakeholder group. This understanding is essential for identifying who will shape the continued development of the city in the future.

EXTENSIONS
In the chapter Extensions, we examine vertical additions as a potential form of urban expansion.
Starting from the FDP Initiative „One floor higher“ and the Loi 10088 sur la Surélévation, an attempt to establish upward extensions as a strategic planning instrument, we also address the resulting politicization and commodification of this building type. Through the case study of Geneva and various examples from practice, we aim to understand the contexts in which vertical extensions occur and the key issues that must be considered in their implementation.

MANIFESTO

METHOD

The booklet is intended both as a documentation of a working process and as a method for approaching themes through a hermeneutic lens.

The word “hermeneutics” derives from the ancient Greek term “hermēneúein,” which means to explain, to interpret, to translate, or to express. This term is connected to a figure in Greek mythology named Hermes. Since the messages of the gods were often cryptic, Hermes had to translate them so that they could be understood. The art of correctly interpreting and translating messages is called hermeneutics. (Schneebeli.H. (2016). *Was ist Hermeneutik?*)

In the current discourse on densification and urban expansion, numerous themes and interests intersect. The vertical extension is often presented as a solution capable of reconciling these differing positions. However, throughout our research, we quickly realized that there is no single answer to this question.

Having become a commodity rather than a genuine spatial strategie, the vertical extension is frequently instrumentalized to reproduce capitalist logics. Our focus, therefore, has been to situate the various attitudes and perspectives supported by statistics, interviews, and studies within their broader context, and to explore how vertical extension might serve as an alternative to the prevailing logics of urban development.

The concept of the hermeneutics of suspicion accompanied us throughout the research process. It encouraged us to look at the material with a critical eye and to continuously question it. At the same time, we do not wish this collection of documents to be understood as suspicious, but rather as a transparent disclosure of our sources and the way we worked with them.

Each page represents part of a document, most of them official documents from the city. We have analyzed the documents and distilled to extract relevant content. These excerpts, in the form of quotations or paraphrases, can be read as a first reduction.

From this material emerges a content-based, keyword-oriented synthesis that revisits and interrelates central themes. Building on these summaries, we will ultimately formulate a (work in progress) manifesto and a foundation for the second semester that bridges theory and practice and articulates a distinct position. With the hermeneutic lense and the knowledge that we collected in the research semester we will, in the next semester approach the physical space.

INTRODUCTION

„The calculation of supposedly environmentally sustainable new buildings [...] is built on a lie. Neither the demolition nor the construction waste, let alone the embodied energy contained in the existing structures — that is, everything that has already been consumed in terms of materials, labour, CO₂ and so on for their original construction — is taken into account in the climate balance of a new building.”

With the demand on a moratorium on new construction, Malterre Barthes, together with countless other voices from architects, students, expert committees, tenants, climate researchers, suggests a strategy to build less and care more, and to redefine progress as the ability to adapt and reconfigure what exists, rather than to erase and rebuild anew. And, to create value and spatial quality through conversion rather than construction, and to improve collective organisation within the current built environment. This directly refers the inherent contradiction within this intertwining of capitalisation and sustainability and to the fact that ecological arguments are increasingly being used to legitimise economic interests. What is produced are „products for which there is no use“, as Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani put it.

INTRODUCTION

The vertical expansion of the city is repeatedly proposed as a possible response to contemporary urban planning and heritage conservation requirements and a strategy to promote social and ecological discourse. The issue is gaining renewed attention and importance today, at a time when affordable housing is in short supply in Zurich and the 2040 climate targets seem unattainable.

The suggestion fits into a series of precedents in times of crisis or in anticipation of change. In search of constructive images for the future after a societal transformation, there are many that looked upward, with a canon that sought expansion toward the sky and the appropriation of the airspace above the city. Utopian meta-structures of the last century extended cities as vertical extensions, aimed, for example, at their democratization and at creating new relationships. The objective was to reinterpret the existing, sometimes contested fabric: The formal implications of these reappropriations in a vertical direction, instead of a horizontal annex, reach a public presence with a different intensity. Avant-garde interventions could contrast sharply with the existing homogeneous city blocks, creating a visual and structural departure from conformist values. The structural translation of lightweight extensions matched this desire. Its translation to reality however often catered less public utopias.⁶ (de Chiffre, L. (1968). *Die Psychologie der Überflieger – zur vertikalen Ausdehnung Wiens seit dem Dekonstruktivismus.*) In a less avantgarde practice, extensions in cities in the last century were often closely linked to suburban expansion and vacant, sometimes derelict, neighbourhoods that were reappropriated through a vertical extension. Extending structures revitalized neglected building stock, superimposed new interpretive layers, or redefined voids. Spaces sometimes were formalized by extensions, that before held space for alternative cultural productions that and derelict structures gained meaning.

The context of physical voids has changed; they have become rare. Yet the layering of projections and values onto cities produces a new kind of emptiness, or rather a poverty of meaning and complexity, which manifests itself in monotony and uniformity. Areas shaped by speculative practices, displacement, or radical new constructions lose their diversity and their bottom-up urban qualities. Qualities that cannot be reproduced.

In architecture, rules do not determine what is permitted or prohibited; rather, they define the framework within actions become possible. Rules are initially invisible and materialise in the physical world through building heights, boundary distances and density indices. However, rules are concrete, formalised translations of the norms and values of a society or a dominant class. Given the speed and mechanisms with which demolition is carried out in Zurich, one cannot help but suspect that things are being produced for which there is actually no need. They arise within a very specific capital- and environment-related framework.

In Zurich, the objectives of the planning tools are implemented in the city and on individual plots through the Building and Zoning Regulations (dt. Bau-und Zonenordnung), utilisation plans (dt. Sondernutzungsplan) and the ISOS inventory (dt. Bundesinventar für schützenswerte Ortsbilder). The BZO is a dynamic instrument that ‘draws’ new legal lines over the urban fabric of Zurich approximately every fifteen years. These lines shift with each revision. The theoretical space within these boundaries is thus redefined and reshaped. The lines are drawn in section or in the floor plan and make no reference to the existing spaces. Nevertheless, it is precisely these lines that determine the specified utilisation zones and building heights, which in turn determine if a building is preserved or demolished. In Zurich, this usually manifests in replacement buildings that follow the economic logic of the city. Compared to other Swiss cities, Zurich ranks highest in the demolition of existing buildings. The following conditions contribute to Zurich having the highest rate of replacement construction in Switzerland:

The structure plan defines neighbourhood centres with a higher building density. These are located along important urban axes. But where more construction is permitted, land prices rise – and speculation increases. The increased building density therefore means that there is greater opportunity for speculation with

rents in central locations. This process is visible in replacement construction: existing centralities are wiped out and the traditional population with limited financial means is displaced. This displacement is class-dependent; it follows social and economic hierarchies. The city thus undergoes an apparent upgrading, but the question remains as to what values are actually being represented. Affordable existing flats are lost and new (unaffordable) flats are created. The question “Who has the right to centrality?” (Lefebvre, H. (1968). *Le Droit à la Ville.*) arises once again.

The net-zero target applicable in Zurich requires high energy standards that existing buildings often fail to meet. This also creates structural pressure to replace buildings, which releases large amounts of grey energy. In addition to private developers, institutional developers also use this target to legitimise demolition and new construction under the pretext of ecological improvement.

In addition to incentives for private actors, there is also pressure on non-profit building cooperatives to demolish buildings. In the city of Zurich, the land is largely built up. At the same time, the cooperatives are pursuing the goal of creating more living space in order to achieve the one-third target. However, land prices are higher than ever, and properties are being sold to the highest bidders. These are often pension funds that prefer to invest their capital in central locations. In order to achieve their goals, they feel compelled to demolish existing buildings and realise the densest possible development via the utilisation plans.

In our current capitalist value system, vertical extensions remain the exception. As isolated cases, they carry little weight as a real alternative to replacement construction. Yet from both a social and architectural perspective, the shift from building anew toward transforming what already exists opens up a fundamentally different way of thinking about the city.

In *Denkmalpflege ist Sozialpolitik* (1975), Lucius Burkhardt proposes an alternative mode of caring about and extending the urban fabric. He criticises the tendency to justify preservation solely on technical or aesthetic grounds and reminds us that existing buildings perform essential social functions: they enable affordable housing, stabilise neighbourhoods and sustain mixed uses. Caring for buildings, he argues, necessarily means caring for their inhabitants and the social networks they form.

In this context, the vertical extension takes on an important role, as it is always a conversation about the existing building as much as about the added volume. It is a question of care, continuity and sometimes disruption, of introducing new layers or reproducing existing complexity. It engages with the networks embedded in the building and those that extend into the city.

A vertical extension should not be reduced to a corrective measure that merely slows the cycle of demolition. Instead, it should be understood as an opportunity to care for and preserve the city's existing qualities and at the same time question the norms and regulations that shape its transformation.

MANIFESTO

From now on, the extension is the rule and demolition the exception.

We do not advocate deregulation, but rather a revision of the regulatory framework and for exceptions that are based on a careful balance of interests.

We confront the question of land with the question of air.

Because in Zurich, the right to the city has always been a question of land.

As long as land remains a commodity, the city will be built according to market logic.

As long as land values rise, people will be displaced especially those with low incomes, the elderly, and the lower middle class.

Zurich lacks affordable housing.

We extend not only in peripheral or railway-adjacent districts, but also in places that appear already complete.

We claim the airspace as a communal asset, withdrawing it from the usual market speculation and rent dynamics.

By doing so, we create new reserves for affordable housing for foundations, cooperatives, and other actors in the most central locations.

The additional rental income generated can cross-finance the renovation and preservation of the existing building stock.

The existing buildings serve as pedestals for the city's upward development.

The newly drawn regulatory lines extend the silhouette of the existing fabric vertically.

Building heights and utilization indices are removed from the planning instruments.

We aim to think not in parcels, but in neighbourhoods and networks.

When an entire neighbourhood is extended upwards, it is not only about stacking vertically, but about creating a horizontal network of connections.

We do not seek to impose utopian urban images that cannot be reproduced.

Centrality emerges from the existing fabric, not from sheer density.

Urban form evolves from the qualities already present.

City planning is no longer conceived in surfaces, but in architectural space.

The floor plan, as the dominant method of planning, is suspended.

In its place come axonometric drawings, images, films, and sections tools that think the city in space, not on paper.

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Cooperatives	building heights, land prices	Initiative, 2025	Mechanisms, pragmatisms	Feasibility	Reflections	Center	Heritage protection	Resistance	Capital appropriation
A_220_2023_3	C_140_2024_1	E_298_2025_01	E_326_2003_01	E_316_2007_01	E_306_2005_01	E_434_2017_01	E_414_2022_01	E_384_2025_02	E_446_2017_01
A_220_2023_3	C_142_2018_1	E_300_2025_02	E_342_2005_02	E_318_2007_03	E_312_2009_01	E_440_2008_01	E_424_2025_01	E_386_2015_01	E_470_2017_01
A_220_2023_3	C_246_2016_3	Initiative, 2023	E_374_2005_01	E_320_2007_07	E_440_2008_01	E_454_2018_03	E_426_2019_01	E_388_2017_01	Invalid
PWG Foundation	C_248_2016_4	E_302_2024_01		E_322_2007_09	E_450_2018_01	E_458_2006_02	E_344_2005_03	E_396_2023_01	E_482_2024_01
A_274_2025_1	C_250_2016_5	E_482_2024_01	Initial proceedings	E_334_2004_01	E_466_2017_02	E_356_2007_01	E_372_2025_01	E_398_2023_02	E_484_2024_01
A_276_2025_2	C_172_2022_1	E_484_2024_01	E_310_2002_01	E_336_2004_02	Meyrin	E_358_2007_03	E_378_2025_01	E_404_2024_01	Tenant protection
A_278_2025_3	C_174_2022_2	E_487_2023_01	E_314_2008_01	E_338_2004_03	E_408_2024_01	E_442_2017_01	E_380_2007_01	E_360_2007_04	E_304_2008_01
A_280_2025_4	C_176_2022_3	Loi 10088	E_316_2007_01	E_346_2005_04	E_410_2014:01	E_448_2017_02	E_400_2025_01	E_310_2003_01	E_320_2007_07
A_282_2025_5	C_176_2022_4	E_308_2005_27	E_330_2003_03	E_352_2005_03	E_412_2019_01	E_472_2008_01	E_402_2009_01	Uncanny	E_322_2007_09
A_284_2025_6	C_176_2022_5	E_366_2007_02	E_332_2003_04	E_382_2014_01	E_414_2022_01	E_468_2017_03	E_414_2022_01	E_474_2010_01	E_328_2003_02
A_286_2025_7	C_176_2022_6	E_368_2007_35	E_340_2005_01	E_420_2011_11	E_416_2011_04	E_464_2017_01	E_424_2025_01	E_476_2010_02	E_358_2007_03
A_288_2025_8	C_184_2023_1	E_370_2007_38	E_346_2005_04	E_422_2011_18	E_418_2011_09	E_308_2005_27	E_426_2019_01	Crisis and Etiology	E_360_2007_04
A_290_2025_9	C_148_2025_1	E_366_2007_02	E_348_2005_01		E_420_2011_11	E_372_2025_01	E_428_2017_01	E_324_2002_01	E_362_2007_01
A_292_2025_10	Air rights, Land rights	A_452_2018_02	E_350_2005_02	Regulatory lever	E_422_2011_18	E_378_2025_01	E_430_2006_01	E_326_2003_01	E_394_2025_01
A_294_2025_11	C_154_1961_118	A_454_2018_03	E_462_2006_01	E_354_2007_33	E_424_2025_01	E_390_1992_01	E_432_2006_02	E_328_2003_02	E_478_2023_01
Private Companies	C_154_1961_120		E_364_2007_01	E_358_2007_03	E_426_2019_01	E_392_2025_01	E_438_2017_01	E_344_2005_03	E_480_2025_01
A_244_2024_1	C_158_2017_1		E_374_2005_01	E_370_2007_38	E_428_2017_01	E_394_2025_01	E_460_2006_03	E_444_1863_01	
A_246_2024_2	C_160_2023_1					E_396_2023_01		E_446_2017_01	
A_248_2024_3	C_162_2024_1					E_398_2023_02		E_456_2006_01	
A_250_2024_4	C_164_2024_1					E_406_2020_01			
A_252_2024_5	C_166_2025_1								
A_254_2024_6	C_168_1959_343					Data	Conceptual shifts 2		
A_256_2024_7						C_34_2025_15	C_70_2019_17		
A_258_2024_8						C_36_2025_17	C_72_2019_18		
A_260_2024_9						C_38_2021_00	C_74_2019_25		
A_262_2024_10						C_40_2021_00	C_76_2019_26		
A_264_2024_11						C_42_2025_iv	C_78_2023_17		
A_266_2024_12						C_44_2025_vi	C_80_2023_16	Seebahnhöfe	
A_268_2024_13						Displacement, Agency	C_80_2019_116	C_94_2010_08	
A_270_2024_14						C_46_2025_1	C_84_2023_01	C_96_2010_09	
						Conceptual shifts 1	C_86_2019_26	C_98_2010_04	
Private Individuals						C_48_1988_08	C_88_2018_12	C_100_2010_12	
A_226_2025_1						C_50_1999_00	C_90_1930_28	Instruments	
A_228_2025_2						C_52_1999_05	C_92_2023_01	C_102_2025_01	
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A_232_2025_4						C_56_1999_10		C_106_2016_01	
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A_236_2025_6						C_60_1999_13		C_110_2025_02	
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A_240_2025_8						C_64_1999_28		C_114_2025_04	
A_242_2025_9						C_66_1999_30		C_116_2019_47	
						C_68_1999_26		C_118_1986_206	



1956
Zurich: Progress and Utopia
Ulrich Keeser, city councillor
1st general assembly



1998-2002
Legislative guiding principle
'At least 50% green in 1st floor'



1999
800 horizon

- Instrumente:
- Grow up by opening built land
 - Grow up by opening built land
 - Grow up by opening built land



2000-2010
'Zurichbilder'

Physical Change



2016
800 horizon

- Instrumente:
- Socio-spatial planning
 - Some kind of opening energy
 - Mehrerwähler
 - canopy construction



2026
800 horizon
Instrumente:
- Adaptation for existing structures
- Air Rights

Subcategories

Functional modern paradigm

- Concrete built
- Zoning, suburban sprawl
- Primary of Agglomeration
- Inside the city
- Occupation of derelict structures
- Alternative Cultural Production

Socialisation

Living here rather than

providing the

Living here rather than

Office-work

- (1) Die jungen Geschlechter unserer Stadt ist die Geschichte des Aufbaus der Zentrumsfunktion... durch den Namen (Münster) Zürich geprägt ist.

- (2) Seit Jahren ist die Abwanderung (insbesondere) Bevölkerung, vor allem kleiner Familien und der überdurchschnittlich Vermögenden, aus der Stadt Zürich.

- (3) Einige in dieser Stadt müssen Abschied nehmen von ihrem Wohnort. Wir leben über unseren Verhältnissen.

- (4) Zurück zum überdurchschnittlichen Anteil und Zentrumsfunktion mit einem überdurchschnittlichen Prozentsatz der Stadt (Münster) Zürich.

- (5) Die Stadt ist gelohnt, sie wird nicht nur... sondern umgeben werden. Umgeben von einem überdurchschnittlichen Anteil, mit hoher urbanen Qualität. Ulrich Keeser, 1956

- (6) Wenn ich mehr (Zurich) (Zurich), meine ich damit nicht mehr (Zurich) und agglomerationsfunktion (Zurich) von (Zurich)

Physical Reorientation

Functional Reorientation

cycles of growth

conceptualised in social objectives

'At least'

instrumental segregation of city and agglomeration

Instrumental housing for new concepts of living

conceptualised in functional objectives

Standardisation

Adapted Agglomerations

Instrumental housing for new concepts of living

conceptualised in environmental objectives

(Standardisation, urban sprawl)

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EXTENDED TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTEXT

Various building practices count as vertical extensions, ranging from an attic conversion to an entirely new structure of one or several additional stories. This wide definition comes from statistics on construction activity that are institutionally maintained in Switzerland. The data informs infrastructural planning, aswell as political decisions, various regulations, and tracks economic indicators.

Data

Further, this statistical data allows for an assessment of tendencies within common building practices. Since these numbers are available for all large Swiss cities, it is also possible to make comparisons. For example, the data reveals that cities follow different strategies in their transformations: while Geneva, Bern, and Basel primarily expand through extension practices, Zurich and Lausanne rely primarily on demolition.

Embodied energy

Overall, the data indicates a yearly decrease in the amount of space added through vertical extensions. As demolition strategies consume significantly more embodied energy, this trend has implications for resource efficiency and overall spatial consumption. “A representative Swiss replacement building generates around 1.8 to 2.8 times as many greenhouse gas emissions over its entire life cycle as an extension” if the embodied energy of the demolished building is included. (Büttiker, 2024)

For Zurich, however, this trend is even more pronounced, with a sharp increase in demolitions around 2009. No other city relies as heavily on demolition.

A vertical extension offers the possibility to transform the city without destroying its existing structures, with implications on embodied energy consumption. ,It also allows a building to be transformed, possibly while it remains occupied, thereby avoiding the direct displacement of residents. In this sense, it can represent a more socially sustainable form of inward development compared to demolition.’ Whether or not to take advantage of these opportunities, reflects a form of agency. (Kaufmann et al., Bautätigkeit und Verdrängung in der städtischen Schweiz, vii., 2025)

In Zurich, where demolition is the dominant approach, it also experiences the most pronounced displacement of long-term residents in the country. In this regard, Further a few notable aspects can be identified when comparing Zurich to other cities.

Historical and territorial circumstances have led to very different positions on housing policy, for example with regard to tenant protection. These have shaped the way in which specific political agency is used. Throughout Switzerland, there are differences in the political capacity for cities to take action. These largely depend on the extent to which they are influenced by cantonal authorities. Zurich is part of a canton with a large area of agglomerations and many more municipalities. Other cities, such as Basel and Geneva, on the other hand, make up a large part of their canton’s territory. This environment has a major influence on cantonal votes and on questions concerning housing. In the canton of Zurich, tenant protections relevance is mostly limited to urban areas. In cantonal votes on such issues, the city repeatedly finds itself in the minority. However, in Geneva for example, there are many politicians who have moved from the local tenants’ association into cantonal politics. There, they have shaped rather strict tenant protections.

This territorial difference helps to explain that while in Zurich, over 7,000 long-term tenants were displaced, in Geneva the figure is 155 long-term tenants. „Statisticaly, these long-term residents have a 30-40% lower median household income than the general population. Residents of replacement buildings, on the other hand, had a median household income that was 14-38% higher than that of the overall population.[...] It is socially stratified and particularly affects people who are likely to find it difficult to find affordable housing again.“ (Kaufmann et al., Bautätigkeit und Verdrängung in der städtischen Schweiz, vii., 2025)

Outside of cooperatives and other institutional forms of housing, this is rarely taken into account in demolition projects. This has a twofold effect: rents rise and affordable housing disappears.

CONTEXT

„A Städte“

Conceptual shifts 1

The prioritization of demolition within current practices unfolds within a spatial planning framework that was also largely shaped in the conditions it was conceived. In Zurich, transformations over the past 30 years have involved both decline and growth.

For long, the city grew in significance as a center, while better connections encouraged commuting and expanded the agglomeration. During this phase, the term “A-Stadt” was coined for Zurich (and many other cities). It referred to the city’s population that did not move to the agglomerations and reduced them to their socio-economic status as “elderly (dt. Alte), poor (dt. Arme), unemployed (dt. Arbeitslose), and trainees (dt. Auszubildende). Simultaneously, the city experienced a flourishing of alternative cultural production.

This condition of the city was a matter of political concern. What would later be conceptualized as inward development, city councillor Ursula Koch had already announced this in 1988. In her speech, ‘Building in Zurich between utopia and resignation’ delivered at the SIA General Assembly in Zurich, she made the anticipatory observation: “Zurich is built.” The implication was that horizontal expansion should cease, and attention should shift to the transformation of the existing city.

Early manifestations of “Zurich is built” were planning objectives such as “10,000 large apartments in 10 years” published in 1999. The goal was to enhance living conditions, address imbalances between residents and workplaces, and curb excessive use of natural resources. The aim was for the city to become a desirable place to live again, to improve living conditions, balance the population with workplaces, and reduce the overuse of natural resources. In specific terms, this meant preventing and reversing ‘the drain of predominantly Swiss families and wealthy residents to the agglomeration’.

‘10,000 Apartments in 10 Years’ was formalized as the city’s legislative objective during the same period as the revision of the BZO, in 1999. The BZO is the Building and Zoning Ordinance, defines the boundaries within which the city can change.

Historically, the BZO is a product of a modernist paradigm and was designed to functionally separate the city into work and residential areas. In doing so, it promoted commuting and distinct living and working zones. At that time, in 1931, changes to the city’s morphology were intended to improve poor living conditions. In many ways, this was being attempted to be reversed. From a different perspective: Both in 1999 and 1931, anticipated popula-

Instruments

tion growth and the populations socio-demography were addressed spatially. At least back in 1931, the underlying issue was largely an unequal distribution of capital (poverty), followed classist concerns of hygiene and produced spaces with a certain monotony.

In 1999, to improve living conditions, zoning regulations were amended to accommodate anticipated population growth and objectives from “10,000 large apartments in 10 years”. Further instruments were defined and strengthened to stimulate construction activity and strengthen public space qualities. For example, road axes were identified as future centralities, with further densification focused along these corridors and infrastructure was planned. The next revision took place in 2016 with very few additional land reserves. Accordingly, today’s densification occurs within the framework of the rezoning and planning instruments established in 1999.

Areas rezoned were chosen strategically to address affordable housing, as well as to provide apartments for a desired shift in sociodemographics with increased space requirements. This had practical implications for the existing housing stock. Many apartments, particularly the common three-room units, were considered outdated and too small. Many of these units were located in buildings dating from the 1930s to the 1970s. Accordingly, the upcoming renovation cycles of these buildings were seen as an opportunity to adapt them. A significant amount of cooperative housing was also located in these areas, supporting the objective of providing affordable housing, which had historically relied on cooperatives. Furthermore, the PWG was established to support this effort.

The prioritization of larger apartments can be observed in the increase in space consumption. Although the trend toward larger apartments had begun earlier than 1999 through changing customs, formalizing it as a political objective amplified its effects. For example, instruments that formalized this objective focused on building density rather than population density. Today, this means that although more is being built and resources are heavily consumed, the number of people actually living in these spaces does not necessarily increase. On another note, this has led to a certain alignment of housing layouts in the city with those of the agglomeration. Or, an agglomeration-ed urban living in order to appeal to the desired demographic.

The 1999 transformation strategy included a range of interventions. Considered were demolitions, as well as attic conversions, and changes to floorplans in nearly half of the buildings. The ISOS inventory was intended to mediate between competing priorities.

Conceptual shifts 2

Seebahnhöfe

Not simply of what buildings to be destroyed, rather to what extent changes were feasible. That was considered beyond buildings with historical significance. At that time, the ISOS inventory did not yet cover the entire Zurich area and it was therefore commissioned to expand its considerations. By the time of the next BZO revision in 2016, this inventory structure and consideration of interests were completed. The weighing of interests for various areas, the densification objectives were prioritized by the richtplan. The strategy of making adjustments by changing floor plans was no longer the focus; instead, the emphasis was on achieving the greatest possible structural densification. Structural preservation defines urban planning and the preservation of green spaces, but not the building fabric.

This decision is in line with a broader conceptual shift in the city of Zurich. The focus had shifted to demolition measures. Demolition for densification became the norm, and exceptions were made only in a few cases, such as for historic preservation. Statistically, 2009 saw a massive increase in the number of apartments demolished annually for both private and cooperative owners. Demolition itself became a common practice of redevelopment within the city, to an extent unmatched by any other Swiss city. Paradoxically, the ecological renovation of buildings is also often taken as an opportunity to construct a replacement building. This is because operational energy has become a major focus as a sustainability goal and has been formalized, in contrast to embodied energy. It is also being lobbied for by industries.

Overall, the parameters for internal development have changed significantly between 1999 and 2016. During this period, the city reversed its previous suburbanization trend, entering a phase of reurbanization by higher-income households. Further, there was a shift from a planned reurbanization to significant sociodemographic change and emerging displacement.

The most recent example of this is the ‚Seebahnhöfe‘. Their planned demolition is an example of decisions that are influenced by the planning phase of the 1990s and current practice. Looking at this does not mean evaluating the decisions that were made.

The Seebahnhöfe are cooperative buildings in Zurich’s ‚Kreis 4‘. Their planned demolition is meeting with resistance from the public and heritage protection. The context and conditions of this decision dates back to before 2010. At that time, the neighborhood had not yet been upgraded through traffic calming measures and has since become an attractive residential area. Their demolition,

preceded by a removal from the preservation inventory, was part of strategical decisions to change the “unfavorable socioeconomic composition of the neighborhood”. (Quartierleitbild Bullinger 2010). During the planning process, it was determined that an ecological renovation of the existing buildings would not be effective. And, the apartments, including many 3-room units, were classified as outdated by the cooperative during the planning stage. The different goals can only be achieved with a new building, which also creates more apartments.

The shift, in which demolition has become as dominant, overlaps with an event on the financial markets. After the financial crash in 2008, there was a massive increase in demolished buildings. Before, the potentials that had built up in the 1999 BZO were gradually realized. Some through vertical extensions, some through new structures, and some through demolition. With the stock markets no longer serving as a reliable investment, institutional investors increasingly turned to the housing market, fueling speculation and accelerating development dynamics. Since then, there has been a shift in ownership structures in Zurich and a growing professionalization. Over the same period, the dominant strategy has become demolition - while, the number of vertical extensions has continued to decline.

Of course it is not the first time that city incentivized transformation by rezonings. Already in 1930, swiss architecture critic Peter Meyer criticized that the building law had become little more than an empty form; a volume to be filled on expensive land. Yet, in his article written for ‚Das Werk‘, he was not primarily outraged by rampant demolitions. What really irritated him was the destruction of roof-surfaces by dormers, which suddenly pierced the city’s roofscape, once their construction was permitted. His criticism was directed at the speculative-driven disfigurement of the architectural figure of the roof. Others also consider this moment to be the beginning of a fetishization of attics. Today, however, the forces at work are different. The late-capitalist housing market creates opportunities in ways unimaginable in the early twentieth century, uncoupling value from resources and reshaping the rules of urban transformation, preceded by examples like haussmann demolitions of paris.

Roof

CONTEXT	After the 2008 financial crisis, land prices in Zurich have previously characterised by relatively steady growth have since doubled. This sharp increase has been driven primarily by low returns in the stock market, which redirected investment capital into real estate. Looking at ownership changes you can see that the development of building heights and urban densification is directly correlated with the rise in land prices and rents (speculation).	ACTORS	be built on by means of height restrictions, floor area ratios and building lines, thus translating the abstract concept of airspace into measurable planning parameters. The Swiss Civil Code separates land and building ownership through building law, allowing land to be transferred under hereditary building rights (dt. Erbbaurecht) Unlike cities such as New York, where airspace is traded as an economic resource, Zurich's system is strongly influenced by public regulation and municipal land policy. Since 2022, the majority of the land has belonged to institutional owners, who are speculation on land and profit. As long as rezoning continues, speculation on further exploitation will continue and land prices will continue to rise. Land prices are highest where the most construction can take place.
Building heights, land prices, rental prices	The highest land prices in Zurich are found in the core and neighbourhood preservation zones. The core zone is mainly located in District 1, where the average building height is also the highest. As a general rule, the higher a plot of land can be built on, the higher its land price. In the city centre, the construction potential per plot is particularly high, and combined with the excellent micro-location, this leads to the highest land prices in the city. Rezoning therefore has a long-term price-increasing effect. The price differences within the city centre remain extremely pronounced. In district 1 (city centre and old town), the price per square metre of land is now around thirty times higher than on the outskirts of the city – in 1936, this ratio was as high as 50:1. Land prices have risen particularly sharply in the Gewerbeschule, Sihlfeld and Hard districts, where they are now as high as in the city centre and old town. While an average of around CHF 2,000 per square metre is paid on the outskirts of the city, prices in the centre are around CHF 100,000; locations close to the city centre such as Stauffacher, Enge and Seefeld are around CHF 20,000 per square metre. New building land reserves increase land prices and, with a time lag, rents as well. This dynamic can be seen particularly clearly in changes of ownership: speculators sell properties at higher prices than they purchased them for, thereby realising substantial profits. The more investors are willing to pay for land, the more rents rise later on, as these costs are passed on to secure returns. Because there are several years between purchase and construction development – for example, in the case of total renovations or replacement buildings – the resulting rent increases only affect residents after a delay. As a possible countermeasure, the municipal right of first refusal will be put to a vote on 30 November. A look at Ulm shows that although this instrument is rarely used in practice, it is nevertheless effective. The reason for this is a central mechanism in German administrative law: the so-called avoidance agreement. It allows the city to negotiate with potential buyers and set specific conditions for future use. The mere existence of this instrument gives the city a much stronger position in the land market.	PWG Foundation	The primary goal of PWG is to ensure affordable rents. To achieve this goal tenants often accept certain compromises. The buildings get renewed according to the principle: “As late as possible, as early as necessary.” Usually, their time spans are 15-20 years longer than with other developers. Buildings are only demolished when their condition is poor or when further densification is not feasible. To keep the rents as minimal as possible the rents are calculated by the area per person, meaning smaller apartments have lower rents. A key concern for PWG is that tenants should be able to remain in their homes. This is also the reason why private individuals, such as elderly owners without heirs, sell their homes to the PWG.
		Cooperatives	In Zurich, cooperatives have demolished 3,753 flats and built 6,587 new ones. Compared to other developers much more frequently. Many of their existing flats are small 3- to 3.5-room flats, once intended as family homes, but now too small for current demand. In the new buildings, the area per person is smaller and rents are rising by around 40% for cooperatives and 90% for private companies. This difference between cost- and market prices are a representation of the returned developers are making.
		Private Companies	Pension funds act, on the one hand, as landlords of our housing stock, while on the other hand facing the pressure to finance retirees pensions through rental income. Their investments are concentrated mainly in city centers. Operating in cycles, they review every 30 to 40 years whether the building and zoning regulations (BZO) have opened up new development potential. If the existing buildings cannot accommodate this potential, replacement construction is usually the solution. There are also rules of thumb: as long as the additional utilization of a rezoning on a site does not exceed 50% compared to the existing building, a replacement new build is generally not worthwhile. But, as with any rule of thumb, there are exceptions, for instance, the location of the property, the technical, architectural, and urban design quality of the existing structure, as well as the future viability or marketability of its floor plans. Property management firms serve as intermediaries between ow-
Air rights and Land rights	‘Ownership of land extends upwards and downwards, insofar as there is an interest in exercising this right.’ (Swiss Civil Code, Art. 667) In Switzerland, land ownership formally extends upwards, but the actual use of this airspace is defined and limited by zoning regulations and building regulations. In Zurich, the Building and Zoning Regulations (BZO) determine how much of this ‘air’ may actually		

ACTORS	nership and residents, functioning as the public face of these institutions while public communication is largely avoided. Pension funds align their rents with market rates and pursue continuous optimization of their properties. Traditional caretakers are gradually replaced by digital systems codes instead of keys.	EXTENSION	Housing and urban redevelopment continue to be pressing subjects in political debate and support for affordable housing is repeatedly confirmed through public votes. Residents are resisting and organizing protests such as the “Wohndemo” against the demolition and commercialization of the city.
Private Individuals	Lu Decurtins, property owner and member of the alternative homeowners association demonstrates how vertical extensions can simultaneously create additional housing and finance the renovation of existing buildings. The extra rental income generated by the new apartments helps cover the costs of refurbishing the original structure. Working in cooperation with a neighboring property owner, a mutual boundary-building agreement was established to enable the joint development of both plots. The rents in the newly added floors are somewhat higher, while those in the existing units have remained largely unchanged, allowing current tenants to stay in their homes. In Lu’s case, the property still had unused development reserves in terms of height and floor-area ratio. For renovations carried out without tenant turnover, around 25% of the investment costs can be passed on to tenants; in cases of vacancy or tenant replacement, this rises to roughly 50%. The existing building is regarded as having an intrinsic value derived from its specific architectural qualities. Lu emphasizes the importance of clear owner responsibility and direct communication with residents.	Initiative, 2025	The broader political discourse manifests through initiatives, including a few initiatives aimed specifically at vertical extensions. In 2025, the proposal “Aufstockung, Anbau, Dachgeschossausbau: Erleichterungen und Vereinfachungen für das Bauen im Bestand” calls for simplifying the process of adding floors to existing buildings. Today, building height limits and setback regulations often make construction within existing structures difficult. As a result, demolition is often chosen, determined. The initiative proposes to simplify this through allowing certain deviations.
The City	The city itself is also an active player in the housing market, both through municipal foundations and through the granting of land under building law to housing developers. In the chapter Context we talk more about the agency of the city of Zurich.	Initiative, 2023	Previously, in 2023, the FDP had launched the “Ein Stock Höher” initiative, which proposed that the city should be raised by one floor across the board. This initiative is part of a national campaign and was introduced in an almost identical form in Bern. With this, the liberal entered the field of housing policy, addressing issues such as housing shortages that had previously been primarily advocated by left-leaning parties. As it currently stands, neither Zurich nor Bern are likely to be vertically extended in the coming years. In Zurich, the initiative was declared invalid.
Foundations and Cooperatives	In Zurich, housing cooperatives and foundations pursue the shared goal of providing affordable housing but differ fundamentally in ownership and financing structures. Housing cooperatives are member-owned and operate on the principle of collective self-help. They finance their projects through members equity, bank loans, and municipal support such as long-term leaseholds or low-interest loans. Rents follow the cost-rent principle, and decisions are made democratically, strengthening residents’ identification with their housing. Foundations, by contrast, are institutionally organized and governed by boards rather than residents. Their capital derives from endowments, public funds, or private donations, and rental income is reinvested for maintenance and future projects. With higher equity ratios, they are less market-dependent but also less participatory.	Loi 10088	However, the idea is not new; it was first proposed in Geneva twenty years earlier. There, it was implemented in 2008 as and referenced as a positive example for Zurich. Law 10088 is a regulation that stipulates all buildings can be extended, apart from a few exceptions.

	Law 10088 applies to the entire canton of Geneva. However, the political process was primarily focused on the city of Geneva.		respective political ratios, the law was passed. However, this was not without some opposition.
Mechanisms, pragmatisms	The proposal follows a straightforward supply-and-demand logic: more apartments would relieve pressure on the rental market. Where demand was highest and infrastructure was already in place, additional housing should be built quickly and pragmatically. More specifically, the focus was on the already dense areas of the city, with the exception of the medieval core. Including areas that had been built on the former fortifications from the 19th century, and further, formal municipalities that were incorporated in the early 20th century. These areas were to be vertically extended.		During the political process in the cantonal council, the project was contested and challenged through a referendum by tenant protection and heritage conservation groups, who were able to bring forward several of their concerns. Nevertheless, after implementation in 2008, Hochparterre commented on the adoption: “The idea is appealing, the infrastructure is already in place, and some development zones in the outskirts (dt. „Speckgürtel) remain green. However, Avenir Suisse did not address who would capture the added value [in their report].“
Initial proceedings	Loi 10088 started from a simple question: amid a housing shortage and reurbanization tendencies, why were there buildings not built to their full height or volume in some of genevas most central areas.	Reflections	Since then, the law has faced heavy criticism from various positions. Including, Pierre Bonnet, author of the feasibility study that shaped it noted: “Today, the practice of building extensions has become commonplace, often speculative, and rarely of high architectural quality!”
Feasibility	The Grand Council of the canton therefore decided to commission a study to investigate this matter. The resulting paper is very similar to a feasibility study. However, it was conducted for many buildings, so a number of typologies were defined and examined. In addition, stakeholders in particular were surveyed. This revealed that in many cases, the owners were relatively well informed about the potentials, but the extra space gained was too small to make development worthwhile. Further, the study found that it began to be worthwhile for many buildings, if two or three additional floors could be built.		In the political debate, Law 10088 was discussed primarily in relation to the city of Geneva. However, it has since been applied across the entire canton, with varying consequences. In the city of Geneva, there has been considerable concern regarding the architectural quality of the projects. This was so questionable in some cases that, starting in 2016, an urban planning analysis was required when submitting a building permit application. In many speculative projects, such an analysis had simply not been conducted.
Regulatory lever	The text of law 10088 was drafted based on this observation. The existing height restrictions of 24 and 21 meters were to be increased by six meters to 30 and 27 meters respectively. The additional space provided sufficient incentive to initiate construction activity. Politically, this was a “pragmatic” solution and extensions would ‘quickly’ provide a lot of apartments and “calm the housing crisis.” This would result in new housing in areas with “high demand and existing infrastructure” “without affecting the existing population.” The economic sector, for example Lignum, confirmed how quickly this could lead to the creation of many apartments. And reports from avenir suisse, for example, confirmed the opportunities offered by density, especially in already very dense areas. With the	Meyrin	Outside the city, however, in municipalities such as Meyrin, there are positive NOTES from practice through vertical extension. Meyrin is a satellite town, a cité built around 1960. There, the construction of additional floors was conditional. It was tied to the renovation of green spaces between buildings and playgrounds, and it was also intended to cross-subsidize energy-efficient renovations.
		Center	The strong speculative tendencies, on the 19th-century neighborhoods in the city, are less pronounced in Meyrin. This was the result of the different roles that the authorities took on. In Meyrin, the municipal authorities saw themselves as part of the planning process and through the conditions they implemented, the added value resulting from the extensions were distributed. At the same time, in the city of Geneva, many individual, fragmented

EXTENSION	projects were developed. There, the city had distributed responsibility to the individual owners: on the one hand, responsibility for the distribution of added value, on the other hand, however, also for the coordination of projects. The result of this fragmentation of the interventions were isolated projects without any true urban planning. The authorities, therefore, acted very differently in both situations. This also applies to the actions of other actors, such as heritage protection. In Meyrin, even listed buildings can be extended and maintenance and renovation of these buildings are financed through such extensions. This allows them to be preserved and protected. In fact, the Heritage Protection even awarded Meyrin the Wakker Prize.	of vertical growth. Shadowing is, of course, a physical reality. For example, in Zurich, high-rise buildings are strictly regulated under the three-hour rule, while in Geneva, building heights are partially controlled by requiring a proportional relationship of two-thirds to the street width.
Heritage protection	This is inconceivable in the city center. Protected buildings were exempted here. Therefore there are two different positions for the city of Geneva and the municipality of Meyrin. This may be related to the different levels of significance that 19th-century neighborhoods and those from the 1960s hold for heritage protection. However, it is also related to the position taken by the city's authorities. They exercise limited influence over the projects, and their fragmentation often does not meet urban planning standards. In this context, historic preservation is sometimes seen as an impediment.	Crisis and ethiology Law 10088 was introduced under a sense of urgency, which justified the pragmatism of the proposal. It was never intended to solve the housing shortage, nor did it reduce it after its introduction. Rather, the law was framed as an exceptional measure made possible by declaring a crisis. The crisis was repeatedly emphasized by political actors at the time, who stated that “we must use every possibility and be pragmatic.” To support this framing, the politicians repeatedly referred to a historical precedent that linked crisis to vertical extensions. This quite specific, etiological myth referred to <i>stadtgeschichte genfs und der aufnahme von glaubensflüchtlingen, den hugenotten im 16. und 17. jahrhundert</i>. Damals sollen, um diese unterzubringen, schon einmal die gebäude aufgestockt worden sein.
Resistance	The tenants' association <i>asloca</i> and residents' associations are also opposing the plans, calling for a moratorium on vertical extensions in central areas. This suggests that not everyone is benefiting. It is not always clear which rent increases are caused by extensions and which are due to general gentrification. However, the tenants' association already pointed out during the political process for Law 10088 that land prices could rise simply because more building is allowed. Through an objection, tenants' associations had managed to secure tenant protection for both existing and new apartments in the extensions. Nevertheless, high rents suggest that there are many workarounds to rent control.	While there are indeed traces of historic vertical extensions on historic buildings in Geneva, they are not connected in any direct way to the arrival of refugees, as the political narrative suggested. Research on the building fabric shows that these extensions took place over a much longer period. The medieval city was constrained by its defensive walls, making upward building more feasible than constructing new houses. The tallest buildings were located along the main commercial street, reflecting the wealth of their owners and their need for additional space. Some extensions also coincided with technical changes in roof construction, when lighter materials became available. Despite this more complex history, the political narrative created a moral aura around vertical extensions: just as Geneva once “made space above its roofs” for refugees, it must again do so for people in housing need today.
Uncanny	Who benefits from vertical extensions, and who does not, is also reflected in the urban space. While Loi 10088 is, at its core, an urban planning measure, the individual extensions rarely improve the public realm and are mainly perceived through their impact on density. Geneva is already among the densest areas in Switzerland, placing significant pressure on public infrastructure. Adding even more density intensifies this, particularly in neighborhoods with many sealed streets and interior courtyards. Many objections to extensions also cite shadowing, a concern common to other forms	Capital appropriation This distortion of history was already criticized during the parliamentary debate on Law 10088. As deputy Isabelle Brunier noted: “It has nothing to do with the massive influx of refugees in the 16th century and only indirectly with that of the late 17th century, but rather stems from the natural growth of their descendants and pressure on the housing market which, benefiting the wealthiest who could afford to live comfortably, forced modest families to concentrate in less space... But when it comes to making a profit, there is nothing like placing oneself in a sacrosanct tradition, even if it means distorting history a little!”

EXTENSION

A less locally specific version of this is the narrative that vertical extensions are an old tradition, with many historical examples of modifications, for instance in churches and other buildings. Even though this narrative does not originate from any actual myth, and has many truths within, it can also be appropriated to justify capitalist development projects, framed with a sense of moral benevolence. In this sense, Geneva shows how political arguments that can be made in favor of vertical extensions can also be used to pursue economic interests.

Extensions offer a more careful weighing of interests than demolishing buildings. The question is, who can actually weigh the interests and who profits from it. Geneva gives clues about where these agencies should be.

Invalid

One important implications of the Geneva example for Zurich is on the liberal initiative “Ein Stock Höher” for Zurich. It was declared invalid, even though the proposal closely resembled Loi 10088 from Geneva. The court gave two reasons for this invalidity. First, a blanket extension across the whole city contradicts the federal spatial planning law, because it allows a general increase in floors without considering the specific needs of each area. Second, any law cannot make distinctions between existing buildings and new constructions, as this would interfere with property rights.

Tenant protection

Nevertheless, the law has been in effect in Geneva for 20 years. Somewhat surprisingly, this is primarily attributable to tenant protection. Tenant protection is stronger in Geneva than in Zurich. It protects tenants not only from eviction but also from full-scale renovations or demolitions. A building that is still occupied can only be demolished under strict exceptions in Geneva. This tenant protection thus extends, in a sense, to the building itself.

Zurich, however, does not have such extensive protection and during the political debate, before the proposal was declared invalid, there were major concerns that the initiative could trigger a wave of demolitions. This concern had not existed in Geneva. In regulatory terms, the proposal acts like a form of upzoning. For example, the maximum building height was raised from 21 to 27 meters. In Zurich, such upzonings primarily realized through demolition measures and therefore, the concern in Zurich was probably justified.