
TU Graz
institut für wohnbau
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157.666 design
the socio-productive workshop
a method for existing building transformation
guest professorship studio magic:
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azra alibabic
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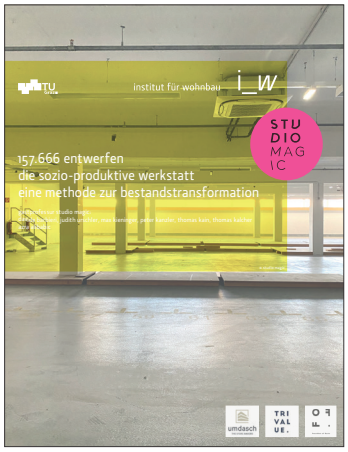
the socio-productive workshop

157.666 design

studio magic (davide barbieri, judith urschler, max kieninger, thomas kain, thomas kalcher)
institute of housing (azra alibabic)

for several years, the scope of our profession has been undergoing fundamental change. the climate crisis, demographic shifts, changing working conditions, and structural transformations in retail are reshaping how and where we live, work, and consume. these developments leave visible traces in the existing built environment: vacant buildings, derelict sites, and structures without a defined programme. as a result, the existing building stock is gaining increasing importance as a resource.

over the coming weeks and months, as part of our visiting professorship at the institute of housing, we will engage with the vacant former leiner department store on annenstraße in graz. it is already clear that a vacancy of this scale cannot be addressed through conventional tools alone. it calls for new approaches, new design methodologies, and the development of new typologies that extend beyond the provision of housing alone.
how can we, as architects, respond to large-scale vacancy not merely by designing a future state, but by becoming active participants in an open-ended process of transformation from the very beginning?
at the centre of the semester is the transformation of an existing building. rather than treating the building as an empty shell awaiting an entirely new programme, we understand it as an existing spatial, material, and social structure. its structural system, spaces, materials, traces of former uses, and present-day relationships form the starting point for the design process.
the process begins with the establishment of a real socio-productive workshop. the workshop is not the outcome of the semester, but its starting point, its nucleus, and its continuous centre. we will not merely design the workshop—we will initiate it and develop it through collective use. from this point of departure, we will investigate potential uses, spatial interventions, social relationships, material cycles, and new forms of production.



selected ideas will not remain confined to drawings or models. through self-build and 1:1 prototyping, they can be materialised and tested on site. building components, furniture, spatial configurations, and temporary uses can be produced, occupied, evaluated, and modified within the existing building.
the vacancy thus becomes a space for discussion, production, and action.
as a method, the socio-productive workshop approaches the transformation of existing buildings not from a distance, but through a spatial and design practice that operates directly within the existing architectural, material, and social structures. when designers actively integrate themselves into an existing spatial and social context, they inevitably alter it through a reciprocal process. observations, conversations, constraints, unexpected uses, experiences, and

collective acts of building feed directly back into the design process.
how is a space actually used? what kinds of encounters does it enable? how do construction and material interact? what can be produced through self-building? which rules are necessary, and which prevent meaningful appropriation? how can economic viability be achieved while enabling social balance? which ideas only reveal their potential through implementation?
students, tutors, craftspeople, potential users, owners, general contractors, potential investors, and other stakeholders become participants in a shared process.

at the beginning of the semester, the socio-productive workshop will be established as the first intervention within the existing building. from this starting point, the building will be examined for its constraints and deficiencies in order to identify its spatial, structural, material, and social potentials. working directly on site will generate ideas for possible transformations. these will be developed across different scales—from furniture to building components and spaces, and from the building itself to the neighbourhood and the city.
the design process follows a productive feedback loop:
observe and analyse > design > build > use and test > reflect > adapt > build further
the spatial experiments serve as instruments of investigation and knowledge production. they are therefore neither mere representations nor definitive solutions. the experiences gained through making and use are fed back into the design process and may lead to revised spatial, structural, or programmatic decisions.

the socio-productive workshop has the potential to develop simultaneously as a concrete place and as a transferable methodology. we will investigate which spatial conditions, tools, rules, actors, and forms of collaboration are necessary for such a workshop to become a starting point for transformation in other vacant buildings.

the question of transferability also has an economic dimension: what kind of economic model can emerge from this methodology, and how can it become attractive to property owners?
we understand this methodology as a practice that does not prescribe a predetermined, completed state from a distance. instead, it begins on site, integrates itself into what already exists, and initiates an open-ended process. we do not design and build for a future transformation. through the socio-productive workshop, we initiate the transformation itself.

the master design studio develops an overarching transformation strategy for the former leiner building and its urban context. the socio-productive workshop is understood as the initial nucleus from which spatial, programmatic, and organisational shifts in scale are explored—from the building to the neighbourhood and the wider urban space. the focus is on house 2, the bridge structure spanning traungauergasse, access and circulation while the existing retail use (billa) remains operational, as well as the activation of outdoor spaces.

building on a group-based analysis of the existing building and its surrounding context, each student will subsequently develop a hybrid overall project that spatially and temporally integrates housing, production, education, culture, care, and collective uses. the objectives of the property owners provide a real-world framework for the project; however, they may be adopted, further developed, or critically questioned with clear justification. in addition to architectural quality, the projects will examine intermediate stages, degrees of intervention, and long-term adaptability.

a particular focus will be placed on economic and organisational viability: who initiates, operates, and finances the proposed uses? which spaces generate revenue, and which require cross-subsidisation? how can revenue-generating models, commons, partnerships, and self-performed work be combined? planning regulations, building law, and political frameworks will likewise be critically examined as potentially adaptable components of the project.

the expected outcome is a spatially precise overall strategy, complemented by a detailed focus area and clearly defined phases of transformation.

the socio-productive workshop

key questions

_who are the initiators, operators, users, and cooperation partners?

_ how are access, responsibilities, and decision-making processes organised?

_which spatial and technical services need to be provided on a permanent basis?

_which activities can generate income, and which communal uses require

_ what costs arise from establishing, operating, maintaining, and further developing the project?

_what contributions can be made through self-building, shared resources, cooperation, or commons-based approaches?

_how can the transformation begin incrementally without presupposing a fully resolved end state from the outset?

_how can the workshop continue, evolve, or be transferred to other vacant buildings after the semester?

the economic and organisational model is not imposed on the project only once the final design has been completed. instead, it is developed alongside the spatial design, tested at a small scale, and evaluated through actual use.

project site

former Leiner site

annenstrasse 63, 8020 graz





scope of work
project implementation

research and the development of the project foundations will be carried out in group work, while the design projects will be developed individually.
attendance is mandatory for the introductory events (including the impulse day), studio sessions, and interim presentations.
presentations will take place in the presence of all students and additionally invited guest critics.
for presentations of the research and conceptual ideas, particular emphasis will be placed on a concise, clear, and comprehensible form of communication. for the design projects, the focus will be on spatial concepts and their communication and verification through 3d line drawings.

floor plans and sections alone are not considered sufficiently informative forms of representation.

semester schedule

1. group work

analysis of the social, urban, legal, and economic context

sociological aspects

- definition of forms of cohabitation and their relationship to space understood as a social fact;
- differentiation between private and public spheres (degrees of privacy);
- relationships between interior and exterior spaces;
- development of a differentiated spatial programme;
- hand sketches, plans, photographic documentation, and written report.

urban aspects

- analysis of the surrounding urban context, with particular focus on the relationship between built structures and open spaces;
- analysis of the social, technical, and transport infrastructure;
- analysis of public spaces, meeting points, and green spaces;
- hand sketches, plans, photographic documentation, and written report.

existing building

- analysis of the building structure: columns, slabs, walls, openings, and connections;
- analysis of technical infrastructure;
- analysis of other existing features and their potential;
- hand sketches, plans, photographic documentation, and written report.

legal framework and area statistics

- building law and building regulations;
- subsidy and funding regulations;
- land-use planning and zoning;
- technical standards and regulations (oib);
- hand sketches, plans, photographic documentation, and written report.

2. individual design work

spatial concept

- circulation spaces, infrastructure, structural systems, materiality, communicative qualities, and qualities of use and occupation;
- private and communal spaces;
- the façade as usable space;
- integration of the analytical findings and the structural-spatial framework;
- functional diagram;
- 3d sketches, plans, photographic documentation, and written report.
- technical considerations
- permeable structures and spatial configurations within the urban context and the building
- building services and installations;
- fire safety;
- structural and construction systems;
- technical details;
- implementation of the differentiated spatial programme;
- spatial programme including area statistics;
- review and critical discussion of applicable legal regulations.

3. final presentation and submission of the project book

content: the presentation sheets must include all relevant drawings, texts, and photographs documenting the final project, together with a written project description.

format: 173 × 233 mm, portrait format, printed on untrimmed a4 sheets with crop marks at 100% scale, centred on the a4 sheet and printed single-sided (see the cloud folder and instructions).

layout: all drawings and annotations must follow the i_*w* graphic guidelines exclusively:

https://cloud.tugraz.at
https://iw.tugraz.at/grafikrichlinien-vorlagen/

- black-and-white site plan, 1:2000
- thematic structural plan, north-oriented, 1:2000
- ground-floor plans, north-oriented, including outdoor spaces, 1:500
- floor plans, north-oriented, 1:500, including shafts and service routes
- sections, 1:500, showing a clear structural system and continuous vertical shaft routing
- elevations, 1:500
- selected excerpts of floor plans, sections, and elevations, 1:200
- façade sections, 1:50
- architectural details, 1:20–1:5
- spatially relevant perspectives as line drawings (no renderings)
- project description

at least five representations of key interior spaces and five representations of relevant intermediate and exterior spaces must be provided.
3d representations must use a 1:1.347 aspect ratio, in either portrait or landscape format (see template).

- line weights must be consistent across all representations;
- no converging vertical lines; vertical edges must remain parallel to the sheet edges;

decorative graphic elements, ornamental bands, or typographic graphics must not be used on the presentation sheets;
only project- and topic-relevant information is to be represented.

dates

method:

research	group work
design	individual work

impulse day	thu.	08.10.2026	1 p.m.	former leiner site annenstrasse 63, 8020 graz
book presentation	wed.	21.10.2026	6 p.m.	graz mueum sackstrasse 18, 8010 graz
tischgespräch	tue.	03.11.2026	4 p.m.	hs 2 (atk1008h)
interim critique	wed./thu.	02./03.12.2026	10 a.m.	former leiner site annenstrasse 63, 8020 graz
final presentation	wed./thu.	27./28.10.2026	10 a.m.	former leiner site annenstrasse 63, 8020 graz