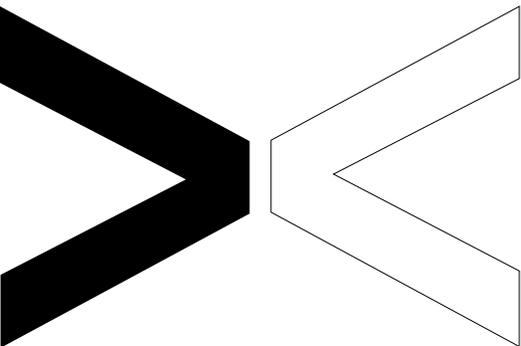


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Istituto  
di studi urbani  
e del  
paesaggio



# More or Less Density

**Accademia  
di  
architettura**

**Symposium  
29–30 October  
2020**

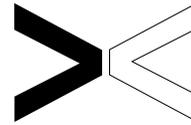
Hall C 0.61  
Palazzo Canavée  
Mendrisio





Greg Metro,  
Hong Kong

**First Symposium of the *Istituto di studi urbani e del paesaggio* (ISUP), organised by Jonathan Sergison, Frédéric Bonnet, João Nunes and Sasha Roesler, with the support of Enrico Sassi.**



The inaugural symposium organised by the *Istituto di studi urbani e del paesaggio* (ISUP) aims to rethink density as a conceptual category that extends not only to urban areas but also to the surrounding territories. Dense living environments have become the norm in many parts of the world, and the rural/urban divide is obsolete when it comes to conceptualising density. Globalised realities are much more complex and new spatial entities are constantly being created by the movement of people, goods and services.

The widespread notion that high-density agglomerations and densification policies are indiscriminately positive (and conversely, lower densities wasteful and inefficient in terms of resource use) must be reconsidered today. The idea that gained currency over the last decade that the “city of the future” must be dense to be sustainable requires careful recalibration. Vertical housing and complex logistics infrastructures are part of an ecological narrative that justifies the design of denser neighbourhoods. In Switzerland, this doctrine has been enshrined in national legislation (*Raumplanungsgesetz*, 2013), accompanied by expert discussions on urban

densification and populist debates on density stress. However, in the light of our current ecological and social vulnerability, density can no longer be read as an absolute parameter, measurable in numbers of individuals per surface unit. Rather, density must be conceived as a relative condition that may be referred to as the “load capacity” of political ecologies. Rather than contrasting the supposed urbanity of denser areas with the presumed dullness of low-density places, the desirable degree of density should relate to the capacity to accommodate specific programmes and to provide high-quality living environments.

While landscapes differ in terms of density ratios and architectural typologies, what counts is their interaction with other spaces: being well connected, providing easy access to large natural areas to residents of the densest metropolitan centres, as well as access to intensely urban public spaces for those living in suburban areas. Hence, the dynamics of the densest metropolitan areas are highly dependent on the resources provided by low-density areas. This interdependency is still insufficiently recognised, at least with regards to urban governance (fiscal and financial aspects) and energy balance (provenance of material components and resources). To reconsider the question of density today we must focus on balancing interactions between different territories, from city centres to the most remote rural areas.

The symposium addresses these controversial aspects of density. We aim to foreground the links between architecture and infrastructure, densely populated inner-city areas and productive hinterlands, high-rise buildings and under-populated rural landscapes. The dynamics of population shift, growth and decrease have local, national and even global consequences, as evidenced by the current Covid-19 pandemic, with densely populated urban areas becoming the epicentres of contagion. Rethinking

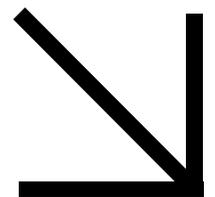
future scenarios for densely built urban environments is crucial to ensure quality of life and optimise the use of resources.

Contributions are clustered around four themes: buildings, landscape, resources, and governance as focal points of reflection on density. Panels include researchers, scholars, designers and planners and each is hosted by one of the four members of the recently established *Istituto di Studi Urbani e del Paesaggio*.

Sasha Roesler, Madlen Kobi, Lorenzo Stieger



Michael Wolf,  
Hong Kong



# 1.

## Buildings: Rethinking housing strategies for denser cities

29 October '20  
10.00–13.00



Moderator: Jonathan Sergison

Density is usually conceived as “spatial-structural” (the densification of buildings), “spatial-social” (the number of people in a defined space) and “programmatically-functional” (including single and mixed use, as well as time-sharing). Also, different building cultures measure housing density in very different ways (e.g. small houses in Japan are a way of creating denser environments without compromising on quality of life). Urban quality is invariably a function of the relationship between density and amenity, which must be considered along with the qualitative aspects of architecture.

This session will address four significant aspects of density in relation to housing:

- Density and forms of construction (the current trend for bio-sourced materials such as timber for high-rise constructions).
- Density and urban housing strategies in European cities (terraced houses, row houses, high-rises, single-family houses, low-rise, high-density buildings, megastructures and megaforms).
- Density and urban commons (new forms of community-building, such as vertical neighbourhoods).
- Density and ideas of home.

|              |   |   |
|--------------|---|---|
| Contributors | <b>Jan Peter Wingender</b><br><b>Elli Mosayebi</b><br><b>Irina Davidovici</b><br><b>Jack Self</b> | Architect, Studio Winhof, Amsterdam<br>Architect, ETH Zurich<br>Architectural historian, ETH Zurich<br>Architect, editor in chief of The Real Review,<br>Unit Master at the Architectural Association<br>School of Architecture, London |
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| Respondent | <b>André Bideau</b> | Architectural theorist,<br>Accademia di architettura, Mendrisio |
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|           |   |       |
|-----------|---|-------|
| Programme | Introduction by Riccardo Blumer               | 10.00 |
|           | Introduction by Jonathan Sergison (moderator) | 10.05 |
|           | Irina Davidovici                              | 10.15 |
|           | Jan Peter Wingender                           | 10.50 |
|           | Jack Self                                     | 11.25 |
|           | Elli Mosayebi                                 | 12.00 |
|           | Discussion with André Bideau as respondent    | 12.35 |
|           | Lunch break                                   | 13.15 |

# 2.

## Landscape: Centres and hinterlands

29 October '20  
14.30–17.30



Moderator: João Nunes

Landscapes connecting hinterlands and centres encompass a series of different epistemological layers: infrastructure landscapes, productive landscapes (e.g. agriculture, forestry, industry, mining) as well as protected landscapes (dedicated to tourism and leisure). We tend to overlook the fact that densification does not only happen in urban areas but extends to the hinterlands through networks for the supply of goods and services, materialising in different forms of infrastructural connections: pipes transport water from mountain springs to household taps, electric grids connect power stations to our homes and roads allow lorries to transport wheat from agricultural fields to the bakery next door.

The liveability of dense urban areas depends on these networks. There is a growing global tendency to amalgamate architecture, infrastructure and territory into a hybrid entity. Various patterns of urbanisation have resulted in horizontal, vertical or cross-sectional spatial expansion, which has consolidated territories into continuous landscapes (non-stop cities).

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|--------------|--|---|
| Contributors | <b>Paola Viganò</b><br><b>Christoph Girof</b><br><b>João Gomes da Silva</b><br><br><b>Luís Paulo Ribeiro</b> | Architect, EPFL<br>Landscape architect, ETH Zurich<br>Landscape architect,<br>Accademia di architettura, Mendrisio<br>Landscape architect |
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| Respondent | <b>Michael Jacob</b> | Landscape historian,<br>Accademia di architettura, Mendrisio |
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| Programme | Introduction by João Nunes (moderator)       | 14.30 |
|           | Paola Viganò                                 | 14.40 |
|           | Christoph Girof                              | 15.15 |
|           | João Gomes da Silva                          | 15.50 |
|           | Luís Paulo Ribeiro                           | 16.25 |
|           | Discussion with Michael Jacobs as respondent | 17.00 |
|           | End of session                               | 17.40 |
|           | Dinner with participants                     | 19.30 |



Gabriele Basilico,  
Buenos Aires,  
2001



>  
Albert Renger-Patzsch,  
Houses in  
Essen-Segeroth,  
1929

# 3.

## Resources: Urban energy landscapes and the question of density

30 October '20  
10.00–13.00



Moderator: Sascha Roesler

Recent discussions around energy transition and climate adaptation have led to a rethinking of the role of energy systems in densely populated environments. Various ideas have emerged on the non-arbitrary relationship between energy infrastructure and settlement structure, and thus between energy and density. In future, dense settlement structures may enable the production of renewable energy, through solar gain, self-sufficient architecture, micro-grids, district systems, or entire ecosystem services. The concentration of the entire cycle of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of energy within a dense area can save energy through the bundling of infrastructures. Low-density areas, on the other hand, may be more resilient in terms of biodiversity and in response to climate change. We shall address the interrelatedness of architecture, infrastructure and landscape by discussing how the notion of “energy landscape” conceptually integrates technological systems, natural forces and the built fabric (energy infrastructure and energy commons).

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|--------------|---|---|
| Contributors | <b>Fanny Lopez</b><br><br><b>Carola Hein</b><br><b>Dominic Boyer</b><br><b>Milica Topalovic</b> | Architectural historian,<br>École d'architecture de la ville<br>& des territoires, Paris-Est<br>Urban scholar, TU Delft<br>Anthropologist, Rice University<br>Architect, ETH Zurich |
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| Respondent | <b>Kim Förster</b> | Architectural theorist,<br>University of Manchester |
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| Programme | Introduction by Sascha Roesler (moderator) | 10.00 |
|           | Fanny Lopez                                | 10.10 |
|           | Carola Hein                                | 10.45 |
|           | Dominic Boyer                              | 11.20 |
|           | Milica Topalovic                           | 11.55 |
|           | Discussion with Kim Förster as respondent  | 12.30 |
|           | Lunch break                                | 13.10 |

# 4.

## Governance: Inter-territorial cooperation

30 October '20  
14.30–17.30



Moderator: Frédéric Bonnet

Better governance may produce spatial and programmatic solutions that lead to better integration, continuity and complementarity between different territorial areas. The last session in the symposium explores some of the challenges of inter-territorial cooperation, including public governance and the involvement of individual and collective participants.

This would concern, in particular:

- Cooperation between metropolitan and rural areas in terms of resource use and its effect on actual spatial configurations (protected landscapes and the leisure economy, the geographical distribution of employment, regional resource management)
- The management of low-carbon mobility systems to improve access to resources from high- and low-density areas (particularly to reduce social segregation caused by lack of accessible or affordable transport)
- The impact of these issues on territorial planning policies (the typological evolution of public spaces and mixed-use buildings and urban environments, the impact of digitalization and big data).

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|--------------|--|--|
| Contributors | <b>Martin Vanier</b><br><b>Keller Easterling</b><br><b>Tom Avermaete</b> | Geographer, École d'urbanisme de Paris<br>Architectural theorist, Yale University<br>Chair of Department of History<br>of Urbanism, ETH Zurich |
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| Respondent | <b>Paolo Amaldi</b> | Architect, historian, University of Paris,<br>Accademia di architettura, Mendrisio |
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| Programme | Introduction by Frédéric Bonnet (moderator) | 14.30 |
|           | Martin Vannier                              | 14.40 |
|           | Keller Easterling                           | 15.15 |
|           | Tom Avermaete                               | 15.50 |
|           | Discussion with Paolo Amaldi as respondent  | 16.25 |
|           | Conclusion                                  | 17.00 |



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di studi urbani  
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paesaggio**



**More or Less  
Density**

**Mendrisio  
29–30  
October  
2020**

The first in a series of symposiums planned by the newly established *Istituto di studi urbani e del paesaggio* (ISUP) addresses the theme of density as an urban and landscape condition. Organised around four thematic sessions over two days, the event will bring together 15 distinguished speakers: architects, historians, landscape architects and geographers. Each session will be moderated by one of the four board members of ISUP and followed by a discussion conducted by an invited respondent.

The symposium will be streamed live  
on our media channel:

[www.facebook.com/USIAccademia](http://www.facebook.com/USIAccademia)  
[www.vimeo.com/usiaccademia](http://www.vimeo.com/usiaccademia)



[www.  
arc.usi.ch/isup](http://www.arc.usi.ch/isup)

**Info**

Università  
della Svizzera  
italiana  
Istituto  
di studi urbani  
e del paesaggio

**Dependence**

Largo Bernasconi 2  
6850 Mendrisio  
Switzerland

tel +41 58 666 5000  
[info.arc@usi.ch](mailto:info.arc@usi.ch)

**Contact reference**

Enrico Sassi  
tel +41 58 666 5978  
[enrico.sassi@usi.ch](mailto:enrico.sassi@usi.ch)