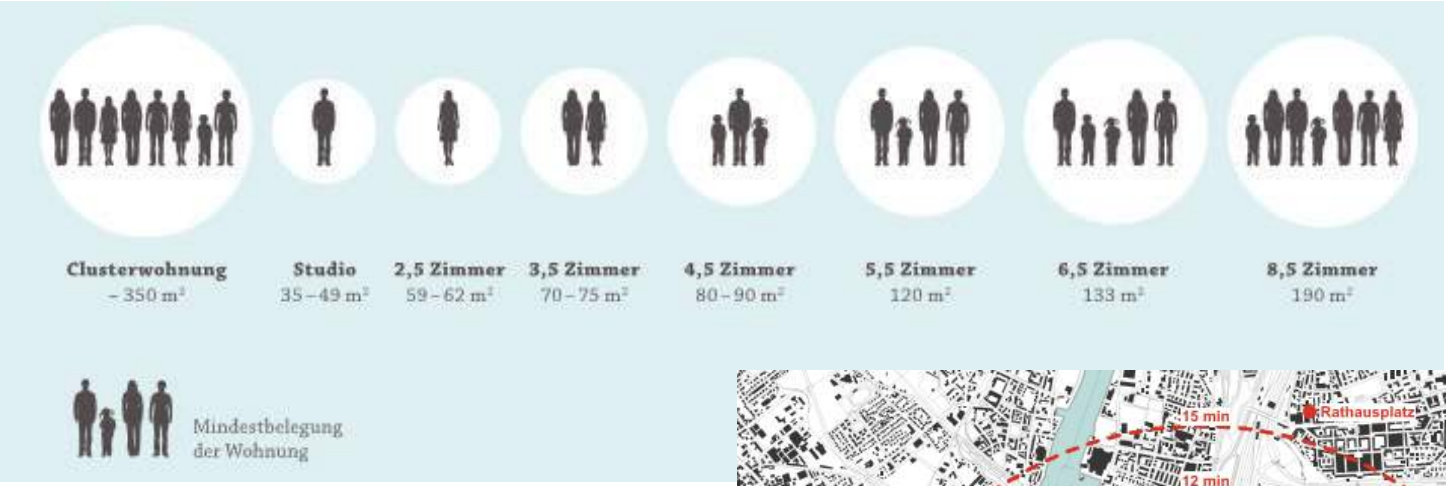
ARTICLE

CO-HOUSING

TYPOLOGIES FOR COLLECTIVE LIVING

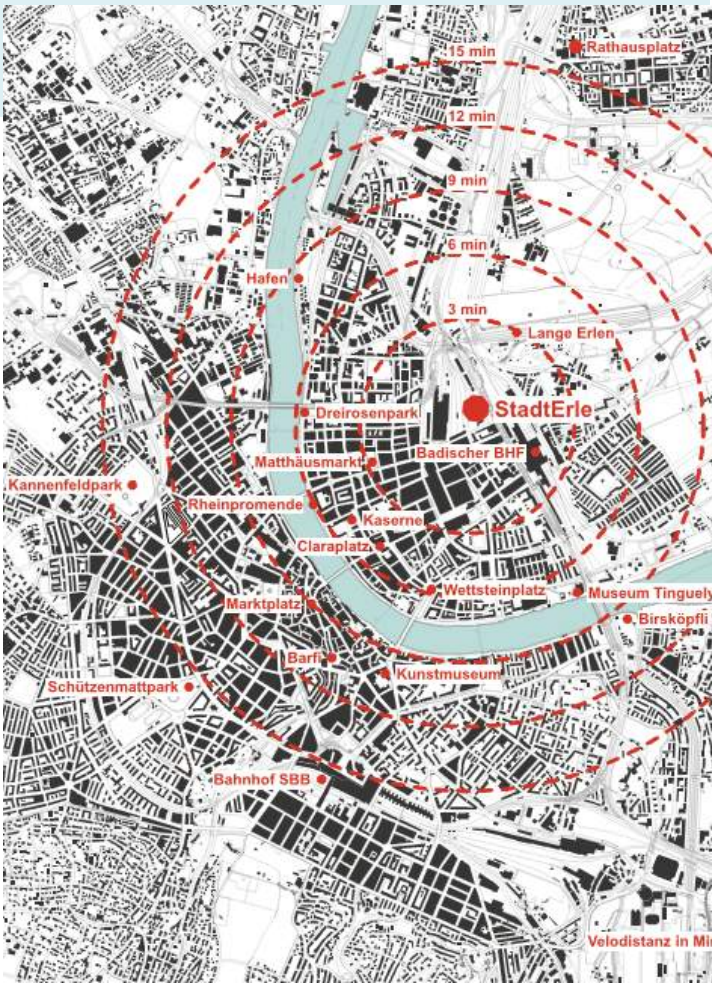
BY VIVIAN SCHWAB



In 2011, when Lars Uellendahl and his partner Sonja Műller, both landscape architects, decided to buy a home in Basel, they entered a nearly impossible market. In the wake of the global financial crisis, Switzerland's perceived stability was compounded by record-low interest rates, saturating the market with foreign investment. Homeownership, which requires a 20 percent down payment, was virtually unattainable for the young Swiss buyers. Not only was financing a challenge, but Lars and Sonia wanted to live with four friends with the accommodation of both privacy and collectivity. So, they realized they would have to get a bit creative.

In 2013, Lars, Sonja, and four friends founded the legal cooperative Zimmerfrei, and reached out to Stiftung Habitat, a nonprofit foundation that leased a plot of land in Erlenmatt East. The land was divided into individual parcels, providing mixed-use development and living spaces for up to 750 people. Their goal was to facilitate ecological and economical urban development. They established a catalogue of standards for location, volume, and use of the buildings as well as sustainability, energy, and mobility. They created an ideological and legal catalogue based on Switzerland's 2,000 watt goal for the reduction of energy consumption throughout Switzerland. They emphasize thoughtful design, provide opportunities for tenant involvement, promote the construction of green urban spaces, and help co-finance through affordable loans. The foundation includes local residents and neighborhood associations.

Zimmerfrei signed an agreement with Stiftung Habitat to develop a parcel for a residential building that would accomodate 100 individuals and adhere to a logistical framework limiting the amount

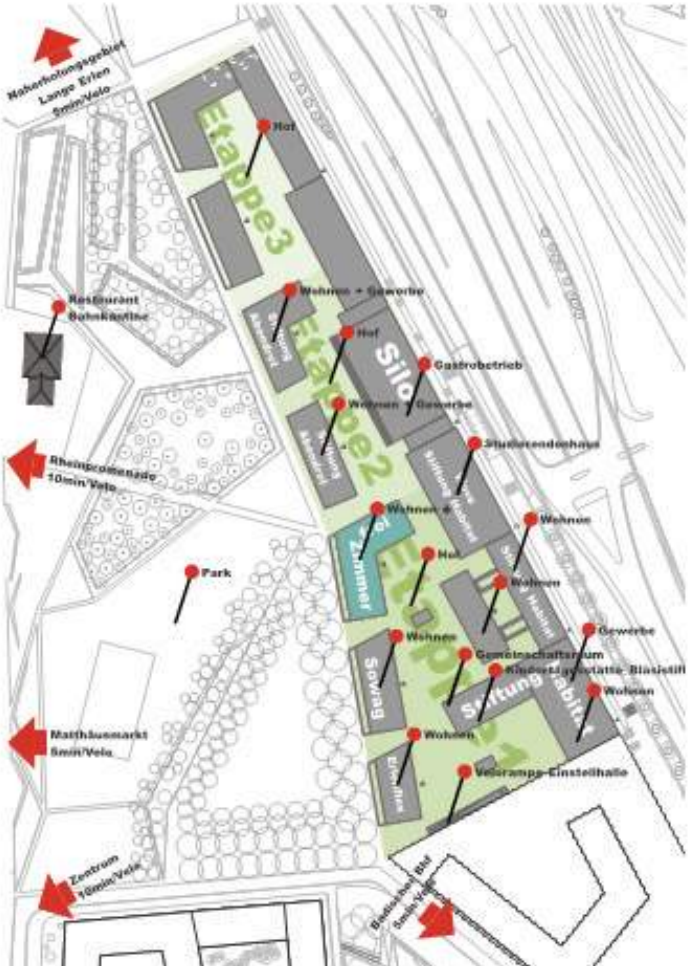


ABOVE TOP: UNIT SIZE DIAGRAM *Courtesy of Zimmerfrei*
ABOVE BOTTOM: URBAN CONTEXT- *Courtesy of Zimmerfrei*

What happens when participation and collaboration come before the design process begins? What would people build if they could decide?

of private space, the quality of insulation, a façade strategy, window standards, and energy systems. With a technical and economic framework in place, Zimmerfrei moved toward design by asking what happens when participation and collaboration come before the design process begins. What would people build if they could decide?

In Switzerland, cooperative housing is 100–120 years old; it is not just about cheap living, but possesses deep ideological layers that value the collective over the individual. In the early 90s, the real estate crisis caused a resurgence of alternative forms of living. For the first time, these were centered in an urban context. Most notorious was Kraftwerk1, initiated by Andreas Hofer in Zurich. Kraftwerk established a permanent residence on the grounds of a former factory designed by Sulzer-Escher-Cies, a live work space for 700 people. An alternative to the private housing market, they were a collective, self-organized, environmentally and economically sustainable community that presented a new model and typology for affordable housing. They encouraged an alternative to capitalism that allowed the building to adaptat throughout its lifetime.



Zimmerfrei used Kraftwerk's model and Habitat's resources to attract people to the project. After some 50 members joined the group, they organized workshops to discuss some of the fundamental programmatic criteria: how much individual space was needed? How much common space? How would circulation be organized? How many flats could fit within the footprint? They conducted 4 workshops over a 3-4 month period, sticking to a strict timeline. Their approach was driven by result rather than process. Workshops were direct, task oriented, and input driven. Efficiency was the byproduct of the process; they recognized that, with so many factors involved, a certain flexibility is necessary. The ultimate goal of the workshops was to define an architectonic program.

During the research and development phase, Zimmerfrei members visited Cooperative Kalkbreite in Zurich, designed by Muller Sigrist. Built on top of a tram depot, normal investors deemed the property site too risky, leaving it open for alternative investment strategies. So Kalkbreite reached out to the municipality with a proposal: more than a tram depot, they wanted a space to live. They provided cluster flats with a shared common room and a large kitchen and private rooms with mini kitchens and bathrooms, which takes less space than normal flats would but provides more privacy.

Building upon these precidents, the programming phase of Zimmerfrei was completed. In March 2014, they initiated a design competition. They invited well-known architects to the jury, which gave the project architectural legitimacy and attracted stronger candidates. In the fall of 2014, the finalists were chosen, and an exhibition was held to attract publicity momentum for financial support of the project. There was no insurance on the borrowed funds, but the cooperative partnered with Habitat to provide a security bond for the project.

In the winter of 2014, Bründler and Buchner were chosen as the winners. The final design is a mixture of cluster apartments (minimum 8 people, maximum 14 people), studios, 1 bdrm, 2bdrm, 3bdrm, 4bdrm, 5bdrm, and 7bdrm. Each unit requires a minimum

ABOVE: SITE PLAN *Courtesy of Zimmerfrei*

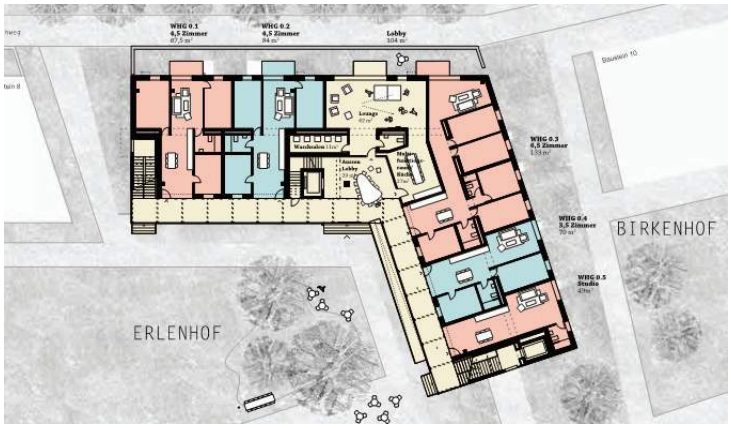
number of individuals, meaning that occupants are required to switch apartments as families age out. Cooperative membership costs 1,000 SF. Living in a flat requires an initial fee that averages 30,000 SF (13,000 SF for the cheapest) and monthly rent.

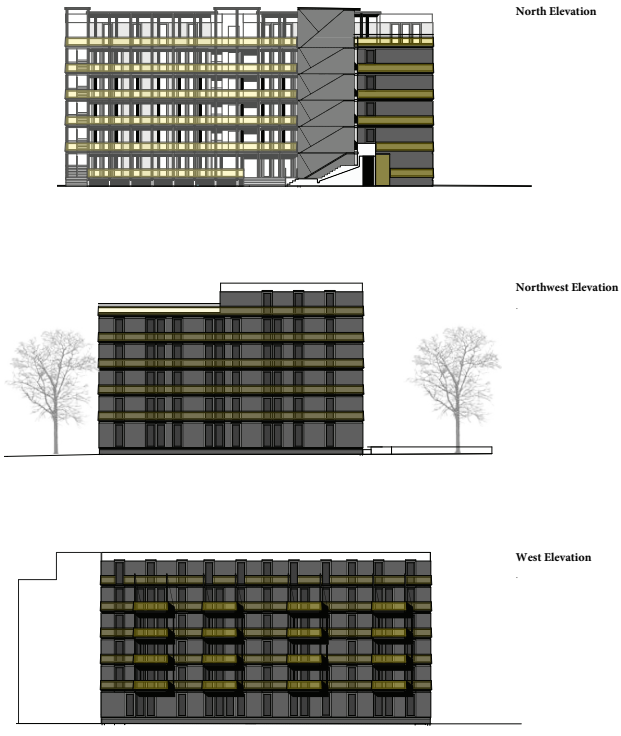
The competition, schematic design, design development, and permitting phases came to about 1.8 million Swiss francs. Most of the private investors were ideologically driven, but Zimmerfrei also incentivized financial backing by borrowing money from private investors at an interest rate with a higher return than that offered at the banks. The caveat was that there was no insurance on the funds, but the partnership with Habitat to provided a guarantee of the project's completion and occupancy.

The resurgence of co-housing typologies addresses a shifting social climate that prioritizes issues of resource consumption, spatial optimization, and paradigms of living. By involving future occupants in the early stages of design, these projects think holistically about the impacts of architecture on the daily lives of urban residents. Zimmerfrei, Kalkbreite, and Kraftwerk 1 represent the positive potential of working creatively within the cracks of housing bureaucracy. They give us hope that these cracks can turn fissures into breaks, from which new paradigms can emerge.

The instability of our contemporary condition makes it easy to dream of a better world. When current society does not meet our needs, we invent. For the past century, individuals and architects have pursued visionary innovations to improve the daily lives of citizens. The 20th-century was an era of idealism. But the failures of the 20th century housing market has perhaps given birth to a new era of pragmatism, and space for new economic models and spatial typologies to remediate the dislocation caused by the market-driven development. ■

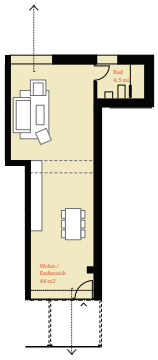
As young architects, we must ask ourselves how architecture attains efficiency in the realization of sustainable development goals on the global scale?



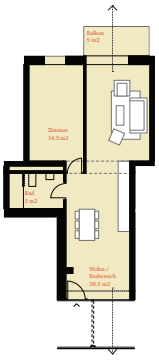


ABOVE TOP: GROUND FLOOR PLAN- *Courtesy of Zimmerfrei*
ABOVE BOTTOM: ELEVATIONS- *Courtesy of Zimmerfrei*

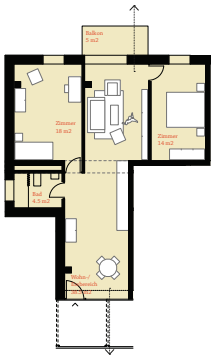
Studio



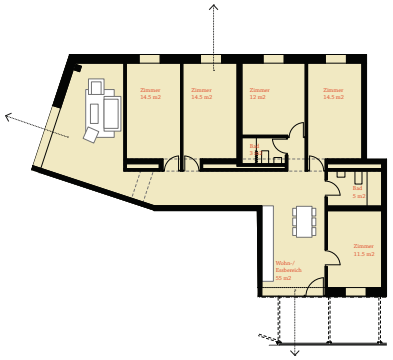
2.5 Rooms



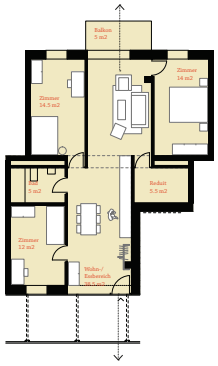
3.5 Rooms



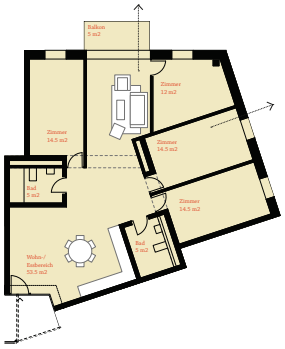
6.5 Rooms



4.5 Rooms



5.5 Rooms

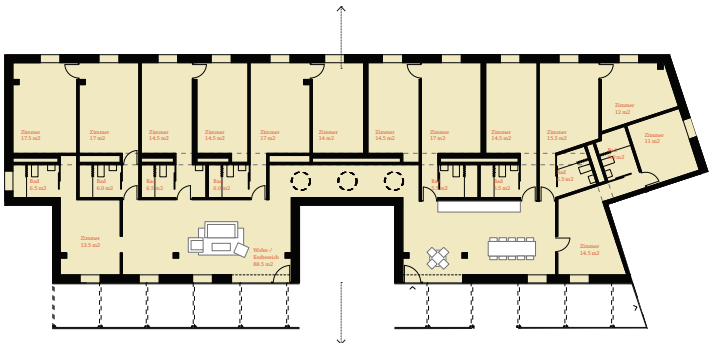


8.5 Rooms



Blick in den Erlenhof

13 room





ABOVE TOP: UNIT PLANS - *Courtesy of Zimmerfrei*
ABOVE BOTTOM: IINTERIOR RENDERING - *Courtesy of Zimmerfrei*



Vivian Schwab
has a BA in Sociology and Studio Art is currently pursuing a Masters in Architecture at Rice University. Last summer she received H. Russell Pitman Graduate Fellowship in Architecture to research collective housing typologies in Switzerland, France, Denmark, and Germany.