

International Symposium
Politecnico di Milano, 9 September 2022

What next with mom's and dad's house? The transformation potential of the single-family house



Stefano Graziani, Treviso province, 2009

One of the most urgent and yet overlooked themes in architectural and urban research is the retrofitting of extensive, urbanized and suburbanized residential territories dominated by single-family houses, generally but not exclusively built for middle-classes in the second half of the 20th century. Although living in a disperse territory represents a rather consolidated practice based upon the intersection of apparently natural architectural forms, urbanization processes and cultures of inhabitation, current circumstances in many European territories call for a process of rethinking of this vast housing stock.

The economic, material, cultural crisis of these housing types is linked, first and foremost, to demographic changes specifically related to the aging process of the 'baby boomer' generation, social transformations triggered by the broader ongoing crisis of the nuclear family, a gradual shift in housing preferences linked to the awareness of the costs embedded in such dwelling models, and the strong attractiveness of the city as productive working space. Yet the understanding that home has always been a productive space, at least in the form of 'reproductive activities', the rise of freelance work, the rapidly changing conditions of work beyond the current pandemic, today's environmental emergency but also the unaffordability of cities call for a further imaginative effort, reconsidering on the one hand the future of these suburbanised territories, on the other shifting focus towards the retrofitting of this composite housing stock primarily made of single-family houses.

During the past few decades, several studies, visions and projects—often remaining in the realm of speculation—have addressed suburbanized residential territories generally focusing on strategies for 'sprawl containment', advancing the substitution of this inefficient built environment with traditional urban models, or recognising in the paradigm of 'densification' a universal saving tool.

The symposium aims at placing the single-family house at the centre of attention and discussion, by bringing together practice and theory, its potential transformation in relation to emergent uses, demographic trends, economic circumstances but also, more broadly, future development scenarios consistent with the current socio-ecological transition agenda embodied by the NextGenerationEU and Green Deal programs.

Call for papers

The aim of the symposium is to share and discuss new, original and emerging perspectives on the transformation potential of the single-family house. We seek contributions from a broad range of perspectives and approaches, from designers, scholars and researchers. Contributions may explore, among other themes:

- The critical assessment of past and contemporary retrofitting/transformational approaches to the single-family house in diverse geographical and historical contexts;
- Reconceptualizations and new perspectives on the single-family house, from both disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches;
- The presentation and discussion of emerging and innovative planning and design tools developed for extensive suburbanised territories;
- The understanding of the transformative potential of the suburban single-family house in relation to emerging societal challenges and uses.

To submit a proposal, please send an abstract of 250–300 words, including name and affiliation, to: sfh-symposium@polimi.it before 30 March 2022. A forthcoming publication project may include selected papers.

Timing

24 February 2022, launch of call
30 March 2022, deadline for abstracts
15 April 2022, notification of acceptance/rejection
15 June 2022, submission draft of paper
30 June 2022, comments on paper
9 September 2022, symposium

Date and location

The symposium takes place on the 9th of September 2022 at Politecnico di Milano, Italy

Contact

Papers, abstracts and any question should be addressed to: sfh-symposium@polimi.it

Convenors

Martino Tattara (KU Leuven and visiting researcher Politecnico di Milano) and Federico Zanfi (Politecnico di Milano)

Scientific committee

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