Institute of Urban and Landscape Studies (ISUP)

PhD student position, SNF funded project: Codes and conventions for future Zurich: A Propositional Planning Approach to Qualitative Densification

Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) is a young and lively university, a hub of opportunity that is open to the world, where students are offered a quality interdisciplinary education in which they can be fully engaged, and where our researchers can count on having the space to freely pursue their initiatives. Established in 1996, USI is in constant evolution, always taking on new challenges while remaining true to its three guiding principles: quality, openness and responsibility.

The Institute of Urban and Landscape Studies (ISUP) was established in 2018 with the objective of pursuing excellence in research on urban and landscape themes at the Academy of Architecture, Mendrisio, which is a faculty of the Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland (USI). The institute shares with the Academy of Architecture a humanistic and wide-ranging approach to research on urban and landscapes issues.

The Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (GTA) was founded in 1967 as part of the Department of Architecture (D-ARCH). Find out more about the Institute under www.gta.arch.ethz.ch. For general information on working and studying at ETH, please refer to:www.ethz.ch/en/the-eth-zurich/working-teaching-and-research/welcome-center.

At the Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio, a faculty of the Università della Svizzera italiana, the Institute of Urban and Landscape Studies, Prof. Jonathan Sergison (AAM) and the Chair for the History and Theory of Urban Design, ETH Zürich, Prof. Tom Avermaete (ETH Zürich) with Dr. Irina Davidovici (ETH Zurich), are searching for a:

PhD candidate 100% from 1st October, 2022 (three years)

Project background
The project combines historical and design-led research to explore urban strategies for housing the anticipated 25% population increase that Zurich faces in the next 20 years. A ‘retroactive analysis’ of the historical evolution of building codes, as well as of the specific urban types and morphologies they have generated, offers the basis for ‘propositional planning’ investigations of their required future adjustment to allow for a process of densification while maintaining urban quality.

The project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation Council (SNSF).

The position
The doctoral project for Project B will be conducted as research-by-design. Through the innovative method of propositional planning (PP), it will test the urban consequences of urban codes, proposing precise adjustments to these codes to allow for Zurich’s qualitative densification.
Your thesis, under the close supervision of Prof. Sergison, will include urban analysis, densities calculations, and the drawing of densification options at urban and architectural scales. You will analyze Zurich’s urban codes and building regulations, current and planned, and use architectural solutions in order to verify and, if necessary, correct them. You will explore the built city and collect information to assist your analyses. You will need to select a number of case studies of typical urban conditions in Zurich’s fabric, and use these as a way to develop scenarios of development with wider applicability. The starting point for this research is the work undertaken by Masters students in Studio Sergison, AAM over 6 semesters and the revisions that are necessary to this previous work on account the 2018 ‘Richtplan’, as well as more recent.

The aim of this critical review of urban codes is to ascertain whether, and under what conditions, the predicted population growth might be absorbed within Zurich’s current, fixed territorial limits. The impact of the densification targets upon the quality of urban space will be tested through a designedly approach, which in turn will inform the adjustment of existing urban codes and the creation of new ones. The propositional planning will be developed through urban design projects related to the critical analysis of urban codes, exploring the limits of the existing urban codes and the urban tissues they might lead to. Exceptional design and drawing skills (ArchiCad, Illustrator amongst others) are required. Professional command of German (spoken, read) and English (written and spoken) is mandatory.

The candidate’s profile
We are looking for a PhD candidate (AAM Mendrisio) with a background in architecture, the history and theory of architecture, or an architect and or landscape architect with research experience. Prospective candidates should hold a Diploma or a Master’s degree acquired at university level in architecture or related fields.

The candidate selected through the AAM call will be enrolled at the doctoral programme of the Accademia di Architettura Mendrisio.

The candidates will be able to demonstrate outstanding design, writing and research skills. The full-time position will be affiliated to ISUP, AAM. The candidate is expected to work closely together another PhD student currently working at GTA, ETH Zurich and a Post Doc working at ISUP, AAM.

Application file (to be sent in English)
- A4 letter of motivation
- A4 statement addressing the candidates understanding of the task
- Curriculum vitae
- Writing sample (English)
- Design/Drawing sample
- Contact details of two referees (previous educators or employers).

Please note that we exclusively accept applications submitted at the following email: candidatureSUP.FNS.me@usi.ch.

Deadline for submission: 31st July, 2022. Interviews for selected candidates will take place in Zurich on 16th August 2022 (morning).

As an institution that values diversity, USI particularly encourages applications from women and from all individuals from underrepresented groups.

For further information on the project, please see the attachment to this call or contact Jonathan Sergison (jonathan.sergison@usi.ch)

Mendrisio, 22nd June 2022