

A Century of Urban Futures: Archives, Vectors, and Perspectives (1950-2050)

Date: September 10-11, 2025

Location: ETH Zurich, Campus Hönggerberg, HIB Building, Open Space 2

The symposium *A Century of Urban Futures: Archives, Vectors, and Perspectives (1950–2050)* invites interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners to join us at ETH Zurich for a two-day symposium exploring the shifting narratives, epistemologies, and imaginaries of urban development. Hosted by Philip Ursprung and organized by Eric Häusler, Thomas Hänsli, Agostino Nickl, and Simon Nougé, *A Century of Urban Futures* will take place on September 10–11, 2025, in the context of the collaborative research project *The Archive of the Urban Age*. The term *Urban Age* is often used to describe the present era of global urbanization, as if it were the inevitable outcome of demographic and economic trends. This symposium challenges such deterministic narratives. We propose a counter-history: the Urban Age was not simply a fact, but a project - actively imagined, constructed, and debated since the mid-20th century by architects, planners, policymakers, and scholars alike. From the postwar period onward, this process intersected with the emergence of electronic computing and the Information Age, shaping new urban epistemologies. Today, the rise of generative AI and large language models (LLMs) once again transforms how we produce, organize, and interpret urban knowledge. It prompts us to reconsider the histories we tell, the archives we build, and the futures we envision. Against this backdrop, our symposium pursues three interrelated aims:

1. **To foster critical and open-ended dialogue** on urban transformation across the built, inhabited, and imagined dimensions of the city - probing its drivers, spatial imaginaries, and lived realities across diverse temporal and geographical contexts.
2. **To explore the potential and limitations of digital and computational methods** - especially AI - for urban research, with attention to their role in creating new archives, formulating innovative questions, and generating novel forms of visualizing knowledge.
3. **To gather feedback on our project, The Archive of the Urban Age**, which revisits the mid-century roots of the Urban Age through the lens of the *Ekistics* journal (1955–2007) and generative digital approaches.

The Symposium is supported by the ETH D-ARCH Enabling Grant.

We look forward to exploring how the city has been - and continues to be - studied, imagined, and made through evolving technologies, disciplines, and forms of knowledge production.

The symposium will unfold in two parts:

- a) Panel Sessions: Four panels will bring together groups of three to four researchers, each presenting their distinct approach to the study of urban futures. These sessions will not only showcase diverse methodologies and case studies but also facilitate dialogue on broader themes such as urban imaginaries, spatial transformation, and the role of knowledge production in shaping future cities.
- b) Project Workshop - *The Archive of the Urban Age*: The second part will take the form of a collaborative workshop centered on our ongoing project, The Archive of the Urban Age. We will present our progress in digitizing and reinterpreting the Ekistics corpus (1955–2007), focusing on the integration of AI-based retrieval tools, semantic modeling, and computational methods for urban history. Participants will be invited to offer critical feedback on both the historical framing and the technical architecture of the project. This session aims not only to refine our approach but also to spark a broader discussion on the potential and limitations of digital archives and AI-driven research tools within the humanities.

Host: Philip Ursprung

Organizers: Eric Häusler, Thomas Hänsli, Agostino Nickl, Simon Nougé

Confirmed Guests: Tom Avermaete
Juan Barcia Mas
Nitin Bathla
Chenyi Cai
Luca Can
Irina Davidovici
Raphael Eder
Naomi C. Hanakata
Lindsay Howe
Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel
Andreas Kalpakci
Nikos Katsikis
Dasha Kuletskaya
Tamino Kuny
Darío Negueruela del Castillo
Sol Pérez Martínez
Angela Rout
Mantha Zarmakoupi