

Concept and Project Director: Dr. Regina Bittner

In 1932, Martin Wagner organised the competition 'The Growing House' which was announced in several leading architectural magazines. The idea was conceived during a time of radical change in housing policy after 'the Golden Twenties': virtually overnight the achievements made during this era in building and urban development seemed to have become worthless. The Great Depression had brought on a crisis in the building industry. Housing construction dropped down to a third of what it had been in the 1920s. The housing shortage drove people to the suburbs, into allotments and small summer houses. Some observers were talking about an 'exodus from the cities' which could cause cities to 'die'. For others it was an expression of an emerging new form of settlement. The competition revisited a theme which had already been spreading virulently during the hardship of the post-war years: 'Growing' as a form of 'natural building' which would offer an adjustment strategy in times of abrupt swings from crisis to boom.

24 model houses were built to designs from the prize winners and members of the working party and were presented in the summer of 1932 in the exhibition 'Sonne, Luft und Haus für alle' (Sun, air and homes for all). Despite the crash of the building industry, one of the decisive criteria was the use of the most advanced construction technology, that is industrial prefabrication. Unlike the heydays of the 'New Building' in the 1920s, this exhibition presented solutions to those on a low-income who dreamed of their own home: houses which were flexible enough to adapt to shifting economic conditions and a constant change in family structures, and needed a minimum of resources to do so. Also living under difficult economic conditions had made the connection to the garden a prominent theme. What's more, the exhibition title 'Sun, air and homes for all' put an emphasis on the recreational value of the garden. The Berlin exhibition made deliberate use of the metaphor of athletic sunbathing people and created an active link between home and leisure. The entries wanted to be understood as contributions to the emergence of a new type of settlement. But because they were reminiscent of bungalows they were criticised for being merely extendable weekend cottages or summer houses. For Wagner the economic crisis was heralding the end of the market economy and a shift towards socialism.

The global financial market crisis of 2008 had internationally almost analogous consequences. The collapse of the property market placed many homeowners with mortgages in a desperate position. Some critics were even talking of the 'end of suburbia'. Even though for Germany the effects were less dramatic, the global financial crisis showed once again the fragility of an urban development based on speculation. In addition, different mobility options and flexibility demands have a severe impact on today's living conditions. New combinations of sedentariness and mobility, migration and living can be observed, which go hand in hand with changes in space

use and spatial requirements. Dessau serves as a good example of this development. In the 1920s, the Bauhaus city was a showcase for innovative experiments in social housing thanks to prefabrication and industrialisation. Today, Dessau is not only affected by out-migration and shrinkage, and the subsequent loss of value on the property market, but with new nationally and transnationally oriented institutions a mobile class has evolved which commutes between the large urban centres Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg and Frankfurt and the big small town. Students, academics, university lecturers, civil servants, cultural sector workers, artists, asylum seekers, migrant workers and commuters make up the growing number of 'Dessauers' without having a permanent residence in the city. They spend two to three days a week in Dessau and make only limited use of the city's infrastructure, of cultural, educational and consumer offers. At the same time many local residents are affected by unemployment and poverty, and rents make up a large percentage of their income. Out of work, many have to make do with their flat and allotment and cannot afford a larger space to accommodate guests or family members who no longer live permanently in Dessau.

The second international Summer School run by the Academy of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation aims to organise an idea contest within the framework of a summer school, where, inspired by the 'Growing House' from 1932, fantasies for a multi-local living in today's Dessau shall be thought up.