Paper / Proposal Title:
Reading raw concrete – Inclusion of housing estates of the 1970s

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Presentation Method. I would like to:

i. present in person (with/without a written paper)

Abstract (300 words):
In the search of approaches and references for the new towns and city developments the question arises how to create cultural identification of the inhabitants with their new living space in times of globalization, climate change and technology revolution. The influence of the cultural patrimony in the creation of this bond has been learned from the failed idealistic utopias of Modernism which neglected the built heritage. At the same time, a closer look shows high differences of concepts because in the change of paradigm of this era, some large scale housing estates were created as “built utopia” to give an alternative to mass housing and single family houses in the suburbs. Their architectural language of raw concrete underlined the progressive and democratic approach of individual living in a dense urban community. As recent investigations point out those projects match with today’s required dense but also individual housing concepts. Thereby, it turned out that those approaches are still or again a part of today’s
attractive housing stock, not only valued by former tenants as this housing is their cultural identity, also by new tenants as housing for their living concept. By analyzing the Alexandra Road Estate in London the role of the technology approach of raw concrete in the process of transmitting the unique character and identification will be outlined. It is it becomes apparent that the significant raw concrete of the estates stands for a unique living space and progressive lifestyle. It will be argued that the raw concrete in its semantical meaning had become a signifier. Thereby, the connotation of concrete has changed, reflecting nowadays the present understanding of an ecology and urban life and not in a way of historicism of the 1960s. Understanding the unique language of raw concrete and its signification as code for the cultural identity of this living space, the patrimony could be used as valuable resource for future housing.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Claudia Volberg (1975) graduated in 2002 from Aachen University of Technology (RWTH) as architect and received the postgraduate-master in Theory and History of Architecture from Barcelona School of Architecture (ETSAB) in 2010. After working in international architecture-offices in Spain, Mexico City and Switzerland (2002-2014), she is teaching at the Institute of Architecture Technology (TU Graz). As member of the international teaching exchange program of the University teaching and tutoring as guest form an important part in her work at the Institute. As Research Assistant she participates in international conferences and active in the architectural scientific discourse. Her phd-thesis “The Signifier Concrete – On the potential of the material semantics in large Scale estates of the 1960's and 1970's” – tutored by Roger Riewe – is reflecting her research interest which she is also focussing as a member of the research team at the institute.