



# “Re-Use” – a grand failure

In early summer 2022, I was called in at the last minute to help stop the demolition of the three legendary Huber Pavilions on ETH’s Höggerberg campus – and to enable their relocation. Re-using buildings, i.e. dismantling existing structures and reconstructing them at a different site, is a topic on everyone’s lips at the moment. In terms of sustainability, it serves as best practice.

The wooden, modular constructions, originally only built to last five to ten years as a temporary solution before ending up in use for over 35 years, appeared to be virtually destined for this kind of project. After much toil and effort, it looked as though a new location had been found, the costs determined and the time scale fixed. Then, two days before the start, the specialists responsible for carrying out the operation announced that, contrary to all the estimates and prior clarifications, a maximum of just 30 percent of the buildings’ original structure could be saved, meaning that at least 70 percent would need to be manufactured from scratch. It transpired that, during a renovation of the Pavilions a few years back, most of the modules had new rendering glued and nailed on, putting paid to the dream of project «Re-Use».

**NB.** The re-use of building structures is generally limited in Switzerland. When reconstructing existing buildings, as a rule authorities insist on the same standards as for new builds, which is not necessarily economically viable.

**NB. 2** They do say that you learn the most by making mistakes.