

Documentation

Residential Building as a means for Urban Development

An IG Architektur project on behalf of MA50

October & November 2010

Executive Summary

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Introduction

With just under a quarter of a million homes, the City of Vienna is one of the biggest house owners worldwide. More than 150.000 financed homes since 1984, and an ongoing development of about 7.000 new homes each year, maintain the central role of the supported residential building within the Vienna urban development.

The continuing strong population increase incites the Vienna urban planning department to huge steps in their development. Currently, several large extension areas are in the state of planning and realisation. Those were the focal point of the threepart discursive event series "Residential building as a means for Urban Development", which took place in the rooms of the IG Architektur in Vienna in autumn of 2010.

Conversational Method

Aims for the events/discussions were on the one hand an improvement of the mutual understanding of all parties involved in the construction phase – on a level playing field, and on the other hand a chance to have a look from the outside by means of inputs from international experts, as well as the search for new planning processes and award procedures.

Analogous to the debate with regard to its contents, the choice of its format was especially important to the the events' concept. Hence the setting was developed in collaboration with a versed mediator from Berlin, and the presentations of the invited experts were moderated, applying different methods of group work.

The approach used was chosen as a variation of an established model – via three zoom-like sub approaches: Zoom Habitation, Zoom City, Zoom Building.

Habitation and User Participation 'ZOOM Habitation' on October 20, 2010

The first evening addressed the topic habitation and user participation. The establishment of affordable and high quality housing is an objective of a sustainable urban development. Recent years show an increasing relevance of user participation in the sustainable housing origination.

The first input was made by Dutch architect Laura Weeber, presenting the project Wallisblok in Rotterdam, in which she participated as a user (and not as a designer). Because of the expected high refurbishment costs and the concurrent unalluring location, the City of Rotterdam agreed to an uncommon concept: the habitable surface, owned by the city, was given to the subsequent residents for free. In return they had to commit to investing 1.000 € per square metre in the refurbishment of the building, to starting the reconstruction within a year, and to actually living there for at least two years, and to appearing as a collective of awarding authorities. In exchange, the future owners were completely free to individually design and plan their own flats. In only two years, 39 modern homes and a communal garden were completed.

The project Wallisblok managed to generate high quality homes and at the same time reasonable ones, as well as a sustained upgrading of the quarter through a modified assignment of roles between city, architects and users, and through a participative planning process. The project received various awards.

The second presentation of the evening by DI Petra Hendrich shed light on the general conditions for awarding authority groups (Baugruppen) in Vienna compared to those in German cities. The term "Baugruppe" stands for the fusion of private persons in order to jointly construct and then use a residential building. Basic trait of a "Baugruppe" is thereby the high degree of autonomy and self-organisation.

The general conditions for awarding authority groups are different in the three German cities presented by Hendrich. However they share their self-proclaimed assignment to support the "Baugruppen" in their development and work. These groups are part of the public dialogue, and are thought of as relevant promoters of sustainable urban development.

Result of the concluding discussion of the participants: the real-life and sustainable identification of the residents with the project, its preceding process and the existence of an active "community" that supports dialogue, are proof of the success of participative planning.

Cooperative Planning Methods for sustainable Urban Development 'ZOOM City' on November 10, 2010

The subject of the second evening was cooperative planning methods for a sustainable urban development. The Vienna residential building with its high quality standards will not be able to deal with future challenges through means and structures of conventional production conditions alone. Certain questions arise: What part of urban development shall residential building take on? What is urbanity? What does a liveable city want to achieve? Who takes part in the planning process, and how?

An input for answering these questions was given by Walter Buser (Department of Urban Planning and Building Regulation - Urban Redevelopment and Residential Building in Munich), pointing out the tensions between politics, urban planning and residential building. Claudia Schelp explained how mediated monitoring was actively applied in the early states of project development in a development area of Berlin.

Munich has an urban development model that, besides 13 other guidelines, focuses on settlement development in concentrated core areas. More than half of the newly rented flats are supported. Almost a quarter of the population has a migrant background. Unlike Vienna, in Munich a "strategic real-estate management" is absolutely necessary because of the extreme shortage of ground. This management defines residential new building as integral subject matter. The urban development is linked to a system of ground information, available on the internet. Munich applies a model of equalisation of values, which supervises (via urbanistic contracts) adequate repatriation for the commune.

The significance of planning in Munich becomes manifest in a rather vivid competitive culture, in new forms of dialogue and networking, in civic participation focal points (adolescents), and in the debate of issues concerning migrant living.

Berlin has currently no supported residential building or hardly private housing due to strained budgetary matters. Unlike Munich however, in Berlin the reservoir of free land

even in city-centre quarters is quite big. Beyond that, there is also a considerable "critical mass" of residents, who are interested in participative habitation, in self-building, and in innovative planning processes.

The actual work at the intersection between administration, investor, planner, and users was illuminated in Claudia Schelp's presentation on the basis of a facilitation process for a centrally located city quarter in Berlin.

The project team had to develop an action plan that especially focuses sustainability, and that is connected to issues related to the housing industry. In an early state, renowned experts teams from planning, economy and research, energy industry, water industry, waste disposal industry, building materials industry, urban open space, transport and social affairs were commissioned to develop recommendations for action, together with representatives of the awarding authorities and political administration.

The subsequent insights of this dialogue process were outlined by Claudia Schelp: the willingness and courage of the answerable protagonists to initiate a process, which can open up new areas and allow for novel ways; the early involvement of all relevant protagonists in the decision-making processes as well as in the changes of those; the mutual understanding of the project, its goals, and the general conditions for working with each other; the understanding of the protagonists (as the suppliers of the resources) in terms of collective thinking and developing of ideas and answers; the controlling of the process by focusing on understanding, structuring, and navigating via different interests.

Residential Building at the Intersection between Users and City 'ZOOM Building' on November 24, 2010

Residential Building is constantly torn between the higher-ranking goals of urban planning on the one hand, and the tangible expectations of the users on the other. Economic, ecological and social needs have an effect on building and constructing within this scaled spectrum. Architects increasingly perceive themselves as the impulse for new and offbeat answers, and lend themselves as an intersection between reflections of urban building, interests of residents and users, and social requirements of neighbours in the quarter.

The planning process for the project Zürich Kalkbreite, presented by Pascal Müller, addressed many of those issues. The project is a perfect example of cooperative development planning. Due to permanent disuse/faulty use of a certain free space in the city centre of Zurich, a citizens' initiative was formed, that was appointed project developer after long lasting tough proceedings with the City of Zurich. The area was to be integrated structurally and socially in the urban context. Required was a high ecological, economic, and social sustainability - in terms of the 2000-watt society model.

The architectural design accommodates the requirements of cooperative building with a high diversity of floor plans and types, also with the idea of central free space. During the project's development, participatory instruments (events, workshops, online polls) and user-friendly presentation methods (models, area zoning plans, etc.) were applied.

Intermediate utilisation of the functional room and the free space is possible for all interested city residents. This space encourages dialogue and constitutes identification with the quarter.

The following suggestions from the third evening's input were deemed positive and worth pursuing by the participants: a concerted development of a vision; a preferably detailed formulation of goals at the beginning; an adequate time frame for developing and planning; transparent, structured and moderated processes; a clear political commitment to options for partaking, together with a binding result; a compulsive mix of supported and private housing; planning of public and semi-public free space as part of the projects; admission of small cooperatives as building project organisers; flexible mobility concepts instead of rigid holding area regulations.