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the names Borneo and Sporenburg. Experiments are being made with different room heights, maisonettes with several storeys, complex encapsulations or open, loft-like floor plans.

Here strategies addressing special cases are generally important: as a programmatic adaptation to the specifics of a situation, demonstrated not least in Borneo Sporenburg with resounding financial success. The new development on these two long peninsulas accepts the obvious downsides of the site with its ragged geometry prescribed by the arrangement of the quays – the unique atmosphere in the port has to be set against the normal standard of living: with very little greenery and an access network that scarcely functions at all. But even more important than the urban context is fitting in with a specific market segment. Housing is no longer built for faceless social groups defined by abstract needs, like families, singles or the elderly, but for occupants who are as concrete as possible: “Their excellent condition,” wrote Adriaan Geuze of the target group at a very early stage, “makes it possible for city-dwellers to run marathons and to go skiing and surfing. They are self-confident and well informed, find their own freedom and choose their own subcultures.”¹¹ The symbols of home life are no longer the living-room couch with the family all sitting on it together, but objects that suggest individual experience: enjoying the contemplative peace of the inner courtyard, sensing the excitement of the nearby city, getting a kick from sport. The architectural concept of a carpet-like patio house development reads like a consistent implementation of the marketing strategy: “Eigen domein in de Stad” – with your own front door in the street, a yard for the bikes, bulky toys or other leisure items, and also an intimate terrace above the roofs of the town. Until then Amsterdam had never seen a comparable symbiosis of urban density with the advantages of a detached house.

Overall the Borneo Sporenburg development is largely homogeneous, but in the new districts in the West Port special cases are raised to the status of a general principle, for example at Block II in the West Dock, designed by DKV as master planners and also partially as the architects responsible. DKV are not looking for a structure that is as

neutral and archetypal as possible, but are a developing a complex, unique building in iterative working stages by introducing individual parameters. Each situation has its own subject, its own typology, its own architect. Based on a regular block structure prescribed by the urban figure, they achieve an atmospheric variety that seemed possible hitherto only as the result of small-scale “growth” – but not in the case of a coherently executed project by developers that still contains about 200 dwellings, of which about a quarter will be rented social housing. The accommodation consists of a three-storey terraces house between the green and stone-paved courtyard, in a flat with a wonderful view over the IJ or a “normal” flat on the street. The architects seem to want to seduce the consumers again with every dwelling.

The fact that the strategy of individualized living has met the consumers’ wishes is shown not least by the market reaction. Thinking about housing production, even on an industrial scale, has been trying to make the process more flexible for some time, so that it can increasingly do justice to the consumers’ individual ideas. A new research field has come into being here, largely unnoticed by the architects. We have heard from the building promoter Amstelland Ontwikkeling Wonen that it has only recently become clear that in future in any given fictitious building commission for 100 buildings they will no longer be dealing with one client, but with 100 different ones.¹²

Contacts with clients, taking into account the possibilities of the new media, need to be better organized if the advantages of large building sites with their carefully devised construction schedules and a high level of prefabrication are not to be lost. Data management acquires a great deal of significance here: ultimately individualization, which according to the manufacturer can extend from selecting a few details of decoration and equipment via the organization of the floor plan to the individual arrangement of sections of the building, leads in large projects to an explosion in the amount of information that has to be processed. The motor car industry with its platform strategy is a model for handling diversity. According to HBG Woningbouw, a new project is not developed as completely new, but examined in terms of deviation from a reference

building. A fundamental distinction is made between shell construction and the finishing process: in the case of the shell, only a few variations and deviations are permitted on the basis of an economy of large unit numbers, but in the finishing process deviations in detailing like for example various eaves forms, diverse window arrangements or a different division of the rooms affect the price very little in terms of the craftsmen working on the spot.

But while at present this kind of management by exception works only with a lot of units that all deviate in the same way, the development aims pursued by the large building producers for the future are clearly defined: so far the programs offer customers help above all in visualizing or checking the possible interior variations. But automatization, as in the case of Patrick Adema of Bouwfonds Wonen, for example, thrives on the quality of the process as a whole. Priority is given to work at interfaces linking construction and calculation, working on a central data base containing all the financial and technical arrangements for the building process.¹³ Ultimately end users will put their individual homes together, and the program will check on-line what is available, what building regulations will allow and the price of the individual dream. After the order is placed, the system generates detailed plans and the delivery and service calls on the general agreements that the building promoter has set up with the individual providers in advance, relating to the anticipated annual production. In future, as is already customary in other industries, building will be on demand: meeting deadlines and cost estimates, and without additional sales costs.

Today exclusivity is not so much a matter of money (or of nobility, race or gender), but based on a conscious decision – and thus on the voluntary exclusion of other options that are equally open to selection. This is true in terms of both lifestyle and one’s own home. The dense and complex collage in the Westerdock is no longer achieved under duress as result of urban development requirements, but makes it possible to achieve an exclusive urban atmosphere. Any location thrives on exaggeration of its special potential.

Notes: See German text p. 31



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