NORDISK ARKITEKTURFORSKNING

NORDIC JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH

2/3.2009

Architectural Competitions

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Collective Housing Competitions in Switzerland

The Parameter of Innovation in Architectural Conception

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Nordic Journal of Architectural Research
Volume 21, No 2/3, 2009, 15 pages
Nordic Association for Architectural Research
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Abstract:

During the last fifteen years there has been a radical change as to what concerns architectural competitions' practice in Switzerland in the collective housing domain. What mainly outlines this change of scenery is the use of competitions in a sector of the construction market that until now has been marked by the private initiative constantly leading to a repetition of well-known typologies and a rather reticent attitude towards young and "inexperienced" professionals.

This situation is being currently modified. An increasing percentage of housing competitions, especially in the German-speaking part of the country, makes part of long-term development schemes regarding urban or suburban areas, schemes related to rehabilitation and densification mechanisms. At the same time the competitions system is being well promoted thanks to a subsequent number of detailed publications. State services and local authorities encourage cooperative constructing societies to act as exemplary promoters, in an effort to affront the housing shortage problem and to adequately qualify the dwelling space, elementary module of the urban environment. Collective housing is no longer considered exclusively in terms of financial conditions and compromises but also in terms of domestic space's quality, given the rapid social changes that define new ways of life and set higher the users' standards.

A therefore increasing number of architects is being offered the opportunity to investigate certain areas of interest that in the past would not comply with the financial priorities of private investors. Innovative ideas and original "images" are being positively evaluated, whether concerning urban forms, housing typology or integration of technological achievements. The article presents four projects issued from recent housing competitions in Switzerland, as study cases that focus on different innovative aspects of the architectural conception

Keywords:
Innovation, architectural concept, housing competitions, cooperative societies, quality of housing.

DEFINING THE SIGNIFICANT TERMS

This introduction about recent Swiss architectural competitions of collective housing wishes, first of all, to demonstrate a change of climate in this sector of the construction market. After the severe crisis of the 90's and during the last decade, new ideas are being implemented in housing production. But among the different types of residential architecture, in this essay we are focusing on the production of collective housing. The term collective is used to refer to the kind of residential architecture that presupposes shared areas by the inhabitants, either in the form of inside spaces or as outdoor common arrangements and facilities, especially in horizontal or vertical circulations. And in this sector, the Swiss state, less in the form of the confederation, mostly by means of local administration policy councils and services, is clearly promoting over the last decade new ideas as an answer to the changing social and economical conditions. Besides, in a country where the lack of available surface accentuates the negative effects of the hyper-urbanization of peripheral areas, the need for efficient forms of dense housing is emerging rather pressing.

In this changing scenery architectural competitions play an important role as quality promoters and catalysts for a rather "accelerated" and what should be a "sufficient" housing production; "sufficient" both in quantity and in quality, which becomes also a publicity factor for an investment. State aided clients, such as cooperative societies and other non-profit estate managers, trusting the competition procedure, are serving as an example for private promoters. Architectural concurrence becomes a tool of exploring new living models. The housing market, largely controlled for several decades by the private sector that was opting for more "secure" and mainly "standardised" patterns, is stirred up by a wide variety of propositions, corresponding to the public demand. The term of innovation, either referring to housing types or to urban forms is being integrated to competitions' programs along with affordable house prices, typological variety and a high price / quality ratio as part of the prerequisites of "adequate" solutions.

We will talk about the characteristics of this change referring mostly to the significant terms of innovation, housing quality, non-profit construction managers and housing competitions. Explaining their mutual relations will aid us better comprehend their incidences on the housing market.

Innovation and Invention

At this point, it would be useful, in order to better define our area of interest, to emphasize on the important distinction between the terms of innovation and invention. Dehan appeals to the original sense of the term "innovate" ["innover" in French] as defined in the "Robert" dictionary: to innovate means to introduce a novelty to an established thing (Robert, 1976). In the Cambridge Online Dictionary we find: "invent: to design and/or create something which has never been made before", whereas "innovate: to introduce changes and new ideas" and "innovation: the use of new methods or ideas". Innovation is therefore naturally related to inventiveness but the basic difference between the two terms, between these two different stages of technical progress (Bullock et al. 1988), remains as Dehan underlines, the fact that innovation does not create something absolutely new but effectuates transformations or new combinations of existing resources, adapting procedures or products to economies and making them accessible to the large public.

"This definition of innovation, as realisation of new combinations between different resources, seems particularly well-adapted to architectural production, where innovation is more frequently based on recycling, re-interpreting and transforming than on pure inventions" (Dehan 1999). In this sense, innovation can be better understood when perceived through its existing milieu. As such and especially in the field of architecture, innovation is measurable in terms of relative rather than absolute performances (Formica 1992). We could therefore say that innovation is a re-evaluation of existing forms and ideas, a new prism under which we can re-examine the existing context.

Innovation and Quality

Innovation is generally conceived as an ameliorating plus to certain conditions. Therefore, its objective is always a qualitative one: ameliorating the adaptation of a product to the needs of its users, improving the relation between the quality of the product and its price etc. (Dehan 1999). Innovation is related to quality by the fact that such procedures aim usually to ensuring a longer duration of the project. We are trying to innovate for to react to rigid, almost unmodified through time, conventional housing forms in a period of rapid change of the social scenery. We are innovating for to predict changes and therefore secure also in the future the project's coherence with its context.

This does not mean though, that the idea of innovation has always been well perceived by clients and contractors, or even some of the profession's members. To put it in the words of a private investor in the Chriesimatt competition, where the client appointed a jury of distinguished architects in order to encourage the selection of "new ways" among the proposed solutions: "... new ways involve the risk that they could not function" (Marti 2004). Innovative operations implicate risks, due to the fact of not correctly estimating either the client's receptive capacity or the time needed for a new idea to mature through its repeated applications. Often an architect is able to detect, measuring to a certain extent by objective criteria and to another by previous personal experience, the efficiency of a specific solution or of a certain spatial device. But is this in accordance with the users' habits or with their tolerance regarding possible modifications of fixed routines? To this end, a close collaboration between architecture and other disciplines – sociology, management etc. – is often required.

We can distinguish the following kinds of architectural innovation (Dehan 1999):
- Formal innovations, dealing with transformations of the built objects form (its volumetric mass or aspect).
- Functional ones that can be detected in the evolution of the plan's organization.
- Programmatic innovations, integrating for instance into the function of collective living certain qualities that would normally be related to other forms of dwelling.
- Urban innovation that is often trying to reconstitute certain liaisons with existing forms of urban space, popular and well-functioning in the past.
- Technological innovation, mainly resumed in the use of new materials or constructing ways. In this last category, we should mention research axes treating the subject of sustainable development and environment-friendly construction.

Innovation and Construction Market

We have seen that a construction market is normally rather reticent towards innovative operations. It should nevertheless be said that the implicated risk depends on the desired impact and the context into which the procedure is inscribed. Different types of innovative procedures present an increasing difficulty when they are simultaneously applicated on the same project. But the greater the risk, often the bigger is the possibility of a more breaking-through, positive change. On the contrary, limited interventions have the advantage of being more easily integrated because the users can appropriate them more easily.

This rule has been noted to concern rather this portion of residential markets – a slowly changing system themselves – referring to ownership than other forms of tenure. In the first case, there existed, at least until recently, a certain tendency to select what would be concerned as having a more or less "universal", "long-lasting" value (Dehan 1999). On the contrary, tenants under rented forms of tenure or even members of cooperative associations are more frequently searching new ideas. We could form the hypothesis, yet to be proved, that there lies one of the reasons rendering certain housing markets more susceptible to innovative concepts than others. The desired change is certainly depending on the target-public; competition programmes should be defined in accordance with its aspirations.

Switzerland is, from this point of view, a rather special case presenting a very low percentage of owners; only one third of the Swiss people own their houses, at the same time a rather low percentage of tenants consider themselves obliged by their financial conditions to rent, in which case they perceive negatively their housing conditions (Thalmann and Favarger 2002). If we relate the idea of collective housing with living units occupied in their majority by rented forms of tenure, maybe this feeble ratio of propriety is a reason for a more intensive effort of ameliorating the offered quality in this field of the construction industry.

Cooperative Societies and Housing Quality

The Swiss state, in the course of the last century, has not undertaken social housing policies, the results and typological connotations of which have strongly been questioned during past decades in other European countries (Schmidt 1988). The confederation has not chosen to construct by its own means but has promoted housing construction by non-profit

managers, offering them considerable advantages. We will shortly refer to the system of housing cooperatives as related to the promotion of the collective housing notion and of architectural competitions as typically applied procedures for the promotion of new constructions.

Why are cooperative societies important for the current housing production? As owners of housing buildings, they certainly do not represent such a high percentage: according to the federal inventory effectuated in 2000, only the 4.5% of the country's housing supply belongs to cooperative societies of construction (information from the Federal Statistical Office). But this percentage is not really denotative of their potential, not even of the role they have played in the construction market since their foundation in the end of the 19th c. and that for several reasons (Thalmann and Favarger 2002). Primarily, because in a way, they also represent – through their functioning and the state's policy concerning them – other forms of associations serving public interests in the construction sector: foundations of public or private right, institutions of professional insurance, pension institutions etc. This group owned in 1990 approximately the 14% of the total housing supply (Cuennet, Favarger et al. 2002). What is more significant is the percentage that cooperative construction societies represent in diverse cantons, often extremely varied: in the cities of Zurich and Basel during the same period this ratio exceeded the 10% only to reach in Zurich the 19% in 2007 (Schmid et al. 2008). What's more, housing cooperatives have managed to remain active during decline periods of the construction activity establishing a reference standard for the rest of housing investors. This is mostly due to the state's aid, linked to their system since almost its very birth, and to the fact that they normally provide the lower rent prices while attaining an optimised quality / price ratio.

Because, even if the main objective of cooperative societies is decent housing on a moderate price the quality of the final result is not necessarily compromised. Since their foundation, their primary aim is to ameliorate the housing conditions of the industrial city's population. The quality criterion remains also current later on, when cooperatives are adopted by different urban systems emerging as solutions to the unnatural rapid growth of the 19th c. cities and the insalubrious living conditions (Loderer and Architektur Forum Zürich 1994) or in relation with the more recent movement of the historic city centres' rehabilitation and the renovation of their existing residential supply. During the course of the years, the amelioration of the cooperative members' living conditions rests subsequently a leading priority. This background and the ever-lasting dream of the single-family home – in Switzerland, still 59% of the population considers a single-family house as the ideal home (Thalmann and Favarger 2002) – define a contemporary setting where new solutions seem necessary.

Architectural Competitions as a Means of Promoting Quality and Innovation

A persisting housing shortage, urging for certain groups of the population, either suffering from discriminations (immigrants, monoparental households, invalids) or not in the measure of finding a better home (a certain number of families with increasing financial means have some difficulty in finding a spacious enough housing unit at a reasonable price), heavy rent loads and the principal characteristic of the Swiss housing market, the exceptionally high percentage of rental contracts as a dominant form of tenure, are some innate conditions of the housing market, as stated by the Federal Commission of Housing Construction in 1999 (Cuennet, Favarger et al. 2002), that still impose the state's financial aid in this sector. Nevertheless, from this date on, the financial aid is to be better framed so that it can serve households who are mostly and genuinely in need. In 1998, the city of Zurich lances the initiative of "10000 flats in 10 years" and later "Housing for all" (2002-2006), planning the production of a certain number of dwellings in a fixed time period. At the same time other cities of equal characteristics follow Zurich's path. These conditions are related to two side phenomena; housing cooperatives and non-profit associations become an easier access to something closer to the ideal home and to one's acquiring more rights on his housing accommodations; a cooperative member finds himself in an intermediate status between a tenant and an owner, with more rights than the first one and less than the other (Thalmann and Favarger 2002). Because of this, even people with relatively fair financial means turn to the solution of housing cooperatives. And in their case the quality factor becomes even more important and above all, affordable. Another significant point concerns a differently qualified part of the population, people with higher intellectual standards turn to housing cooperatives charmed by the myth of a communal and more human model of life.

In this context, a long tradition of architectural competitions, though referring mostly until now to other than housing programmatic uses, is being reactivated. The competitions number held each year in Switzerland, was reported in 1975, between seventy and one hundred (Strong 1976), in 1996 around a hundred and thirty (Strong 1996), while during the period 1985-1998 this number varied between sixty and a hundred and ninety (Meyer-Meierling 1998). Switzerland is thus representing, along with Germany and Austria, one of the European countries holding the higher percentage of competition organizing. But we should as soon underline the difference between the diffusion of the competition system, regarding housing production in Switzerland, compared to other northern countries. In the spirit of the general housing policy, where the state has not engaged itself in the construction but only in the promotion of collective housing, it is not designating competitions as an obligatory condition of the provided financial aid, as goes i.e. in neighbouring Austria (Rebois 1990).

But there are other conditions that together with contemporary social changes facilitate the application of the competitions' system, especially when it has already been tested in the course of the years with satisfactory results: improved living standards create higher demands from more conscientious users; negative past experiences little promoting communal life or "banalizing" the notion of "home", make exploring new solutions and intermediate living forms an imperative priority. In order to better understand this changing context we should also seek more influential groups that favour the competitions' system within the housing sector. Thus, we should probably speak of professionals who are constantly demonstrating a high interest in competitions, besides the opposed arguments (poor compensation of the effort, sacrifice of time and energy that could be devoted to already assigned projects, etc.) and of decision makers that promote the system for reasons of economy. And in this equation the most important components are the quality / price relation improved by the wide variety of ideas, the guarantee of a better thought answer to a complex problem and the fact that well-adjusted procedures secure a better planned and therefore shorter lasting building process, ensuring the budget and the time frame. To these arguments we should probably add that competitions can distribute the work more evenly to the profession (Strong 1996), not only with respect to the winners if not also to the assessors, and it is as such a tool that they are serving in Switzerland until now. This last point makes nowadays the discussion about competition procedures (open or by invitation) extremely important; it can define the range of opportunities offered to the younger and less "wired" professionals. We should note a final point that has to do with the particularities of the procedure itself: the most important contribution of a competition is the dialogue established between different actors (promoters, participants, the jury and the public) encouraging debate, exploration and research over the complex subject of housing (Strong 1996) through "democratic" standards. Taking into consideration the country's political system, that generally encourages debate, even to what concerns the construction sector, and the publicity that architectural projects receive nowadays in general, we can imagine that competitions serve also as a way of acquiring a kind of "general consensus" based on early discussions and public participation (Strong 1996) that can largely facilitate the scheme.

In the following, we will take a closer look to the different types of architectural innovation that the above setting is stimulating. Every project will be presented from a specific point of view, emphasizing on a particular kind of architectural innovation, in order to give a global idea of what is going on today in this sector of the Swiss construction market. It goes without saying that in the majority of the cases, a project's conceptual value cannot be restrained in so strict a classification, justified only by the purpose of a systematic analysis. It is therefore understood that certain aspects of the following examples could also be studied through the prism of a different type of innovation.

In the first case we will focus on the idea of formal innovation; the authors are reinterpreting the classic urban block, deforming its most marking element, the continuous, uninterrupted fronts. In the second case, the insertion of the single-family house theme to the logic of a collective housing complex is providing an example of programmatic innovation, on the fairly fertile research track of the collec-

tive housing units' differentiation and individualisation. The third example will serve us as a paradigm of functional innovation; an unexpected fragmentation of the principal form, reflects the different character attributed through a rich typological variety of housing types to each separate fragment and facilitates the construction in separate stages. The last project presented here offers an example of urban innovation; the wide-spread form of the block ("point house") is being re-examined within the spectrum of the global form that takes up its uniformity also thanks to the complimentary design of its interstitial free spaces.

CONTEMPORARY PARADIGMS OF INNOVATION

Residential Complex Volta Mitte - Basel (2005)
Arch.: Christ & Gantenbein (1st prize)
The competition's site is located close to the French frontier, in an area of the city that is currently going through important transformations. The district of St. Johann was originally developed around the industry placed along the river Rhine and was mainly inhabited by this industry's workers. Today, in the limits of the urban agglomeration, it is the location of the prestigious Novartis Campus of Sciences and particularly charged by traffic loads. The Volta Street that crosses the district connecting the Swiss east tangent highway to the French highway is to become a residential zone, by the underground, in this section, construction of the north tangent highway. Along with this new route, a new suburban underground train station will connect the railway station of St. Johann to the international airport and the city's network. The street's front will be planted; a bicycle and a tram lane will be added.

Figure 1

Given the complex, evolving nature of the area, the competition's organizer (the canton of city of Basel) merely defined housing as the main programmatic function, leaving the invited teams free to propose, depending on their perception of the zone and their knowledge of the market, other compatible uses. For to secure the realization of the project, the city opted for an architects' / investors' competition; every architectural team should be allied to a contractor willing to assume the project's execution. In terms of urban form, the participants were asked to complete an urban block of the existing tissue and to deal with the corresponding issues of the regular and monotonous street façades, the courtyard's, semi-public space organisation and the connection between the private residential and the public sphere. The proposals would also be judged on the basis of their originality regarding the complex's image projected to the railway station of St. Johann, the quality of the housing typology, the possibility to shelter people coming from mixed social backgrounds and the interest of the investing proposal. (Fig.1)

Christ and Gantenbein, a relatively young architectural firm, took into consideration the existing situation, studying the negative conditions imposed by the existing urban type. The fixed shape of the block's envelope and the traditionally static character of the street front presented, along with the northern orientation of the courtyard façade, considerable constraints to a satisfactory design. The radically changing scenery of the former industrial area, also on a social level, could not be adequately expressed through a sterile repetition of the urban form. The authors propose a five-storey high skin, formed by alternated brick and glass bands, which generally follows the block's contour but is drawn back diagonally at its corners to accentuate the openings of the built tissue and the enlargements of the street's space, the two plazas at the block's extremities. While the Volta façade remains relatively calm (but for the distorted balconies) the courtyard's front is strongly deformed. This arrangement serves two principal purposes. Firstly, the extended length of the façade is "decomposed" to give the impression of more than one building volumes. Together with the volume's recessions on the level of the last two floors, this allows for a more user-friendly scale to be restored on the free space of the courtyard. A calmer, residential ambiance can therefore be established. On the other hand, this "unaffected", "relaxed" treatment of the building's frontline secures an even longer, naturally lit, front with the additional advantage of its differently reacting towards the distinct surrounding situations (the rest of the courtyard's existing fronts). Varying views are created for the house units while, at the same time, the disadvantageous orientation conditions for the rooms placed on this side of the building are cancelled. (Fig. 2)

Figure 2

In total, 96 apartments, the majority of which represents moderately sized dwellings (3½ or 4 ½ rooms), are proposed. 22 out of these constitute a boarding house (destined to house employees of the closely situated pharmaceutical company or of the office surfaces on the first floor) whereas four of them are designed as duplex urban attics, placed on the upper floors. No apartment is identical to another. However, they all answer to a kind of free design, with a flowing living space extending from one façade to another and incorporating the entrance area, the kitchen and the living room. As a result of the sculpted courtyard front the building's width varies from 5m to 17m. Too profound units take advantage of an increased room height (2.8 – 2.9m). The extreme typological variety aims to a large, socially varied public, possibly interested by different forms of tenure. (Fig. 3)

On the ground level, passages allow a connection between the street's universe and the semi-public space of the court. This latter's design, picking up the strong lines determining the façade's transformation, was criticised by the jury in relation with the twisted front. According to the jury report, a calmer arrangement should be sought, reinforcing the desired contrast between the two different levels of social interaction. The jury also thought that the house types should be better studied, especially given the fact that already some of the apartments' exterior spaces (balconies, terraces) do not seem to possess sufficient dimensions. The construction being planned for the current year, it remains yet to be seen how the project will be transformed during its "realization process": "The partly experimental character of the houses should be disciplined, the implicated risk can be decreased by a measured "preservation" of the concept..." (Laedrach and Waltert 2005).

Residential Complex Weissenstein – Bern (2004)
Architects: Graber & Pulver (2nd prize)
The competition was held by a cooperative society for the site of a disused gravel pit that has also served as dump area in the past. A small river running along the northern border of the terrain and the close proximity of the Weissenstein sport ground, of some commercial uses and other complimentary services

Figure 3

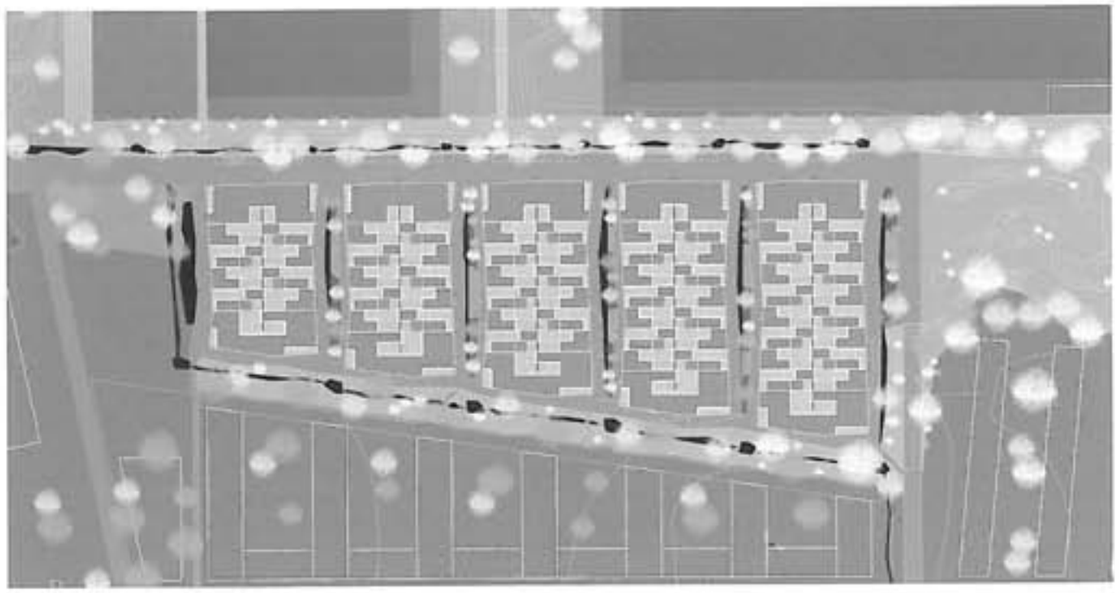


Figure 4

complete the background scenery of the future residential complex. The client set as a priority the production of reasonably spacious, affordable housing with a certain typological flexibility that would allow it to be adapted to various forms of tenure and to future changes of the households' structure. (Fig. 4)

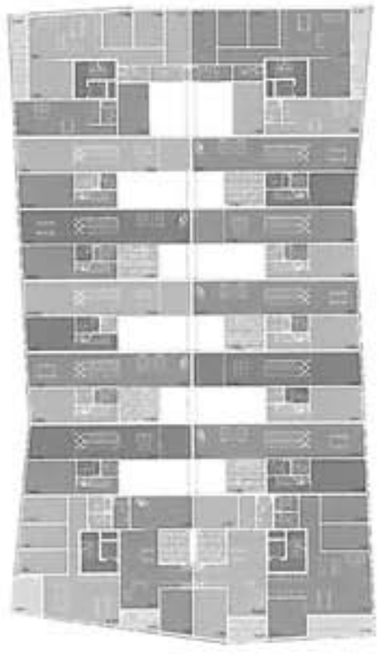


Figure 5

The two main characteristics of the project are its compactness and the originality of the proposed house type; it is a contemporary reinterpretation of the medieval urban tissue of Bern, combined with a sensitive reading of the single-family house idea. The authors propose five "housing islands" placed on a distance that allows between them the creation of "green alleys" promoting the collective life. The five fragments are aligned to the northern border of the site, with a kind of homologous growth of their length corresponding to the biased southern line of the plot. The compactness of the proposition issues from the complex organisation of every island's main body. While its extremities are occupied by flats of one sole level served by separate entrance cores, the rest of the block is filled with row houses, each one of them extending to four different levels and interacting, with an adjacent housing unit, in section and plan. Every "island's" middle space is hollow. It is carved by a sophisticated sequence of private free spaces that creates a unique neighbourhood's atmosphere. (Fig. 5)

The maisonettes have their own roof gardens, private courtyards or spacious verandas that look onto the "green alleys" between the buildings or onto every building's middle space. They are also served by their own private entrances and parking spaces on ground level, combined usually with spare rooms or storerooms. The halls that enlarge the entrance zones can also be quite handful for families with children, serving as indoor playing rooms on rainy days or weather protected space for other occasions. In the intermediate levels, night zones are alternated with living spaces that combine kitchen, sitting room and dining. Every level is marked by its own spacious outdoor extension such as a terrace or a loggia, while on the attic a big room that can serve as library, playing or living space is enriched by its direct connection to the roof garden. (Fig. 6)

The two different house types make the project attractive to many social groups and family structures. The authors create a proposal that could serve as a model project for Bern's housing market presenting a particularly high demand. It offers a contemporary version of two different housing themes: living close to the centre of the city in a neighbourhood of high density but with a quality that mainly reflects living in the country. By reinterpreting the medieval tissue's compactness, the architects provide their residential complex with a strong image, thus also answering to the lack of identity of the surrounding built environment. The history of the place is taken into consideration, not being contradicted by the proposed intervention; the ancient gravel pit is not to be "re-naturalised". The "alleys" between the housing-blocks are to be planted where possible but mostly equipped with urban elements coinciding with the existing concrete coverings of the underground dump's air wells. Moderately sized green surfaces are planned. They are destined to form small plazas contributing to the proposed qualitative variety of free spaces. An effort is made to integrate different branches of the existing stream to the alleys' design, combining them with a system directing the rain water to a large basin, placed to the main plaza on the northwest side of the terrain.

Figure 6

Residential Complex Chriesimatt – Baar (2003)
Architects: Graber & Pulver (1st prize)

This project issued from a private competition aiming to the preservation of the specific area's identity by the construction of a coherent and respectful residential complex. The competition procedure offered the co-proprietors of the terrain a wide range of choices, subsequently an increased chance of finding a rather original solution but most of all a means of reaching a common agreement. The high demand of Baar's housing market and a quite selective public related to it, make innovative solutions quite searched for. The site is located in one of Baar's few areas that have not yet been built. To the west, interesting views have to be searched diagonally through the existing residential buildings; to the east, the settings are dominated by small-scale villas and single-family, detached or row houses; to the south, the terrain reaches the agricultural zone of Baar and the unobstructed view extends as far as the Alps of the Bern region. The clients demanded quality housing, enriched by an appropriate design of collective and private free spaces. Playgrounds and meeting points for the community should promote a vivid social life.

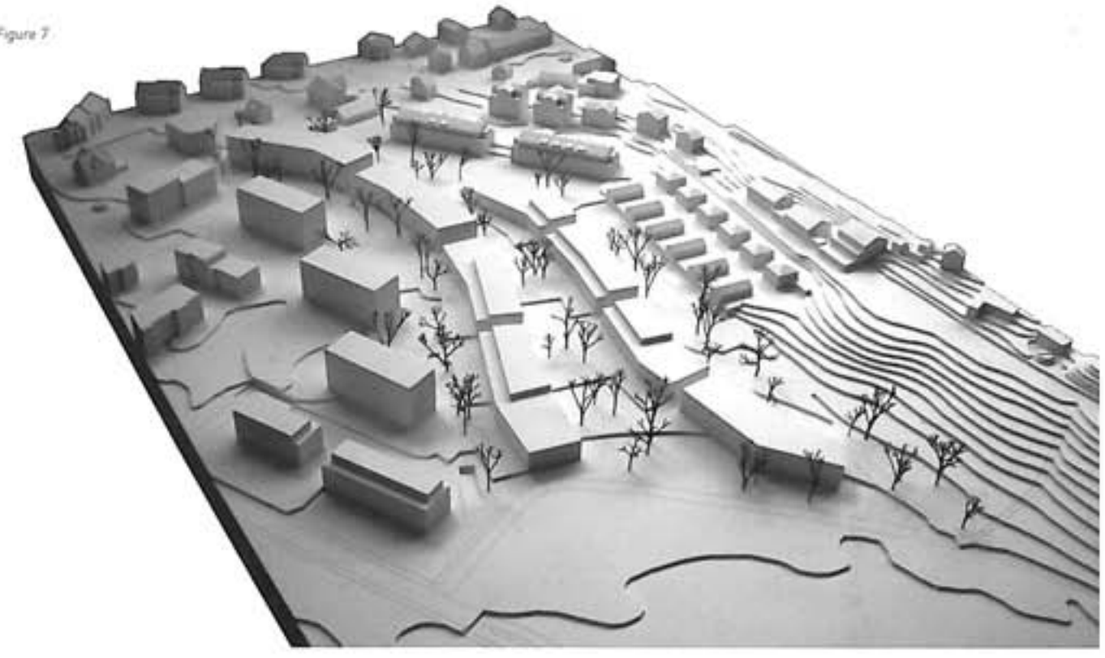
The awarded solution managed to create a special image for the future buildings, taking advantage of the characteristic trapezoidal form of the terrain that is slightly twisted following the soft descending slope of the topography to the south. Above all, the project convinced the jury of its practical, functional approach managing also to attribute to every building an autonomous identity. Two, at first sight, continuous linear constructions follow the terrain's borderlines with light distortions.

When examined more closely, they reveal eight distinct slabs, completed in the northern end of the terrain, by a block that forms the finishing point of the whole composition and contains in the ground floor, some small-scale commercial facilities compatible with the residential use. Between the two linear almost continuous buildings, a large free space, opening to the unobstructed view close to the southern border, forms a kind of central, green park for the complex. (Fig. 7)
The buildings are disposed, according to the underground parking's entrances, into four different groups that make possible diverse options of completing the construction into several stages. Except for the northern group, incorporating the block, each of the resting three contains two separate fragments, characterised by their oblique sides and their bodies' slight changes of direction that create different building widths. Therefore two principal themes are generating distinct house types that create, in a bigger scale, a great variety of public, semi public and private free spaces: the treatment of the building's differentiated width and the way the main, loft-type living space of the apartments is functioning in relation with its exterior extension, be it a loggia, courtyard or terrace.

Short-width parts, such as attic units positioned in retreats of the building's volume, take advantage of spacious terraces and widened views. Middle-width apartments are designed either with a shorter double aspect living space, whose length is completed by a loggia oriented to the east or the west, or with a unilateral living sequence that is naturally lit and ventilated also by an internal patio (attic floor). Duplex apartments follow more or less the same principles, with a type of two-storey loggia, marking their position to the complex's façades and looking onto the unit's private garden. Building parts with exceeding widths acquire a kind of "open room", a spacious, square-shaped loggia. Other than that, the apartments are marked by a slight difference of level between the sitting-room and the kitchen, when a double aspect living space is concerned, a small hall that creates in many cases a transition space for the night zone, and a multi-purpose room that forms frequently an extension for the entrance / kitchen / living room / loggia sequence and is separated from it by means of a wide sliding door. (Fig. 8+9)

The architects offered an in-depth analysis of three different fragments that present each,

Figure 7



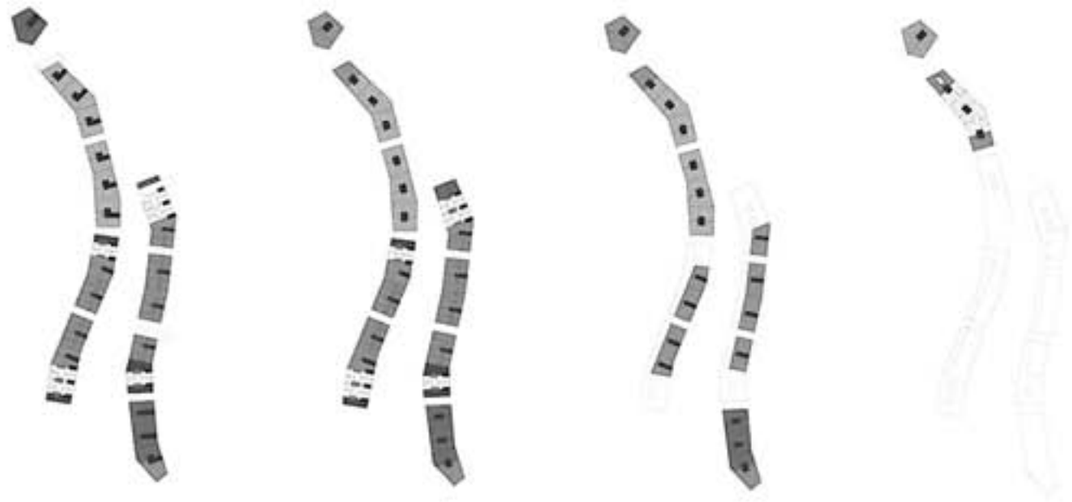


Figure 8

due to their position in the terrain, the combination of housing types in their interiors and their volume sizes, a special residential character. With the treatment of the first fragment that is located to the northern extreme of the complex, they create a version of "urban living in the park"; a three-storey volume, close to the main connection route, is filled with one-level, loft-type apartments. There are no private gardens on the ground level but the common free space is planted with different kinds of trees. The second fragment shelters mostly duplexes, lowering its volume (two stories) when reaching the site's south-western extreme. There, the proximity of the neighbouring slab that blocks the view to the east is amended by a private garden or a terrace asset. The third fragment, situated to the site's south-eastern extreme and liberated from neighbouring buildings, contains large one-level apartments, among which is included a special type located in the southern side and rejoicing of a panoramic view. The treatment of the buildings' skin contributes to the special identity of the whole restoring its unity. Big square openings, corresponding either to windows or to loggias, are arranged in a somewhat fortuitous way in the façades. A discreet earth tone is used for the exterior brick walls. It creates a strong contrast with the shining paintwork of vivid coral tones applied to the loggias' interior surfaces and to the windows' frames.

Residential Complex Guggach - Zurich (2005)
Arch.: Althammer & Hochuli (1st prize)
In this case the client, the cooperative of Zurich's Tram Workers, has fixed the competition's objectives in accordance with the city's initiative "10000 flats in 10 years". Already owning a residential complex with small-sized apartments in this district, the cooperative aimed on providing its members (that have the financial ability to ameliorate their living conditions) with the option of moving into bigger, appropriate for families flats (of 4 ? and 5 ? rooms), without completely changing neighbourhood.

The site is located in close proximity of the plaza Buchegg – a turning point in the city's traffic network – and of the newly constructed – also through a competition won by the architects Mike Guyer and Annette Gigon – residential complex of Brunnenhof. To the west, the

Figure 9

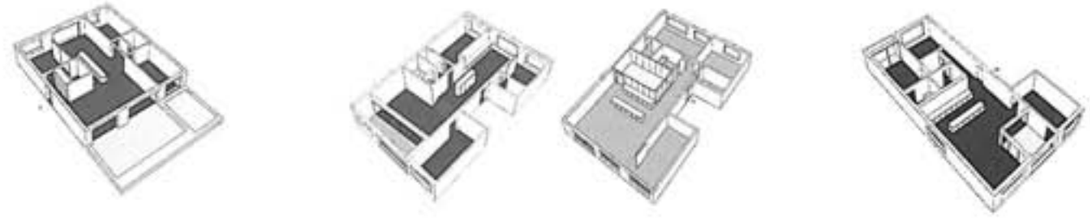


Figure 10

Figure 11

terrain is reaching a large recreation area with a natural forest; to the north, the sport installations of Guggach; to the east, it is circumscribed by Hofwiesen Street, a busy road connecting different parts of the city. Thus the traffic noise becomes an issue to be affronted by the participants, as well as the two existing, disused buildings of Zurich's Electrical Company. (Fig. 10)

The winning project integrated both these buildings to the new complex. Their "artless", "casual" emplacement in the site becomes for the authors an organising principle as to what concerns the rest of the composition. Eight compact, moderately sized buildings (3-5 floors high), following the well-known and widely spread, especially in Switzerland, type of housing block, are arranged in the terrain as "carelessly" thrown pebbles. On a second look to the plan, they seem to sketch with their borders the plot's limits, as if they were to fill its entire surface. They give the impression of a "built layer" that has been obliquely sliced in order to create openings with interesting perspectives onto the surrounding settings. At the same time the whole composition, through a consistent, well-studied design of exterior spaces, forms in the urban tissue, a passage from the busy route to the forest. By their turning and twisting in relation to one another, the blocks seem to carry progressively the pedestrian to the higher situated, natural scenery. Four platforms, forming distinct plazas, each one of a special character (Magnolienplatz, Brunnenplatz, Turmplatz, Aussenraum UGZ), link through ramps and staircases, Hofwiesen Street to the peripheral calm road of the green surface. (Fig. 11)

The relatively small scale of the blocks makes them easier integrated to their heterogeneous context. The two longer and finer construction bodies of the group are following the contour of Hofwiesen Street, thus forming, in combination with an adapted housing typology, an unforced barrier to the traffic noise. A tranquil character is established for the rest of the complex and the interstitial collective space, reflecting a domestic identity for the whole set.

A circulation core in the centre of every block, serves three apartments by floor. In the flats, the entrance hall is developed in such a way as to create a transition space between surfaces left to collective use and more intimate zones. Loggias, placed in the buildings' corners, offer biased differentiated views. A spare room is usually found in direct relation with the main living space, possibly assuming various uses: as a prolongation of the sitting and eating zone, as an office, library or additional bedroom. In

Figure 12

the linear buildings of Hofwiesen Street the circulation cores are placed next to the street façade, protecting, along with the elongated sequence of living rooms, bathrooms and spare rooms placed to the east, the private zones of the apartments of the street noise. To the west, the night zone is completed with a balcony stretched along the entire length of the façade.

The project's strongest point is its double identity; a suitable, user-friendly scale for the separate units and a uniform, strong image of a whole for the group. As pointed out by the authors, the main idea is to establish a continuous spatial flow, produced by the intertwining of two different qualities: a certain openness guaranteeing for the complex's free spaces and the for the housing units interesting views from varied angles and a compactness, intelligible on the global concept and the choice of the building type. (Fig. 12)

Recapitulating

To review the analysed examples, it is important to clarify two points concerning our particular selection of projects. Firstly, the fact that their majority concerns winning designs, does not reflect a special interest, from our part, in awarded proposals. Competition projects represent intellectual goods of an undeniable value regardless their materialisation, as well pointed out in the exhibition "Le concours d'architecture est un bien culturel" celebrating the centenary of the foundation of the Swiss Architects' Federation, on March 2008. In the framework of this short presentation, searching to demonstrate that construction managers do regard innovation with a different eye, we have intentionally opted for primed projects. We have thus showed that housing promoters become in practice willing to "refresh" their existing range of solutions, as part of an effort to remain competitive in a demanding market. Secondly, the term of innovation is used here in full awareness of its various aspects and diverse interpretations, as a classifying criterion for the analysis of projects, studied until now mainly under the prism of a typomorphological method. It serves us therefore mostly as a tool to confirm the interest of specific proposals in an already shaped (using multiple criteria) corpus of case studies.

We should likewise focus on another significant element. Certainly, innovation is a term frequently coming up in competition briefs and can be there perceived in relation with what seems to be, in the housing investment's domain, an incontestable shift from the quantifiable to the qualifiable. But even though the housing market is changing in a way that the number of square metres reflects no more the primary criterion of an investment decision, construction promoters are not willing to take the risk of innovation without consequent guarantees on their priority interests. In other words, a competition's objective is to provide the client with a variety of solutions, among which he can choose the most appropriate design in terms of function and aesthetics but also, the one most well-studied in terms of its future materialisation. As a consequence, a jury's decision often stumbles to questions concerning a project's complying with the program's quantifiable requirements (number of units, costs, timetable, constructed surface, etc.), especially in relation with additional expenses.

Comparing, for example, the Chriesimatt and Weissenstein projects, coming from the same office of architects, we can see how a detailed typological study in the first case, secured for the proposition the first prize, while in the second case, doubts as to the project's satisfying certain requisites of the program (the proposed built surface exceeded all other solutions while the number of housing units was not confirmed) classified the project in the second rank. Regarding this remark, we should also bear in mind that more innovative solutions often require an additional amount of energy, effort and time to mature and convince of their efficiency, which is not always possible in a competition's restricted time frame. For instance, the jury's comment, mentioned in the case of the most breaking through of all projects presented here, the urban block's transformation, can also be explained from this point of view; that is to say, as referring to an obligatory adjustment of the solution to a more pragmatic and precise application frame.

Finally, it is important to take into account the fact that housing competitions refer to a common good. They may represent "agons between artists" (Lipstadt 1989) but they also reveal the "inescapably collaborative nature of architectural creation" – in the sense of an architect's "relative autonomy" (Lipstadt 2005). Housing competitions refer to a product that interests the public deeply. Any kind of dialogue developed in their framework is quite determining for the architects' relation with the public and consequently, for the definition of the profession's place in the society. The diffusion of innovative, ameliorated patterns by means of an increasing publicity around the housing competitions subject can reinforce the relationship between architects and public. And in this process, the participation of younger professionals is essential. Maintaining an important ratio of open competition procedures means nourishing the profession's hopes; it means reacting against established systems and in several cases, reacting against "elitist" attitudes that alienate architects from the market's principles and functioning codes as well as from the public's needs.

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