

BETWEEN MARKETING AND BUILDING CULTURE

Current architectural developments in the Tyrol

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Which themes dominate the building sector of an industrialized mountain land that lies at the intersection of several transcontinental routes, a land that has at its disposal one of the most highly developed tourist sectors in the world? Naturally, infrastructural buildings and the hotel trade at once spring to mind – but the construction of the mere hardware is no longer the be-all and end-all.

Media dramaturgy instead of architectural planning?

The Tyrol is one of the most exciting open-air laboratories for current architectural developments – not least because here current high technology has always linked up in an innovative way with the entertainment industry's latest ideas. The former developed from the situation and morphology of the mountainous countryside, a location that always required highly demanding techniques in this sometimes inhospitable environment. The latter resulted from the combination of great natural resources and a favourable site in the centre of Europe, a factor that soon ensured touristic development in the Alps. The beginning of the 21st century, however, witnessed a dramatic change in the traditional interpretation of architecture. Architects today have to face a great loss of influence in their shaping of the environment. Whereas until only recently it was hoteliers and politicians who entertained precise ideas of what they were ordering from the architects, this patriarchal situation has meanwhile fundamentally changed. In the 20th century the client had both the know-how and the necessary capital to manage his investment. The architect in turn knew how



Den Lebensmittelmärkten des Tiroler Familienunternehmens MPREIS, die seit Jahren durch ihr ambitioniertes Architekturprogramm große internationale Reputation erlangt haben, wurde in Sölden ein weiteres spektakuläres Objekt mit auskragender Terrasse hinzugefügt.

The family-owned MPREIS grocery stores have acquired an excellent international reputation with their ambitious architectural programme. Sölden is the site of a further spectacular object with projecting terrace. (Fotos: Egon Wurm, monrainer.com)





Einen ganz anderen Weg geht das heuer im Nachbarort Biberwier eröffnete „Cube“-Hotel, das vor allem sportliche aktive Urlauber anspricht. (© Eduard Hueber/archfoto)

The “Cube” Hotel in neighbouring Biberwier is very different, appealing primarily to active sports enthusiasts.

always require artistic interpretation and the individualism of an architect, even if today this is frequently denounced as inappropriate elitism.

Trade as a cultural achievement

One sphere of architecture in which construction and its qualities are measured even more in terms of quotas than in tourism is trade. Today, branches of chain stores can open and close overnight depending on how the turnover develops. Local mayors reflect on the social consequences of a lack of local shops, but the chain stores do not. In many remote valleys in the Tyrol this is an acute problem. But Austria’s only family-owned grocery stores have shown how to make a virtue of necessity. In recent years the MPREIS markets in the Tyrol have impressively shown that functioning grocery shops can also be developed at sites where turnover expectations would not seem to be so favourable. However, it re-

quires patience, conviction and long-term investments by a solid private company – something that no concern can “afford”. MPREIS has also shown that such markets can actually make a cultural statement – their ambitious architectural programme has meanwhile acquired an excellent international reputation and is synonymous with quality in the global architectural community. Together with Tyrolean and international architects, MPREIS develops new sites on the basis of various basic elements – open garages beneath the markets, integrated cafes as a meeting point – typical of the company. One of the latest examples is the site at Sölden in the Ötztal. With its glacier skiing area Sölden is an epicentre of the Austrian tourist industry. At the same time, it is located in one of the longest side valleys branching off from the Inn Valley and it features an extreme population situation with few local residents and numerous seasonal employees, migrant workers and, of course, guests. In this valley the open-

ing of the economy for investors from elsewhere practically constitutes a political problem in view of the traditional structure in the hands of a few clans. The initiative for Sölden MPREIS market thus came from the local mayor, not from the company itself. The availability of reasonable shopping facilities of quality for the local population – hitherto dependent on small, locally owned, high-priced shops – thus almost became a democratization project. Building land is at a premium in Tyrolean valleys and so even the mayor was only able to provide a practically undevelopable piece of land on a rock between the federal road and the gorge of the Ötztal Ache. The valley’s ambivalent sociology, the uncertain prospects and the high development costs of the site would doubtless have deterred any other chain from investing here – not so MPREIS. Together with architect Raimund Rainer, they built a spectacular object with terrace projecting over the ravine and serving as an extension of the café in-



Im Erdgeschoß der gebäudehohen Halle befindet sich die riesige Lounge mit Bars, Screens und Dancefloors. (© Eduard Hueber/archfoto)

On the ground floor of the high interior hall is a huge lounge with bars, screens and dance floors.

side. It was the aim of the architect to react to the site – in trade more the exception than the rule on account of the “distraction factor” – and to provide views of the valley and of the adjacent local emergency services’ building also built by him. A concrete wall displays openings in the form of lettering, indicating the altitude of the place. The project shows in an exemplary way that social, cultural and economic expectations of a trading site can all be fulfilled when clients and architects plan responsibly.

Wellness and Zeitgeist

Back to tourism which is responsible for a great proportion of building activities in the Tyrol. Two hotels in the Außerfern exemplify the different paths taken by this sector. They are oriented to very different target groups, each of which are approached by means of customized marketing concepts. The Life Resort Mohr in Lermoos makes use of its spectacular location opposite the dramatic faces of the Zugspitze in order to provide its mainly well situated urban guests with relaxation at the highest level. Extensive and luxurious wellness areas are just as much a part of this as is the lav-

ishly furnished terrace which provides a worthy setting for the Zugspitz panorama, the main local asset. Stylish materials and spacious room effects also feature throughout the lounges and individual rooms.

The “Cube” in Biberwier is a very different matter. It follows an architectural concept that directly implements a structured programme. Young people in search of sport and parties represent a considerable market segment in Tyrolean tourism, but five-star wellness temples hardly attract them. NOVARON, the Austro-Swiss planning office, thus developed the prototype for a simple atrium house with galleries opening on to spartanic rooms with a large lobby for storing snowboards

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or mountain bikes. This constructional simplicity does, however, have a sophisticated design feature: ramps form part of the arcaded walk around the central hall and provide a dynamic element, the rooms along the galleries are finished in opaque and coloured glass, the silhouettes of people and equipment thus being partially visible behind them, and the outer façade is finished in silvery shimmering plastic. This creates spacious images and provides new uses. An example of this is the huge lounge that takes up the entire ground floor zone in the interior hall. With bars, screens, removable furniture and dance floors, it is geared to total partying. This thoroughly successful new type of hotel was first built in the Carinthian Nassfeld and is now serially produced by Baumschlager & Eberle, the Vorarlberg planners.

Current Tyrolean architectural developments do show one thing: even in building sectors like tourism and trade that are extensively dominated by market research, communications design, media dramaturgy and marketing, creativity and individuality are still what count despite all uniform tendencies on account of supposed market needs. Innovation comes less from the indiscriminate satisfaction of desires and wishes and more from long-term, socially and ecologically responsible planning. Durability is one of the criteria of architecture as a cultural achievement – and in the Tyrol there are clients and architects who can honour this and who wish to do so.

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