Programme of habitat wishes
- a tool for communication -

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Introduction
How to develop an attractive built environment with the desired housing and well kept outdoor conditions? As long as experts do not ask laypeople for their needs and wants, we must not be surprised that people are not interested in their environment and show a lack of care. The contribution of (future) inhabitants in the planning process can have a material and a social impact on building, improving and maintaining a neighbourhood. One of the problems that have to be solved is the question how to improve the communication between non-professionals and professionals, between inhabitants and designers (architects). Inhabitants express themselves in a simple language about the number of rooms, cupboards, size of the garden and parking place. Architects communicate in drawings of designs and talk in a technical language about functions, forms, spatial structures, light and expression. It can be helpful - is the fundamental idea in Wageningen - to develop a shared language, to start talking about activities and use scale models in a structured process. The participation process is a sort of exploratory expedition. Good communication is a must for a successful participation process. A clear expression of the 'programme of habitat wishes' is the first step in the dialogue between inhabitants and architect. The Structural Space Planning Method is a structured process to develop a programme of habitat wishes for the built environment. It can be related to all sorts of objects: houses, co-housing projects, institutions, playgrounds, streets or neighbourhoods. Full scale and scale models are part of the Structural Space Planning Method, as described by Van Dam (these proceedings). My contribution describes some practical experiences with the development of the programme of habitat wishes and the effects on the participation process.

Tool in dialogue
A 'programme of habitat wishes' suggested to the architect what the consumers want and what they expect from the expert. But this presentation shows that it is even more: it is a tool in the dialogue. In most cases the (future) inhabitants are playing no part in the building process, they cannot influence their built environment. Others, such as the local government, the housing association or the proprietor/landlord are making decisions about what type of houses, number of rooms, playground and parking facilities...
et cetera there will be, without any knowledge of household activities and lifestyles.

A 'programme of habitat wishes' is not the same as a 'programme of demands', but can be a part of it. A 'programme of demands' or a 'bill of quantities' is a complete statement for the architect; it describes also the technical demands and financial limits.

What is essential for the development of a real dialogue?

All participants have to understand each other, need a language to express ourselves. Besides language we can use some other tools to help lay-people to develop their ideas about their habitat and to communicate with others about their needs and wants.

The first step is 'the inventory'. What we want to know from lay-people is more than a simple investigation through a questionnaire or checklist about how much rooms and what sort of facilities they want in a kitchen. We want a communication about their 'dreams' of their way of living and sphere of the habitat: formal/informal, closed/open, individual/communal, etcetera.

So we need methods to explore and discover their needs and wants.

From our research we discovered the importance of following elements in a dialogue of the habitat:

1. discovering - knowing what you want to discover
2. expressing - telling what you want
3. understanding - the right feeling for the intentions of the other
4. responding - reactions, answers, reflection and responds on intentions
5. evaluating - test and value of proposals, intentional and unintentional effects
6. discussing - discuss and discover the in-and-outs of the plan
7. improving - continuing the response and improvement of the plan
8. deciding - decision of the plan, written statements of the commitment.

A dialogue paying respect for these eight elements is a learning process for all participants. A dialogue, by definition, can not be a one-way form expression from the professionals to the non-professionals or vice versa. It is a two-way, reciprocal process.

The Structural Space Planning Method is developed - from the 50's onward - in the education practice in the Household and Consumer Studies. It gives students a framework to tackle different situations. It can be helpful in discussions about changing the built environment for instance, with nurseries and parents in a day care centre, or with elderly and handicapped people to change the shopping area, or with women to develop a new feminist view on the concept of 'the home is my castle'. The method is not a recipe nor a panacea, it is a way of structuring the process. It helps to analyze a concrete situation and to develop a programme for the process of intervention.

Two practical experiences

The two examples come from my own experiences with co-housing projects and people who want to develop a sort of community, to develop conditions for good contacts and possibilities for shared activities in their neighbourhood. The projects I was involved in were new building projects, one project was Co-housing of Elderly and the other a so-called Central Women (regular co-housing project).

Both projects are more or less typical Dutch phenomenon in (social) housing. For both types of projects there are national interest group organisations, which do promote the development of projects by future inhabitants. Participation is an essential part of the design and building process. The goals for these co-housing movements are the realisation of housing projects for groups of people with shared ideas, i.e., with private houses and communal rooms and facilities clustered around the private sphere. The aims are to enlarge the opportunities for social contact and mutual help.
The Co-housing of Elderly is restricted - by central government regulations - to people over 55 years of age. Regular Central information for the architect to make the first sketch.

Women groups are heterogeneous in age, but are also - as the elderly groups - characterised by different backgrounds as types of households, social-economic status, etcetera.

Co-housing of Elderly
Two students took the mission to develop a 'programme of habitat wishes' for a future habitat for a group of about forty elderly. The research and development time was restricted to three months. The students made a programme for six meetings and an excursion to an existing co-housing project for elderly.

Afterwards they wrote a report with the goals of the group, the social characteristics, some physical aspects of the planned houses (not in detail), the activities and demands for the planned common-spaces, the main conditions for the location, larger environmental aspects, management aspects and financial aspects.

It is not a detailed programme but a first step in a long process. It is developed as a tool for further negotiations with the local government and a social housing association in the area. It can also function as the basic

Centraal Wonen Wageningen
The initiative for this project was taken in 1979. After a year of preparation the future inhabitants had formulated a 'programme of habitat wishes', which was presented to the local government and a social housing association. The initiative group discussed and worked on the following subjects:

- the relation between independent life and communal life, a differentiation in forms of the building with more or less private facilities,
- the size of the group in relation to the size and sort of communal facilities (meeting places, children's rooms, workshops, garden rooms for guests and temporary housing),
- the realisation to the environment with a more or less open community, reflected in the location and design of the building complex.

Work was done with scale models of the houses and the project as a whole. The ten main elements were described in a four pages 'programme of habitat wishes'. The programme was accepted by the housing association and worked out as a commitment for all participants in a building team.
including a delegation of the future inhabitants.

The programme and the experiences with building on scale were very useful in the process of selecting a location. The group participated in a local-organized participation process for a large area. Within this area a plot had to be selected with the best perspectives for the further development of the project. The group got only one week for consultation and decision. The 'programme of habitat wishes' was a useful framework for the selection and weighing the priority of criteria. This resulted in a first and second priority list. The next step was a negotiation about the size of the plot. The group succeeded in the realization of the first priority and the enlargement of the area to a adequate size, that is to say a size they all agreed on.

During the planning process the full-scale model was used to discuss two alternatives for the communal rooms (meeting room, kitchen and children's room). The disagreement about the size and form of the meeting room could be solved after the building had been evaluated in the sim-lab. In 1985 Centraal Wonen Wageningen opened their doors of 43 dwellings and a communal 'project house'.

Conclusions

The evaluation of the practical experiences has to be placed in the context of co-housing. The social and spatial conditions are both of great importance. A well-developed programme of habitat wishes shows the following functions in the dialogue:

- the first step of acquaintance is that people who are strangers for each other get a framework for discussion and discover each other;
- the discussions and the decision process contribute in the formation of a group-identity;
- with a realistic set of limitations (for example a number of square meters to be divided between private and common activities) the programme enables the participants to work on expressing a personal perspective, it prevents a group from permanent 'habitat in dreams';
- it functions a framework for integration of new people in a group, it is a guideline for newcomers and it prevents a group for a permanent discussion about unclearly made decisions;
- it is a way of getting a commitment between all participants who decided for their contribution of realisation of the project (co-housing group, architect, housing company, local government, financier);
- a framework for making decision under time-pressure;
- a framework for a delegation of inhabitants to participate in the building-team;
- a framework that sets priorities, important in the financial struggle, the economy;
- a tool for groups to be successful in a participation process, to explore and to express their needs and wants, the activities and relationships, the spatial consequences.

A point of special attention is the presentation of two and three dimensional model. The results of the Structural Space Planning Methods are made by (future) inhabitants to express their habitat wishes, it's not a concept plan or design. This can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. In particular, some of the solutions in the scale-models give inadequate presentations of wishes and bad or inefficient spatial solutions. The architect always needs a verbal explanation of the models. With a good understanding of the programme the architect will be able to find much better spatial solutions for the intentions of the inhabitants than the structural models suggested.
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