This paper has been written in addition to the previous reflection paper and does not discuss the previous context.

Problem: Families vs. Amsterdam and unsuitable family dwellings

Amsterdam needs families! Families are an important factor in city life for economic and social reasons. By living in the city and making use of the city, families contribute to the economics of the city and its liveliness. Families need Amsterdam as well! The city is attractive to families as Amsterdam offers social networks, facilities, schools and work close by.

Families and Amsterdam would create a perfect symbiosis, one could say. However, Amsterdam lacks suitable family dwellings. This has two consequences. One group of families is leaving Amsterdam. The other group stays in the city, but is living in unsuitable dwellings. This group consists of mainly Amsterdam people with a migration background, especially people with Turkish and Moroccan roots. They prefer staying in the city but are stuck in unsuitable dwellings because of their economic position.

Topic and target group: Compact family apartments for city families

Therefore, I decided to design suitable compact family apartments for city families. Who are these city families? The common factor is that these people prefer living in the city because of its attractiveness. A large part of these families has a migration background. Therefore, building suitable family apartments does not only mean affordable and spacious. It needs to take into account the different dwelling preferences as well. Having a migration background has an influence on the dwelling preferences. These preferences have been researched by TheSmartAgentCompany. The most important preferences, that influence the dwelling layout and are overlapping, are: a separation between public and private space, either a big living kitchen or big living room and an extra bedroom for taking care of grandmother or grandfather(*). But, if every preference would be fulfilled, the dwelling will exceed 100 m2 and not be compact and affordable anymore. Moreover, building for a specific group is not manageable as it is expensive. As is common in Dutch housing the building needs standardization.

* For a comparison of the living preferences of the different target groups (families with Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan, Surinam and Antillean roots), see the Matrix Living Preferences in the appendix of my previous reflection.

Solution: generic vs. exceptions

The first solution is a standard compact dwelling unit, that can be used in a flexible way. The unit responds to three kinds of flexibility, according to different wishes during the day (1 - polyvalent), over time (2 - adjustable) and among different families (3 - generic vs. specific). The design solution is generic, but can be made more specific in use. Flexibility is stimulated by the separation of the public and private area by a buffer zone and sliding doors. The living area is quite small (2 x 13 m2), but can be expanded by opening the sliding doors and making use of the buffer zone (15 m2). This buffer zone offers polyvalence / multiple use by its size and position in the middle of the dwelling: it is a hallway, a place to invite, an extension of the living area, a playing area, a work area and a party area. By this solution a compact, affordable and flexible dwelling unit has been created. (A)
The second solution is the arrangement of the dwelling units. Two units are combined by a polyvalent buffer zone. This zone has multiple functions: it does not only offer the entrance to the dwellings, but it offers the emergency exit, an extra bedroom and an outdoor room as well. Firstly, it is the entrance to the dwellings. The dwellings have their entrance in the middle, because of the separation of public and private in the dwelling, the need for daylight in both zones and the buffer zone in the middle. Secondly, the entrance zone offers emergency staircases where needed. Thirdly, this entrance zone offers an extra bedroom for one of the two dwellings. This room can be used for taking care of the grandparents or as work space or extra bedroom. This extra room gives more flexibility (polyvalent) in use to the dwellings. Fourthly, this zone offers an outdoor room along the gallery. This is a more sheltered outdoor area for playing or having a seat. Different combinations of these functions have been used in the design. The standard units in combination with the buffer zone form a system. The system is applied on the location and together they form the building ensemble. This system uses as much repetition as possible for generalisation to make the project affordable. (B)

The third solution is the collective space. Building more compact dwellings implies less private space. As a consequence the demand for more collective - outdoor - space becomes bigger. The outdoor space of the dwellings is combined with a gallery, which is orientated towards the sun. Doors can be opened which connect the outdoor gallery to the living area. The combination of a gallery and outdoor space stimulates contact between the residents. Through the gallery the dwellings are reachable by elevator as well. (C)

The fourth solution is the courtyard building. The courtyard building offers immediately a collective space in the middle. The composition of the dwelling units on the site forms a u-shaped courtyard building with a raised deck. The parking garage is located under the deck with a collective court yard on top. This is the place for urban farming, gardening, dining, playing, enjoying the sun. The grown produce can be used in the public neighbourhood building. This building is a daycare for the neighbourhood during the day and a centre for public activities during the evenings and weekends. This is the place where celebrations and memorials, which are important for families with different backgrounds, can take place. (D)

Architectural appearance in the city

In the way I treat my façade I use a combination of views/attitudes/concepts from both Modernism and Postmodernism. The façade openings have been designed in a modernistic or functional manner. They are as big as possible in order to ensure optimum daylight, especially with the galleries above. They can be opened for controlled natural ventilation and extension of the living space. The material is used in an optimal way for reducing building material by the application of ‘steenstrips’ and tiles.

However, the appearance of the building is designed in a more postmodern manner. The building needs to position itself in the Amsterdam context. The topic is decoration/ornamentation and relates to both the Art Nouveau and Art Deco history of Amsterdam and Moroccan and Turkish architecture. (E)

Group vs. individual

Stereotyping and placing in groups are delicate acts. This design tries to seek the balance between group thinking and considering the individual. The design tries to offer choices and flexibility to change the dwelling according to one’s needs. There is always a limit to this.
This design tries to deal with living preferences of people with a Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish, Surinam and Antillean background by making a standard dwelling that is flexible in use (with a public, buffer and private zone and sliding doors). Firstly, it does not consider the preferences of people with other backgrounds. Secondly, the design does not deal with all the specific wishes (*) of the target groups. These are either specific wishes that can be dealt with by residents themselves - ‘voetenbad’. Or wishes that are not practical, such as not placing the kitchen and toilet next to each other because of hygienic reasons. Therefore, I took into account the most important and overlapping preferences, that have the biggest influence on the layout of the dwelling. Within this layout the resident can change the dwelling according to his/her needs.

* previous reflection – matrix living preferences

The broader context

Building family dwellings is a topical subject. There is a new trend that families prefer staying in the city when children are born and grow up. Because of the newness of this development cities do not have many suitable family dwellings to offer yet. However, there are a lot of buildings being built at the moment. The buildings that I have come across are mainly buildings with maisonnette dwellings. Probably, because maisonnettes offer both a natural separation between public (lower floor) and private (upper floor) and more space. The amount of newly built compact family apartments, that I have come across, seems minimal. However, Punt-Komma (1988) by Alvaro Siza still forms a good example.

Future

If the demand for dwelling changes in the future, the building can be adapted. The first solution is splitting up the dwelling. Each dwelling can be split up into two smaller apartments for a single or a couple, because of the two shafts. The dwellings would measure 3.6 m wide by 9.9 long, which would add up to 35 m². The second solution is using the in-between-zone as smaller apartments of 35 m². As a consequence all dwellings would be entered via the gallery. Emergency exits would need to be placed outside. The third and easiest solution is to change the layout of the dwellings themselves. The load bearing walls give the freedom to design the layout as preferred. These changes take place within the same system, but the stability of the building should be guaranteed. (F)

Conclusion

The standard dwelling unit forms a ‘building stone/ingredient’ that can be applied to multiple cases. The system of units can be used on several sites in different orientations, in multiple cities that need compact family apartments. The composition in the context and the architectural appearance make the building ‘verankerd’/fit for its specific location. The context offers the limit into which the unit can be repeated horizontally. The context and height limits determine the limit of vertical repetition. The building would need side entrances with either staircases or a gallery. If the dwelling units are entered by porticoes and no gallery is used, it is necessary to place balconies in front of the dwellings as outdoor space. Either the maximum height would be four storeys or every portico would need an elevator. The dwellings cannot be entered by just a gallery. Using just a gallery implies the turn of the dwelling unit by 90 degrees. The consequence is that the private (sleeping) zone can only have two bedrooms. Moreover, this would create less dwellings along the gallery. These are the reasons why I have chosen for the solution with a combination of porticoes and gallery plus three bedrooms. (G)
6 rooms dwelling
- total: 74.7 m²
- room 1: bedroom/kitchen: 11.4 m²
- room 2: bedroom: 7.4 m²
- room 3: bedroom: 8.6 m²
- room 4: polyvalent hallway: 14.8 m²
- room 5: kitchen/living room/bedroom: 12.9 m²
- room 6: living room/kitchen/bedroom: 12.9 m²
- bathroom: 4.1 m²
- toilet: 1.1 m²