

generare un grande benessere. E dopo esserci tanto divertiti a dare un aspetto attraente alle cose, abbiamo fatto di ciò una priorità per noi. Non volevamo più essere costretti a guardare da un'altra parte se, viaggiando attraverso il paese, ci capitava di incontrare una nuova costruzione, ma volevamo anzi poterla apprezzare. Oggi in Tirolo abbiamo 130 filiali. Ma prima che il pubblico arrivi a riconoscere il tuo impegno in campo architettonico ci vuole molto tempo. Se noi ad esempio costruiamo un supermercato a Ötz o a Fieberbrunn, poi lo vede soprattutto la gente che è di casa in quei luoghi. Ma a un certo punto anche tra gli architetti e negli uffici della regione è risultato evidente che MPREIS ha sviluppato su tutto il territorio questo tipo di architettura e così nel 1999 per il progetto del supermercato di Lienz, costruito assieme all'Arch. Pöschl, abbiamo ricevuto il premio di architettura moderna della regione Tirolo. Abbiamo semplicemente capito che la buona architettura è qualcosa di speciale anche per la gente semplice e che rappresenta una possibilità di identificazione: "il supermercato non è un negozio anonimo, ma il mio MPREIS, dove vado volentieri". Abbiamo sentito spesso molte persone dire: "il mio MPREIS è quello in via Fischerhäuslweg, anche se io abito da tutt'altra parte".

Un nuovo, moderno supermercato come questo valorizza i prodotti in vendita, ma valorizza anche i collaboratori che poi lo moltiplicheranno ancora, e in tale senso si può dire che il progetto complessivo ha avuto successo. Non posso quindi affermare che ha avuto successo l'architettura in genere ma il nostro progetto sì. Noi siamo interconnessi molto strettamente con l'economica regionale, siamo uno dei più grandi acquirenti della Tirol Milch, dunque abbiamo il carattere regionale da un lato e dall'altro lato abbiamo il prezzo, che rimane sempre un fattore assolutamente fondamentale. Siamo uno dei maggiori e più economici rivenditori di articoli misti di tutta l'Austria. Perciò bisogna far quadrare tutti i fattori, la qualificazione del personale come l'assortimento, il prezzo, l'inserimento nella regione ed infine anche la qualità architettonica. Poiché costruiamo in molte località anche di grande importanza, come ad esempio all'ingresso o all'uscita di un paese, e quindi contribuiamo in modo decisivo a determinare la loro immagine, è particolarmente importante la qualità dell'architettura che si va a realizzare.

CMF: C'è stata per qualche progetto un'opposizione da parte della popolazione o del comune, del genere: "una cosa così orribile non la vogliamo"?

HJM: All'inizio ci sono state molte discussioni di questo genere e questo io l'ho preso sempre, a dire il vero, come un complimento, perché quando si apre un supermercato normale, nessuno discute dell'architettura, ma delle offerte speciali nella fase inaugurale o della gentilezza o meno del personale e così via. Ma che in tutto il paese si discutesse ai tavolini del bar dell'architettura di un supermercato di alimentari non era mai successo prima. Non abbiamo mai affisso alcun tabellone di cantiere, eppure la gente ha telefonato per chiedere ad esempio: "costruite voi a Silz?". Sta sorgendo qualcosa, potrebbe trattarsi di MPREIS.

Qualche sindaco, mi viene in mente ad esempio il caso di Pfunds, ha detto: "se voi mi costruite qui una specie di stalla, allora io ci mando dentro le bestie". Poi lo stesso sindaco si è complimentato con noi perché l'architettura era in ordine e tutti erano contenti. Oppure il caso di Weißenbach: lì c'è un supermercato coperto da un telo di plastica nera; all'inaugurazione erano presenti altri sindaci che hanno chiesto al sindaco, notoriamente "rosso", come mai avesse lasciato costruire un edificio "nero". O il caso del supermercato Köberl-Markt a Wenns con le sue finestre irregolari, che è stato chiamato la "casa di Fred Feuerstein". O il caso del supermercato di Mayrhofen che, al contrario, ha delle finestre così piccole che in paese l'hanno chiamato l'"alveare". O ancora a Reith im Alpbachtal dove è sorta una vera e propria iniziativa popolare contro questa architettura moderna.

Ma oggi devo dire che la situazione è radicalmente cambiata. Quando ora arriviamo da qualche parte sono gli stessi sindaci che dicono: "se proprio deve esserci un supermercato, allora vogliamo avere un MPREIS". E poi sono addirittura orgogliosi se a casa loro hanno un supermercato che magari vince persino un premio. L'atmosfera è decisamente mutata ed ora può definirsi addirittura positiva.

CMF: Il suo personale interesse per l'arte e l'architettura c'era già prima o si è dischiuso qualcosa di nuovo per lei?

HJM: In sé e per sé, l'interesse per l'arte c'era già da sempre. Mio fratello Franz è pittore e come vede ci sono diversi suoi quadri qui negli uffici. Devo dire che tutto è iniziato nel modo semplice che le ho descritto. Poi si sono sviluppate capacità che prima non conoscevo. E quando ci si trova di fronte a determinati impegni concreti, come ad esempio gli incontri con gli architetti, si scopre improvvisamente la capacità di vedere certe cose e di riuscire a partecipare all'attività creativa. Così nasce qual-

cosa per cui si può dire: "dunque ho delle qualità, posso anch'io esprimere delle cose e sono accettato dagli architetti come interlocutore nel loro campo". Non si tratta quindi più di cosa fa l'architetto o di cosa facciamo noi, ma esiste una discussione comune e il risultato che ne viene fuori è il prodotto finale.

CMF: Grazie per l'interessante conversazione, Sig. Mölk.

Hansjörg Mölk, MPREIS
in conversation with Christoph Mayr Fingerle

CMF: Mr Mölk, what is your personal philosophy and what is behind your decision to bestow a special architectural treatment upon the anonymous supermarket box that used to exist — and which still does exist in fact? Is there a company strategy for this?

HJM: There isn't always a strategy. As a company, we have to make decisions based on gut instinct too. If it transpires in retrospect that this was a good decision, then it becomes a strategy. As a result, others see a good strategy too. We happen to be a third- or fourth-generation family business. After the First World War, our grandmother, Therese Mölk, began to deal in all sorts of things with her husband, as was the way after the war. Over time, the focus shifted to groceries. Around this time, they acquired the military baker's in Dreiheligenstraße in Innsbruck. And thus a second pillar to their business came about with bread production and, over the next few years, 30 branches were opened with the help of their children. This was extraordinary for the grocery industry at that time was structured on an individual basis. The shops were nearly always individual businesses, only Meini and the Konsumverein had branches.

In 1974, we, the third generation, the grandsons, began to restructure the business because all the shops, with just 30–80 m² of sales area, were relatively small and no longer viable when the discount shops and shopping centres came along. Here, price played the larger role. We asked ourselves how we could survive in the market and realised that we must be cheaper than the others. With the price, we chose the instrument that would work the fastest. We then renamed the business MPREIS. The M can be regarded as standing for Mölk and the PREIS (price) part of the name stands for the fact that from then on price was the number one consideration.

For a while, we operated old and new supermarkets in parallel since we could not close and change all supermarkets at the same time

otherwise we would have had no turnover. So we opened new supermarkets and gradually closed the small ones. There are six partners in the company with Anton Mölk and I being the directors. We both took all the responsibility at the beginning and the others have gradually come on board. Herbert Mölk made a very significant contribution with the founding of "Baguette". In setting up these bakery cafés, we are no longer purely supermarkets and, here and there, they replace the former village café that in many places no longer exists.

Together with the architect Planatscher, with whom we were already associated, we had to tackle a larger construction in Volders village centre. It was not only a question of building a supermarket, the community had given a minimum cubature — a task for which the architect found a good solution. So we built another supermarket with him and one supermarket after the other was positively developed in collaboration. And so this process came about to act differently from usual and in such a way that we, too, had pleasure in its form. And once all the partners have been involved in this process, something of this nature can be planned for the long term in a family business. Ultimately, a lot more was added to the original concept of price which, at the beginning, was the only element. Employees' qualifications were promoted, the range of products grew and then, inevitably, the quality of the interior was improved since you cannot say that the range of products has no effect on the interior. As already mentioned, it was a process. One architect alone was soon no longer in a position to manage all projects so the architect Pöschl was brought on board. This was followed by talks with architects Reitter, Pendl and many others. It was a long process that started at the beginning of the eighties and then self-seeded as it were. Each architect strove even harder than the previous one and a competition came about. We have worked with around 30 architects to date.

Another step was making contact with the architect Dominique Perrault after he had won the Innsbruck Town Hall competition. He was immediately prepared to work for us as well and was impressed by the MPREIS concept because collaboration between relatively small supermarkets and architects does not exist in France. He built the first supermarket in Wattens for us and later, another two supermarkets.

CMF: How do you choose your architect? Was it just chance or were there other criteria?

HJM: The architect Planatscher was the first but then it was also a matter of luck. At the

time, the building of a supermarket was unappealing for established architects. The image of supermarkets as simple, functional constructions was firmly fixed not only in the minds of the population but in those of the architects, too. Boxes that could simply be placed anywhere without any requirement for quality or even a need for spatial qualities. So then we came across the second generation, the younger architects. There was a certain amount of luck here, too. We converted a supermarket in Fischerstraße in Innsbruck with the architect Planatscher.

It just so happened that the architect Pöschl built an integrative kindergarten in the same building so we came into contact with him. The very first talk with him was interesting because he immediately asked himself how transforming a grocery shop into a new supermarket could be achieved. It was a talk about logistics and possible procedures within the context of a grocery shop and the recognition of the fact that the outer shell and inner function should not be considered as separate entities. A supermarket is one of the most visited public places, and one in which nearly everybody spends a not inconsiderable amount of time. It is a communicative place in which all strata of the population come together. The former "Greisler" was the place where people came to exchange news, the place where communication took place. The supermarket was however no longer a central meeting place but was opened somewhere remote, on the edge of town. And with self service, the communicative moment has ultimately been considerably reduced. By setting aside a special spot for "Baguettes" within the supermarkets, we have tried to revive this old function. These bakery cafés represent new communicative places.

The choice of architects was never made through competitions. Twenty years ago, the severest critics of architects were always the architects themselves. We achieved a successful collaboration with the introduction of a second level. A group of architects came about that always passed on its knowledge whenever a new architect joined them. Pöschl explained to Pendl the logistics of what happens in a supermarket, how important, for example, the length of shelves is, how many spaces are needed in the car park, what size the cool stores have to be or which goods are delivered with which means of transport and so on. It was a group of young architects who collectively worked for MPREIS. Good feeling was generated as well as a certain pride. It was an exciting process.

CMF: The decision to invest in architecture has clearly paid off for your company. Are there budget limitations for the planning of a new supermarket and what effect does this investment in architecture have on the MPREIS company as a whole?

HJM: The economic aspect was not there at the beginning because we have not built any luxury constructions. People seem to think that good architecture must be expensive. Of course it has its price. In particular, a certain ceiling height naturally costs more. But that is actually the only luxury that we allow ourselves. If I make a ceiling higher so that more space results, I produce a certain transparency and openness in the supermarkets that is of particular significance from the inside out. In the first instance, it is the architect who is responsible for clarifying the question: "How does the supermarket function at the place in question?" This is contingent on the car park, the entrance, the delivery area, distances to boundaries and the direction of the sun. With food, you have to be careful not to let in too much sunlight or warmth. Every supermarket and every location is new and so neither the customers nor we know how the next supermarket will look. We have no specific design. Everything develops individually at the location in question. There are certain cost guidelines as to how much a square metre of usable floor space may cost. This value determines the cost of construction.

And whether that works for the customer? I believe, in general, that the influence of aesthetic sensation on the state of mind is severely underestimated. There are many studies on the subject of noise, but there are very few studies on how we react to what we take in visually from our surroundings. I am certain that things perceived by the eye can depress just as much as they can create huge feelings of well-being. And although we had a great deal of fun creating visually attractive things, for us it was also a priority. We no longer wanted to look away when driving through the countryside and coming across new buildings but wanted to be able to stop and stare. We now have 130 branches in the Tyrol. But it takes a very long time for the public to realize that one becomes architecturally committed. When, for example, we build a supermarket in Ötz or Fieberbrunn, then the people who see it mainly are those who live in these places. But now and again, it gets through to the architects and the Land that MPREIS creates this sort of architecture throughout the country and so, in 1999, we were awarded the Tyrol prize for modern construction for the

supermarket in Lienz that we built in conjunction with the architect Pöschl. We simply felt that good architecture is something special even for simple people and thus gives rise to possibilities of identification. The ideal scenario would be that that is not an anonymous shop, but that that is my MPREIS, the one I go to. We have already heard from many people who say my MPREIS is the one on Fischerhäuslweg even though they live somewhere completely different.

A new, modern supermarket of this type enhances the goods; it enhances the employees who then multiply this to the extent that one can say that the overall concept bears fruit in the economic sense of the word. I can't say that the architecture bears fruit but that the overall concept bears fruit. We are very closely linked with the local economy; we are one of the largest purchasers of milk in the Tyrol so we have regionality on the one hand and we have the price which, as ever, is a highly significant factor. We are one of the largest and cheapest full-line distributors in the whole of Austria. All factors must work therefore. Employee qualifications as well as product range, price, integration in the area and, of course, also the quality of construction. Since we build in many very prominent places such as the edges of a village, and thus contribute significantly to the image of the village, the quality of architecture that emerges there is particularly important.

CMF: Have certain projects given rise to objections among the population or community along the lines of "We don't want anything that awful"?

HJM: At the beginning there were many such discussions and I always saw it as a compliment, for when a normal supermarket opens, no-one discusses the architecture but they talk about the opening offers or whether the staff are friendly and so on. But a whole village discussing the architecture of a supermarket down at the pub was something totally new. We didn't even erect a building board but people phoned nonetheless and asked for example, are you building in Silz? Something's happening there; it could be an MPREIS.

Many a mayor, I'm thinking of the one in Pfunds, has said: if you build anything like a barn then I will drive animals in. In retrospect, he gave me a compliment then that the architecture would suit and everybody would be happy. Or in Weißenbach: there was a black sheet over the building at the opening and mayors from other towns asked the town mayor whether, as the "red" mayor, he had allowed

a "black" building to be built. (Red = colour of the social democrats; black = colour of the conservatives; a "Schwarzbau" is also an illegal building). Or the Köberl supermarket in Wenns with its irregular windows which was named the "Fred Flintstone house". Or the supermarket in Mayrhofen which has such small windows that it is known locally as the "bee hive". Or in Reith in the Alpbach valley there was a whole village movement against this modern architecture.

Now, however, I must say the situation has basically changed. Whenever we go anywhere now, the town mayors say, if we have to have a supermarket, then we want an MPREIS. And they are even proud when they have a supermarket in their town, especially if it wins a prize. The mood has changed and has now become positive.

CMF: Your personal interest in art and architecture, was that already there or has this opened up something new for you?

HJM: Art was already there. My brother Franz is a painter and, as you see, there are a great many of his paintings in these offices. I must say, it has just grown in the way I have described to you. Abilities have come about afterwards that you were not previously aware of. And when tasks come up during that collaboration, such as meetings with architects, you suddenly discover abilities in yourself, the abilities to see, to discover certain things and simply to help give form to something. Then something comes into being, and you can contribute something and are accepted as someone with whom the architect can have a dialogue. It is not about what the architect does or what we do, but there is a general discussion and from that the end product arises.

CMF: Thank you for talking to me, Mr Mölk.