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## **Re-inventing Città Ideale**

*Designing Urban Experiences in Almere*

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## **Re-inventing *Città Ideale* Designing urban experiences in Almere**

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### **Abstract**

Urban designers are faced with the challenge of having to create very long lasting sites for urban life. Traditional aspects of urban planning encompass infrastructure, environmental factors and aesthetics. But urban design increasingly also has to aim at generating urban experiences for an unforeseeable future and for a highly diverse public of visitors and residents. This paper claims that insight into the psychological structure of experiencing may serve as a helpful guideline for design practices aiming at the experiential qualities of urban life. By distinguishing 4 different levels of experiencing (a physiological, an emotional, a conceptual and a reflexive level) different aspects of the urban experience can be identified, thus enabling the designer to define which physical properties of the urban planning can be utilized to promote such experiential qualities.

To illustrate how this model may contribute to urban design the planning of a new city centre in Almere (the Netherlands) is analyzed. Almere is a relatively new city situated east of Amsterdam. It was founded 30 years ago and was meticulously planned to become a *Città Ideale* for a middle-class of new suburbanites. It currently has 184.000 inhabitants. The ambition is that Almere will grow into one of the five largest cities in the Netherlands over the next 30 years. Creating not only attractive housing and good leisure facilities but also sites for genuine urban experiences has become paramount for the future development of Almere. Hence, the famous Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas (OMA) was employed to design a new city centre. Our paper will analyze how and to which degree this design is catering for urban experiences and thus contributes to the municipality's re-invention of Almere as a contemporary *Città Ideale*.

**Keywords:** Urbanity, urban design, experience design, the structure of experiencing, Almere, Rem Koolhaas.

### **Designing experiences in urban space**

Experience design is the practice of planning, crafting and implementing products as well as processes that enhance or support individuals' subjective experiences in interacting with objects or other people. In our understanding of the goals and scope of experience design, we argue that experiences are not the simple outcome (an effect) of design (a cause). Design may facilitate experiencing and may even alter the quality and direction of experiencing but the experience itself stems from the individual's relationship with the world on a specific moment in time. Experiences are situational, and hence depending on an array of factors other than just design – e.g. mood, more stable psychological predispositions in the individual, time and opportunity, ideational and/or discursive formations etc. Furthermore, experiences are individual: My experiences of a given situation are very likely to differ from yours, because my experience is what I sense and feel, when exposed to a product or a service (process), how I value it and what it means to me either right now, in relation to my past or to my future goals. In other words, experiences are generated by what I do as an organism *and* as a competent agent in regard to a specific input, which in its turn may be the result of design.

Experiences presuppose the active participation of the individual, who is actually experiencing. In order to make this participation comprehensible for design practice, we will present a model of the structure of experiencing that we have elaborated elsewhere (Jantzen and Vetner 2007a, 2007b, Vetner and Jantzen 2007).

This model is psychological, because experiencing is a psychological phenomenon. We hence agree with the definition of subjective product experience, given by Hekkert and Schifferstein 2008: 2) as “the awareness of the psychological effects elicited by the interaction with a product, including the degree to which all our senses are stimulated, the meanings and values we attach to the product, and the feelings and emotions that are elicited”. In adhering to this definition we reject the one given by some of the proponents of “the experience economy” as the new era in marketing (e.g. Pine and Gilmore 1998, Schmitt 1999). For these marketers, experiences denote uniquely meaningful life events of considerable emotional and cognitive intensity, or simply put “peak experiences” of almost ecstatic character (cf. Maslow 1970). To us, on the other hand, experiences denote a much broader array of everyday sensations, emotions and cognitions, including those facilitated by the quite mundane use of ordinary goods and the social interactions with others. Experiencing is not bound to unique events, but a consequence of having sensations and being emotionally and cognitively involved, which is part and parcel of everyday life. Behaviour is intrinsically experiential: i.e. sensitive, emotional and cognitive (cf. LeDoux 1996). This goes for *all* behaviour, also for consumer preferences and decisions in the market place (Hansen and Christensen 2007, Zaltman 2003).

Experience design is hence a practice of generating products and processes, which facilitate psychological responses or are based on psychological motives of a universal character. But this, however, does not imply that the practice of design is and always has been inherently experiential. On the contrary, until the 1970es design was predominantly preoccupied with enhancing the functionality of products, focusing on how goods could do their job as efficiently as possible. The coming of “usability” meant a paradigmatic shift towards focusing on the specifications of the user, who had to manage the good in order to get the job done (Norman 1988). Physiological and psychological limitations and capabilities – i.e. “human factors” – might constrain or support the use of design, thus making the products more or less usable. With the coming of the emotional paradigm in human factors the tide shifted in the late 1990es towards “pleasurability”, focusing on why users might actually enjoy managing the good (Jordan 2000, Norman 2004). Experience design is thus preoccupied with pleasurability: how everyday products may anticipate or ignite the hopes, fears, dreams, longings and sensations of ordinary users.

It is our intention to apply the principles of experience design to the analysis of urban design. By our knowledge, this has not been done previously. Urban space is no doubt a special case compared to the world of ordinary objects in that cities are not reproducible. Even though the planning follows standard procedures and despite most or all of the components used in building urban landscapes being serially produced, the sum of these elements – a city or a precinct – are as a rule unique. But what is not unique, are the sensations and emotions evoked in the city’s users: its residents and visitors. They may be special for each individual, but they are qualitatively similar to the responses evoked by other objects, that in this respect may substitute cities as a source of experiencing. Therefore the psychology of experiencing is highly relevant for planning and (re-)building cityscapes as well. It is this issue we want to address in our paper.

Four additional features have fuelled our interest for urban design. Firstly, the built environment is not easily disposable. People have to live in and with their urban setting for a very considerable amount of time. Secondly, citizens are rarely mere victims or consumers of the built environment. People contribute to the history of space, turning it into a place, ideally *their* place, thus illustrating how agency is paramount to having relevant and interesting experiences. Thirdly, this everyday practice of appropriating the built environment and

transforming it from abstract space to one's own place may bring about a special atmosphere, typical for precisely this place. People inhabiting the place help fostering *genius loci*, making the place attractive to others – e.g. visitors – too. Fourthly, apart from gated communities urban space is accessible to the general public and not restricted to a well-defined target group. Designing urban space differs in this respect considerably from designing ordinary consumer goods, which often are much more targeted towards a specific segment.

This highlights an essential problem in urban design: how to build environments that may appeal to quite different needs, longings and purposes? We will attempt to tackle this intricacy by introducing psychographics in experience design. Psychographics asserts that people are motivated for particular sensations, emotions and actions by individual differences, constituting relatively stable personality traits and thus predicting, how different groups will react to or seek out particular aesthetic stimuli (cf. Jantzen and Vetner 2008b, 2009). Such insights may help designers in planning a versatile environment, appealing to various tastes and preferences.

Our example is a case from the Netherlands, which has a long tradition for “total urban design”, where cities or precincts have been built by a unit, holding total development and design control of infrastructure as well as buildings (Lang 2005). This tradition was initiated in the early 1920es with the design by Hendrik Berlage of the internationally renowned *Plan Zuid* in Amsterdam (cf. Jantzen 2006), and was institutionalized in the subsequent extensions of Amsterdam by Cornelis van Eesteren since the early 1930es. For more than three decades a functionalist approach reigned Dutch urban planning, keen on finding an efficient solution to a practical problem: how to store an ever increasing urban population? This paradigm reached its apotheosis in the 1960es in the planning of *Bijlmer*, criticized as being a wasteland of high-rise apartment buildings in the eastern outskirts of Amsterdam. As a direct result of this project, planning of new urban settlements in the late 1960es started to stress the importance of taking the human aspect into consideration. Neighbourhoods should be built to match the inclinations of its inhabitants: its actual user. This shift is comparable to the coming of the “usability”-paradigm in product design. The physical and cognitive make up of residents became the measure of how to build, resulting in low-rise housing. New projects for city or precinct development since the late 1990es are comparable to the “pleasurability”-movement: e.g. Leidsche Rijn in Utrecht, Roombeek in Enschede or Zuidas in Amsterdam (Jantzen and Vetner 2008a). Now the necessity to build affective environments – i.e. physiologically arousing as well as emotionally gratifying – has been emphasized as crucial for future urban development, thereby setting an agenda for experiential qualities in urban design.

The planning of the city of Almere in the early 1970es had the explicit goal of building a series of settlements matching the “real” needs and wants of residents, thus realizing the renaissance dream of constructing a *Città Ideale*. In 1994 though, the city council opted for a new and truly urban city centre, thus appealing to other experiential preferences than those hitherto prevailing. Our paper discusses whether this re-invention of *Città Ideale* caters for a totally new group of resident (urbanites) or rather adds urban flavour to suburban existence.

### **Almere, the *New Towns*' capital of the world**

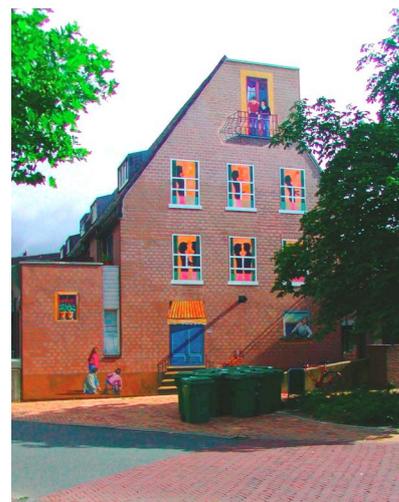
In a newspaper poll in February 2008, 2900 Dutch readers nominated the city of Almere as the ugliest place in the Netherlands (Heijmans 2008). A close runner up was Nieuwegein, south of Utrecht, which like Almere is a *New Town* established in the 1970es. The rest of the top 5 was made up of cities, which had developed during the industrial boom in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Den Helder, Heerlen and Eindhoven. A common feature of the nominees is, that they are known to the Dutch public but rarely visited by people not living or working there. Their negative public image is thus in all probability largely based on hear-say, stereotypes and prejudices, and not so much on facts.

This might hold especially true for Almere. Actually, in 2006 a report showed that 45% of its inhabitants were not only satisfied with but also proud of their city – an increase from 35% in 2002 (Wagendorp 2008). The steady growth of the city during the last 30 years, and the fact that only relatively few settlers leave Almere on a later stage in life bears witness of a widespread satisfaction amongst its population.

In November 1976 the first 200 residents moved in to their newly built homes in Almere. The city is located approximately 25 km east of Amsterdam on the dammed up area, Flevoland. Flevoland is part of a large-scale land reclaim project, poldering the IJsselmeer initiated early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The planning and developing of Almere was a direct consequence of a rapidly increasing population following the Second World War, the need for inner-city renovation in the larger Dutch cities, and the consumer demand for (ever) more spacious housing since the 1960es. As such, Almere was built as a means of re-housing citizens from especially Amsterdam and Utrecht.

In contrast to the old cities Almere offered more attractive family housing, green surroundings (parks, wide lanes, sports facilities etc.), new schools, and a more efficient and safe infrastructure, with separate roads for public transportation, cars, bikes and pedestrians. The key inspiration to developing this new city was the British “Planned Urban Settlement” trend in urban planning, which in 1946 had resulted in the *New Towns Act* (cf. Osborn and Whittick 1977). These new settlements – e.g. Stevenage (1946), Peterborough (1967), Runcorn (1967) and Milton Keynes (1971) – were attempts to realize the ideals of the *Garden City* movement, spurred by Ebenezer Howard (1946/1902) and Raymond Unwin (1996/1909) at the turn of the last century. Here towns were to be developed as autonomous organisms, distinct from the urban sprawl by rejecting high-rise buildings and instead stressing the importance of gardens and sumptuous parks for the qualities of authentic living. *New Towns* were meant to be a modern version of *Città Ideale*, a haven from “megapolis” (Osborn and Whittick 1963).

From the beginning the planning of Almere deviated from the ideals of the *Garden City* in one important aspect. People were to be re-housed but not rigorously re-located: i.e. they still had to commute to the big cities to work. Almere was in that particular aspect, like so many other post-war suburban environment, to become a place for spare time and family life. But Almere has apparently been very successful at that. The number of residents has increased steadily since 1976, reaching a population of 184.000 in 2008.



Figures 1 & 2. Almere-Haven, est. 1976: a typical Dutch canal town – or perhaps not?

Although the city is in the top 10 of the larger Dutch cities, it differs from the others in at least two key aspects. The first is its demographic profile: Almere has the lowest number of higher educated citizens (20% of the population), the highest percentage of children (23% of the

population), a relatively large number of citizens of non-Dutch origin (25%) and the lowest crime rate of all larger cities. The disposable income of the average citizen is higher than in any other large Dutch city, while the prices of real estate are moderate compared to most cities.

But being a *New Town*, Almere also differs from “ordinary” cities by being meticulously planned in regard to infrastructure, the lay out and aesthetics of the built environment as well as to the profile of the population. The blueprints of the city defined geographically distinct areas of settlement (Almere-Haven, Almere-Buiten, Almere-Stad and Almere-Poort, the last one currently under construction), each operating independently of one another but still connected on both an administrative and an infrastructural level. This endeavour resulted in a network of suburban settlements without a distinct city centre, thus setting Almere geographically apart from a typical Dutch large city, and – almost from the start – earning it the nickname *Los Almeres* by critics of suburbia. To the perhaps prejudiced outsider Almere may seem as an endless suburb, or rather: a confusing sprawl of precincts, which probably to a large extent explains its negative evaluation in the 2008-poll. To the general Dutch public, Almere seems like ultimate suburbia. An image, strangely at odds with the profile nurtured by the municipality: i.e. of being the *New Towns*’ capital of the world – the largest experiment with new urban settlements, and hitherto rather successful at that.



Figure 3. Tenement housing in Almere-Buiten (Regenboogbuurt), approx. 1995.

The local residents evidently hold a view of their city, which is more in vein with the local authorities. Re-emigration has been sparse during the last 30 years and there is a constant influx of young families to support the ideal of still being a “new” town, despite having come to an “adolescent life stage” (Berg, Franke and Reijndorpp 2007). Many people move within the city limits to newly developed neighbourhoods thus up- or downgrading their dwellings to meet their actual housing wants. On the level of national housing policy, Almere has also been recognized as a prospective environment for living. In fact, it has been pointed out as a key area for solving future housing problems. This implies that Almere must grow to approximately 350.000 inhabitants over the next 25 years, becoming the country’s fifth city in terms of population.

To meet such expectations Almere must develop and extend its identity. Compared to other cities however, Almere for the time being lacks institutions for higher education, significant

local industry and businesses especially in the creative and knowledge intensive fields (only 40% of the working population is employed in the city), seminal cultural attractions (e.g. a professional sport team, museums of national reputation), bars, cafés and restaurants as well as hotels. It henceforth has to become a place, where it is not only nice and comfortable to live, but which also is exciting and inspiring to visit and work in.



Figure 4. Canal houses built in Almere-Buiten (Eilandenbuurt) as part of the housing expo 2001 *Gewild wonen* (a pun implying "Wild Living" as well as "Intentional Living").

On this expo, supervised by Carel Weeber, 11 different plans for housing, allowing more consumer influence on design, were presented.

The municipality recognized this issue as early as 1994 when it decided to force "a quantum leap forward" with the explicit goal of invigorating the city's identity and strengthening its brand image for the existing and future residents, prospective businesses and the general Dutch public. To reach this objective an ambitious planning project for a high profiled city centre was launched. This centre, consisting of high-rise office buildings, a distinctive shopping mall and various cultural institutions, is currently under construction. It is supervised by the famous Dutch architect firm OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture, lead by Rem Koolhaas) and consists of a number of architectonic landmarks adding up to a remarkable skyline, which mentally as well as visually should put Almere on the urban scene. This ought to be taken quite literally. As a matter of fact, the city was until recently hardly visible from the motorway traversing the area, because of the low-rise paradigm and the preoccupation with creating ample green environments, guiding the early planning of the city.

Almere is thus currently re-inventing itself, transforming a New Town into something that in a perhaps nearby future might qualify as a "real" city. Put on a simple form the endeavour is to infuse the qualities of suburban life with urban experiences in order to increase its population's satisfaction and attract new businesses and future residents, especially settlers with high incomes, which until now have preferred to settle in the neighbouring Gooi-region

on “the mainland” (the wealthiest area in the Netherlands). In the future Almere should thus become not only a comfortable and convenient place to live for middle class citizens, but also an exciting and stimulating place to work, dwell, shop and perhaps even visit for all kind of groups. In the following we will discuss this attempt to mix suburbia with more metropolitan-like qualities by focusing on how the urban design may support these quite different forms of spatial experiences.



Figure 5. Parts of the new “skyline of Almere-Stad seen from the shore of lake *Weerwater*. Left to right: *Silverline* (Claus and Kaan (2001), owner condominiums), *The Wave* (van Zuuk (2004), owner condominiums), *Apollo Hotel* (Alsop (2004), part of the Urban entertainment Centre), one tower of *Side by Side* (Architekten Cie. (2006), tenement apartments) and the theatre (SANAA (2007)).

Our analysis starts out by highlighting the differences between suburban and urban forms of experiencing, how they relate to the psychological structure of experiences, and in which way they could be meaningfully generated by urban design.

### **Urban and suburban experiences**

Urban sociologists and economic geographers have identified two main indicators of urbanity. Firstly, big cities are the loci of administration and of economic power. They are “central places” with a high concentration of agents engaged in the production, distribution and consumption of information, goods and services as well as in decision-making and counselling (Bahrtdt 1961). Secondly, big cities are characterized by density. Historically cities were compact units crowded by people engaging in the many activities implied by the concentration of power and money. This made cities attractive for supply companies, specialized in supporting core industries with goods and information. Thus the larger and more compact a city, the more specialized functions does it provide, and the more attractive it is for visitors, residents and new settlers (Wirth 1957).

Important urban experiences are derived from these two indicators. Urban life is firstly characterized by versatility due to the mix of specialized providers of goods and services and differentiated groups of customers. Cities are crowded with people frequenting the many opportunities for doing business, shopping, socializing and education and thus contributing innovation and exploration. But the mere amount of people and perceptual impressions secondly favour a blasé and reserved attitude in the city-stroller to safeguard inner feelings and thoughts from the turbulence of public life (Simmel 1903). One important consequence of this attitude is a clear conception of the distinctions between public and private life. Urbanity sets the scene for public life (cf. Sennett 1977), which is seminal for explaining the positive re-evaluation of urban life since the 1970es. Another consequence is the ability to utilize surprises and challenges in public life to develop private sentiments (Lofland 1998). Urbanity creates niches for private life in the turmoil of the public sphere, and is as such a driver for creativity and novelty. It propagates new forms of living, new ways of behaving, and new perspectives on one's identity.



Figure 6. The “skyline” of Almere-Stad, seen from the opposite shores of lake *Weerwater*, close to the highway. The shopping mall, *Citadel*, consists of the buildings on the right hand of the picture.

Thirdly and closely connected to the inherently creative and experimenting aspect of urbanity, a main attraction of urban life is undoubtedly the opportunity for face-to-face interactions with (other) strangers in the crowd. To manage this contact in a both correct (informal or courteous) and emotionally satisfying or even exciting way is essential for experiencing urbanity. These opportunities for having this kind of contact set the urban experience apart from other forms of spatial experience (van Engelsdorp-Gastelaars and Hamers 2006). The rural experience, by contrast, is characterized by an aversion and distance towards strangers. It focuses on commonly shared traditions and routines instead of innovation and development, and aims at stability instead of variation. Surprises and challenges are most often dealt with as threats to existence.

The suburban experience on the other hand is characterized by a professional or rational attitude towards strangers. Intensive face-to-face contact belongs to the realm of work and is not a resource for personal development, whereas the realm of leisure is founded in contact with intimates, with family, friends and sometimes neighbours serving to maintain a proper definition of the self. The suburban experience focuses on privately based traditions and routines, and aims at relaxation and “recharging” in the private sphere.

Urban and suburban experiences hence spring from separate ways of dealing with the distinction between the public and the private sphere. Urban experiences are generated by utilizing public life for private purposes of self-development, fuelled by the manifold options for interaction and exchange (“the market”, versatility and poly-functionality). Suburban experiences, on the other hand, cultivate private life in the secure and secluded space of the house (“home”) or the local community of intimates (“neighbourhood”). The suburbs are in effect the actualization of Le Corbusier's dream of creating “machines for living” (Marcus 2001): i.e. they are designed to be – ideally speaking – mono-functional, rationally serving the

purpose of providing decent housing and hence only providing those other functions that contribute to this single purpose (e.g. a local shopping mall, elementary services like dentists, hairdressers, medical practitioners or a local police station). The fact that many post-war suburbs have been planned to target specific lifestyle groups contributes to confirming the world-views, wishes and habits of the suburban residents.

The charm of suburban life is therefore that it confirms existing values and ideas, thus stabilizing identities and social roles. Urbanity on the contrary questions such stable notions, pointing at dreams not yet fulfilled or generating longings, one never even suspected to possess. Interactions and exchanges on the urban scene do in other words often have an erotic tinge. They often are sensually challenging, inciting and luring (e.g. window shopping), happen unexpectedly, involve surprise and excitement – and may be seductive: i.e. they can make individuals question their identities and self-conceptions. Whereas the quality of suburban life is emotionally underpinned by feelings of comfort, safety and being in control, the emotional qualities of urban life consist of surprise, joy or even elation, and the sensation of temporarily losing (self-)control. Table 1 sums up some of the differences between urban and suburban experiences.

	<b>Urban experiences</b>	<b>Suburban experiences</b>
public/private sphere	public	private
density	high	low(er)
functions	poly-functionality	one dominant function
metaphor	market	home
interaction	strangers	intimates/neighbours
contacts	developing identity	affirming identity
self-actualization	creativity, change	stability
positive emotions	surprise, joy	comfort, safety
control	temporarily lacking	confirmed
arousal	stimulation	cosiness

Table 1. Differences in spatial experiences

On the physiological level suburban life aims at well-being and sociability (cosiness), while urban life is directed towards more erotic or pleasurable qualities (stimulation). To develop places that advances the opportunity for such stimulating contacts and encourages self-development and creativity is paramount in designing urban experiences. This practice is in no way an easy one, partly because the nature of experiencing makes it impossible to plan and predict experiences with any kind of certainty, and partly because designing experiences in cityscapes is a costly as well as precarious affair. Firstly, cityscapes are built not only to satisfy a whim of the moment, but actually investments are made aiming at a very long-stretched and hence unforeseeable future. The planned environment has to be emotionally gratifying and/or physiologically appealing also in 20 or 30 years time. Secondly, building public places like city centres implies catering for the needs and wants of a general public, and not merely of one or a few well-defined target groups. Cities are, like broadcasting, libraries and (at least in some countries) health systems public service. The designer hence cannot afford to disregard all the various publics, who take a direct or indirect interest in the city. The design should appeal to the experiential make-up of urbanites as well as people living in the suburbs, and often s/he cannot ignore the wants of companies or visitors either (see Jantzen and Vetner 2008a for more on this issue). But before discussing how design might actually enhance urban experiences for such various target groups, we have to elaborate on the psychological structure of experiences.

### **The structure of experience**

Whether we actually experience something at all, and whether this experience is pleasurable and meaningful or not to a large degree depends on our mood and a host of situational factors influencing this mood. Insight into the psychological structure of experiencing nonetheless may give us some guidelines as to how the process of having an experience can be supported by design and how design can relate to the contingencies of mood and mind.

To facilitate design practice we have proposed a model of how the structure of experiencing should be understood (Jantzen and Vetner 2007a, 2007b). This model is based on two core assumptions. In the first place having an experience is the outcome of an organism's way of responding to some specific input (stimuli) *and* an organism's motivation to seek out particular new inputs in its environment, based on prior experiences. Experiences are thus produced in a dynamics of processing signals and searching for signals. In this respect, our model combines neo-behaviorist and motivational stances in the field of psychology. In the second place having experiences and dealing with them in a gratifying manner is essential to being a psychologically and socially competent agent. An important part of individuals' autobiography consists of episodic memory, i.e. our actual recollections of past experiences. Experiences are thus formative for our own understanding of who we are, where we come from and what we are moving towards. Recollected, they convey meaning, which creates coherence and identity and also may (or must) be communicated to others to make social sense (Vetner and Jantzen 2007). In this respect our model combines insights from behavioural science with a hermeneutic position.

What characterizes a "good" experience, i.e. an experience that is pleasurable, emotionally gratifying *and* inherently meaningful, is that it implies alterations on all or most of the various psychological levels of dealing with information from the environment. An experience of "good" quality must firstly be touching, arousing or relaxing. It must bring about physiological change (Pfaff 2006). Secondly it must be emotionally satisfying, implying that it must lead to some change in our actual doings: in attracting us it activates us for new actions, thus diverting us from our previous preoccupations. Emotions are basically warning systems, signalling that something dangerous or beneficial is about to happen (Frijda 1999). Thirdly, a "good" experience affects our way of thinking, behaving, wanting or longing. It changes our habitual ways of "doing": i.e. our pre-existing cognitive schemes, scripts, frames and maps, to a high degree formed by previous experiences. Fourthly, such changes on the levels of the organism may also contribute to developing our identity and give us new perspectives on who we are and what we are aiming at. Such new insights into our own life projects create meanings that can be communicated to and exchanged with others. A "good" experience should thus be understood as a relation between largely unconscious biological levels and a reflexive and socially comprehensible level.

A simple framework for making the structure of experience applicable to design practice therefore consists of four levels of response and motivation. These levels are of an increasingly complex character. In order for an experience to be significant and memorable an outcome on a lower level has to affect the higher level: unconscious reactions have to be transformed into meaningful events or actions. On the other hand the wish to experience something significant on a higher level may motivate the organism for actions on the lower levels: e.g. buying something new or extraordinary, visiting unknown places etc. This framework is sketched in Figure 7.

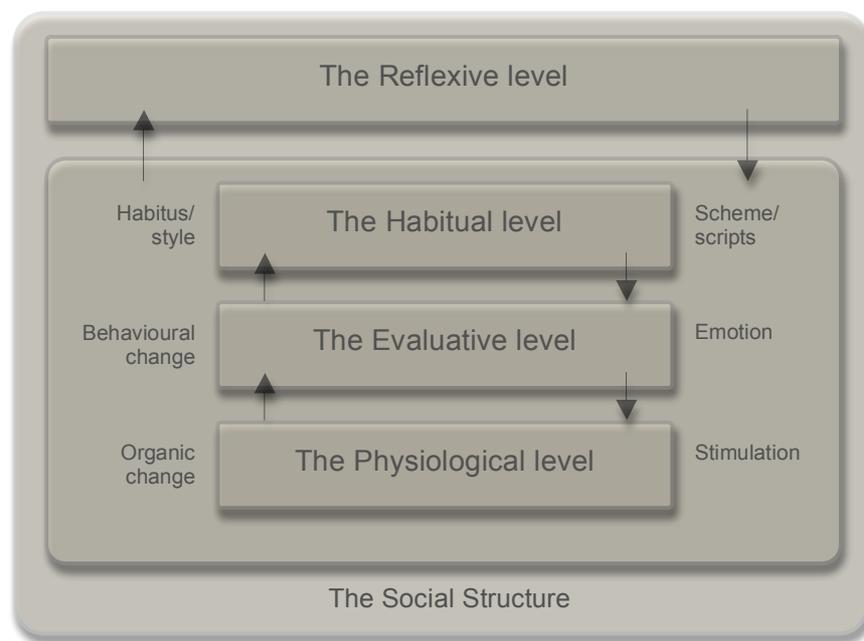


Figure 7. The Structure of Experience

At the physiological level, the organism is in a constant state of tension in order to tackle the tasks necessary for survival. This tension or arousal can be very low, as in sleep, or very high, e.g. in case of danger. On the next level, physiological changes lead to behavioural adaptations. When confronted with a pleasurable or painful arousal the organism may avert from its on-going activity either to enjoy this sudden moment of pleasure or to escape from pain. This response is emotional, in that emotions function to activate or de-activate, block or promote behaviour. This kind of decision-making is instantaneous and largely unconscious and is pivotal in relation to our preferences and habits. Habits thus consist of behavioural schemes that make our way of relating to the world automatic and predictable (Piaget 1980).

At the reflexive level, pleasant sensations, emotional responses and altered expectations, characterizing the largely unconscious operations on the biological level, are transformed into new understandings of our own existence or our environment. Having become conscious, experiences can be verbalized and shared by a community. Reflexivity is this on-going process of evaluating actual experiences, defining new types of experiences, imagining what their effect might be and considering how big the chances are, that such experiences and such an effect might come true. Table 2 sums up some defining characteristics for these four levels of experiencing.

LEVEL	MODE	OBJECT OF ANALYSIS	DOMAIN	THEME
<b>Reflexive</b>	Narration	Social agency	Communication	Identity
<b>Habitual</b>	Cognition	Groups	Automatisation	Scheme
<b>Evaluative</b>	Emotion	Organism	Behavioural change	Control
<b>Physiological</b>	Pleasure	Nervous system	Organic change	Stimuli

Table 2. The Categorisation of the Structure of Experience

The essence of this model is that stimulation of the organism is transformed into emotions, collective dispositions and communicable meanings. In the interrelation between the physiological and emotional level the organic responses to a stimulus are at stake. The exchanges between the emotional level and that of habits determine how the content of the experience is going to be categorized (as 'good' or 'bad', 'worth repeating' or 'better to avoid' etc.). Stimulation and automatic responses are finally turned into memorable lived experience in the dialectics between the habitual and the reflexive level

### The structure of urbanite experiences

The essential attraction of urban experiences is that they contribute to self-development by being challenging and versatile and by relying on intense face-to-face interactions in the public sphere. The dominant emotions in this type of spatial experience are thus those related to the brain's "seeking system" (Panksepp 1998): the joy of discovering something unexpected, the urge to explore new fields and the play with other sides of one's identity than those habitually staged.

Physiologically pleasure is derived primarily from stimulation and excitement, i.e. from increased arousal by being confronted with something unexpected. But points of rest and relaxation are necessary to counterbalance the risks of too much arousal (i.e. stress). Attractive urban environments are therefore characterized by ample space for "time-out": parks, plazas, cafés, etc., which in addition offer possibilities for socializing with strangers. Moreover landmarks and a clear grid may prevent the city-stroller from getting lost in the crowd. The urge for intensity does not erase a need for orientation and feeling safe. Negative emotions (anxiety, fear) have to be controlled or prevented, for the impression of the urban environment to be positive.

On the level of habits the urban experience is very much a matter of "accommodation" (Piaget 1980): of integrating new impressions in existing cognitive schemes in order to expand one's knowledge of the world and/or to refine one's gamut of feelings. For this to happen, the interesting inputs must in some way match the relevance structure established by previous experiences. At this level urban experiences presuppose a dialectics of transgression and affirmation, essential to the innovative quality of urban life. At the reflexive level such dynamics are mandatory for an ongoing identity project favouring self-development. In this perspective personal identity is a process continuously in the making rather than a stable fix-point for outer directed actions. These characteristics of the urban experience are summed up in the following figure:

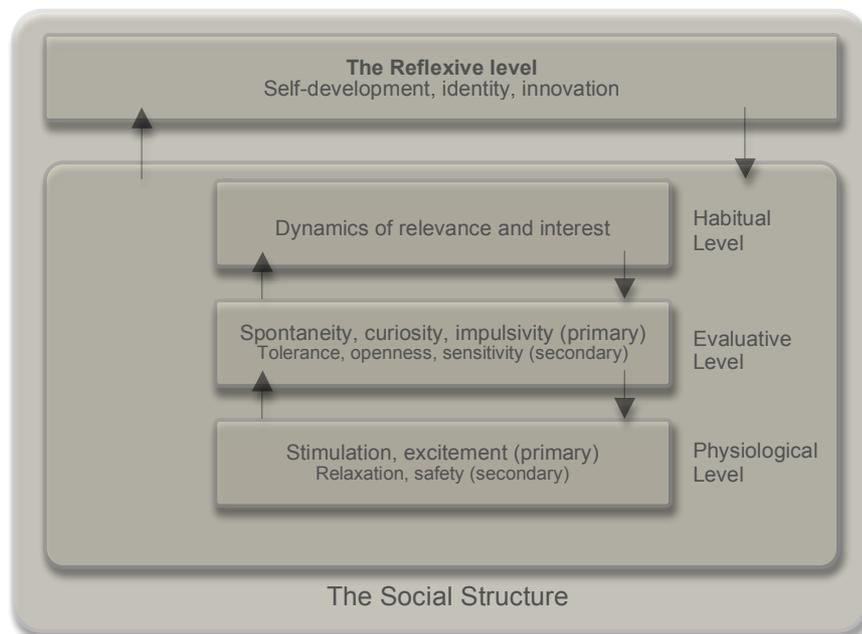


Figure 8. The Structure of Urban Experiences

The people actually populating city centres belong to two very different categories. On the one side some groups have to live there in lack of other (i.e. better) opportunities. The "death of cities" (Jacobs 1961) and the pauperization of centres over the last century is the result of

an ongoing emigration of its previously diverse population to segregated suburbs. In many cases the old centres have become ghettos, predominantly housing those people who cannot afford to move. On a mental level this process may result in a “ruralization” of urban centres.

On the other side the old centres have become attractive for gentrifiers, who move to this place voluntarily precisely because centres provide ample opportunities for urban experiences. These experiences could therefore with some right be named the *urbanite's* experiences. Being the primary driver of the knowledge intensive economy this “creative class” has become increasingly interesting for local policy makers and is consequently targeted by urban planners (Florida 2002). The hidden problem in this planning and policy-making is of course that the total percentage of potential “new urbanites” in a country at any given time is relatively small in terms of psychographics, approximately 20% – hardly enough to populate all the exciting new (real or micro-)metropolises being planned and built (van Engelsdorp-Gastelaars and Hamers 2006).

### **The structure of suburbanite experiences**

In contrast to urban experiences, the essential attraction of suburban life is that it contributes to existential stability in affirming the significance of everyday life. It aims at providing ample space and time for strengthening intimate relationships and the contact with peers (neighbours, acquaintances, friends). Two quite distinct types of emotions prevail. On the one hand those related to the brains “nurture system” (Panksepp 1998): the satisfaction derived from bonding with and caring for or being cared by significant others. Life in *New Towns* is highly sociable, at least according to the ideals of the “New Urban Settlements” movement. It should be oriented towards “peace, love and understanding” and rely crucially on empathy. Being able to mean something to others and share their preoccupations, worries and delights is in such cases a strong motivation for choosing a suburban life form. On the other hand suburban experiences are also related to the ability to tackle the “anxiety system” (ibid.): the comfort of feeling secure in an otherwise uncertain or unsafe world. The reality of suburban life is often to safeguard its residents from external dangers and disturbances, which has turned many upper middle class suburbs into gated communities or “ghettos” for the happy few. Being able to control the surroundings is in such cases a strong motivation for choosing a suburban life form.

On the physiological level “good” suburban experiences is a result of a decrease in tension or stress. Such a decrease is either a goal in itself (the control motive) or a means to reach a higher goal (the sociability motive). A common thread in these two motives is a well-arranged environment easy to survey for each individual inhabitant. The ideal suburb is hence characterized by low-rise housing. But whereas anxiety-reduction relies on surveillance, sociability presupposes common grounds (parks, playing fields, village halls, cafés) to meet. Another common thread is the necessity of creating an environment with a balanced population. Put rather simplistically, the ideal suburban neighbour is either somebody to share important values and features with (sociability), somebody not to worry about (anxiety-reduction) or somebody who contributes to your own standing (status). In this respect, the ideal suburban neighbourhood is characterized by homogeneity, in stark contrast to versatility and heterogeneity of ideal urban life.

Whereas input has to be interesting in order to be relevant for urban experiences, impressions have to be relevant in order to become interesting for suburban experiences. On the level of habits the suburban experience is thus very much a matter of “assimilation” (Piaget 1980): of being able to find already established and hence recognizable patterns in new information in order to process it comprehensibly. New input should thus contribute to confirm the stability of existence on the reflexive level. Experiencing something unexpected and interesting should

in the end contribute to re-affirm a relatively fixed identity: i.e. tension may be utilized to bring about a stronger equilibrium. The characteristics of suburban experience are summed up in the following figure:

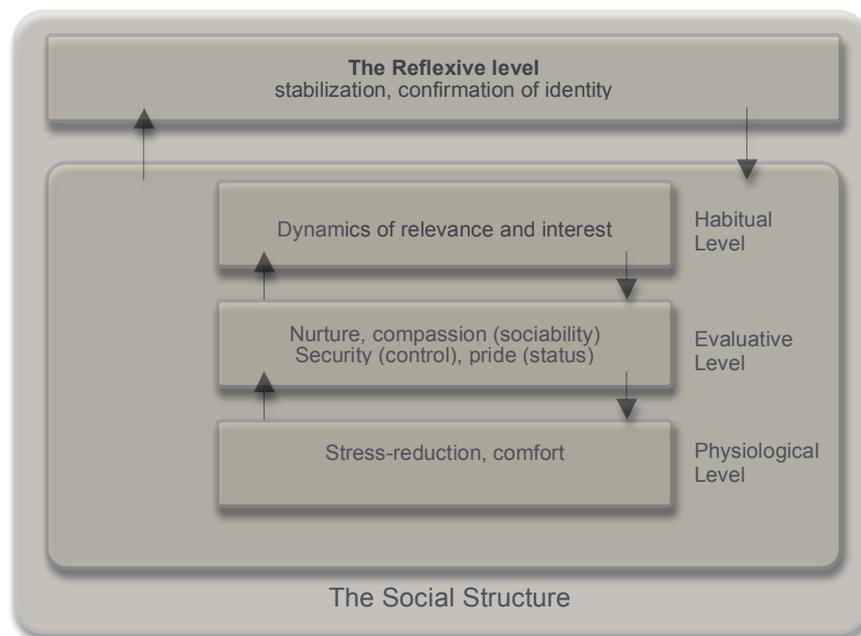


Figure 9. The Structure of Suburban Experiences

As this figure illustrates, there is no such thing as a univocal suburban experience. On the level of emotions three distinct clusters of motives prevail, appealing to quite different groups in terms of psychographics (Häusel 2006, Jantzen and Vetner 2008b, 2009). These differences may be illustrated by the groups' way of tackling disturbances. Some people do their best to avoid disturbances as much as possible (control motive), others use disturbances as opportunities for demonstrating their own ability to master turmoil (status motive), and others again use disturbances as inspiration for meaningful social contact (sociability motive). This last group has important similarities with the gentrifiers, who are in the market for urban(ite) experiences, in that both groups are motivated by a need for development either individually ("the creative class") or socially ("the sociable class"). In terms of personality both groups qualify as extroverts (Eysenck 1967, Gray 1981). Those groups motivated by either control or status on the other hand qualify as introverts. They are either individually (status) or socially (control) oriented.

Interestingly, such psychographic differences were attended to in the initial planning of Almere in the 1970es. When sketching the lay-out for Almere-Haven, the first settlement, planners designed specific neighbourhoods for extroverts, and other ones for introverts and individualists (Provoost, Colenbrander and Alkemade 1999: 9). Taking the individual differences of the future residents into account from the start perhaps helps to explain the relative success of this *New Town* (e.g. in terms of satisfaction or in figures of re-emigration) compared to other new urban settlements. All too often such "ideal cities" were planned with regard to what planners thought socially desirable – i.e. targeting "the sociable class" – and not in respect to the needs and wants of those who actually went to live there. In many instances this malpractice has led to a sorting out of people, resulting in precincts populated by residents with no other place to go.

Before analyzing how Almere's new city centre matches such psychographic differences and which kinds of suburban experiences might benefit from the centre's urban flavour, we will provide some more details on the political ambitions leading to this plan as well as on how the plan was eventually realized architecturally.

### ***The quantum leap: Policies, plans and practices***

As already mentioned the passing of the new plan for the city centre by the city council in 1994, marked a decisive break with the prior principles for developing Almere, which had been guiding the planning since the early 1970es. With this new plan the council for the first time opted for high-rise buildings. Furthermore the previous goal to develop a network of equally important centres was replaced by a new ambition to develop one core centre. The five guiding principles in this centralization were the following (Architekten Cie. w.y.: 4):

1. Almere should have one overarching City Heart
2. This City Heart should become a *complete* centre providing all aspects of urban life: entertainment, culture, offices, housing, services in a varied mix
3. New concepts of urbanity should be integrated with traditional ones by connecting the existing centre in Almere-Stad with the shores of lake *Weerwater*
4. The City Heart should have a regional appeal, giving Almere a distinct identity in the northern rim of the Dutch network of cities (*Randstad*); this identity should emphasize the new, innovative andn experimental qualities of Almere
5. Combining mainstream with periphery, small scale with large scale, the City Heart should be attractive for everybody: versatile, heterogenic, high quality and coherent.

Becoming an attractive city, a truly urban environment, was clearly the council's penultimate priority. And as indicated by the last two principles, this goal was stated explicitly in terms of urban experiences. The new City Heart should be visible, audible and tangible to its users (inhabitants as well as visitors), and it should consist of a sufficient number of landmarks to convey an urban impression. Almere was to make a "quantum leap" (Municipality of Almere 1994) from being a fairly large provincial town to becoming a mini-metropolis, mirroring itself in the image of Amsterdam on the opposite shores of *IJmeer*.



Figure 10. Map of the City Heart, 2008. The old city centre's grid structure is clearly visible in the upper part of the map. The oblique road structure of the new mall in the lower part of the map forms a remarkable contrast to the rectangular streets in Teun Koolhaas' original plan.

These bold ideas were to be realized on the arable land north of Almere's artificial lake and south of the existing centre. This centre had been designed in the early 1980es by Teun

Koolhaas with a grid structure, inspired by the lay-out of Barcelona, but with building blocks of more moderate proportions (i.e. 5 storeys high). Teun Koolhaas was one of the four candidates invited to make a proposal for the final masterplan. The competition, however, was eventually won by his cousin, Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and his Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), whose very name must be said to resound the council's ambitions. OMA, renowned for its neo-modernist theories on urban planning (e.g. Koolhaas 1994/1978) but also for having implemented the master plan for a new city centre in Lille successfully (cf. Koolhaas e.a. 1996), had presented an outline that negated the existing lay-out of the centre in a provoking way. This proposal conceived of a high-rise business park just north of the centre's railway station, landmark cultural institutions (a theatre, an urban entertainment centre, museums) and apartment buildings at the lakeside and an open-air shopping mall in connection to the grid of existing shopping streets.



Figure 11. *The Wave* by the local architect van Zuuk, 2004.

By now most of these elements of the master plan have been realized, although with considerable changes compared to OMA's original outline. The business park, though, is still under completion, as the first of the three 100.000 m<sup>2</sup> office skyscrapers of L'Hermitage, the highest (Carlton, also housing a hotel) being 120 metres, will not be finished before 2010. But some of the office buildings are already functioning as clearly visible landmarks. The WTC/Alnovum-building (by Benthem Crouwel, 1999) and the La Defense (by UN Studio, 2004) form a stark contrast in both shape and colour to the existing built environment, which must be said to be rather pale (predominantly using yellow bricks) and modest. Most projects on the lakeside being completed, Almere has by now a spectacular skyline visible from the A6-highway and from the air. Apartment buildings like the Silverline (by Claus and Kaan, 2001, 17 storeys), the twin towers Side by Side (by Architecten Cie, 2006, 22 storeys) and not least the sculpturally curved *The Wave* (by van Zuuk, 2004, 7 storeys) together with the theatre (by SANAA, 2007) and the Urban Entertainment Centre, harboring a music-hall, bars, restaurants, retail outlets and a hotel (by Alsop, 2004), have turned Almere into a hot place for

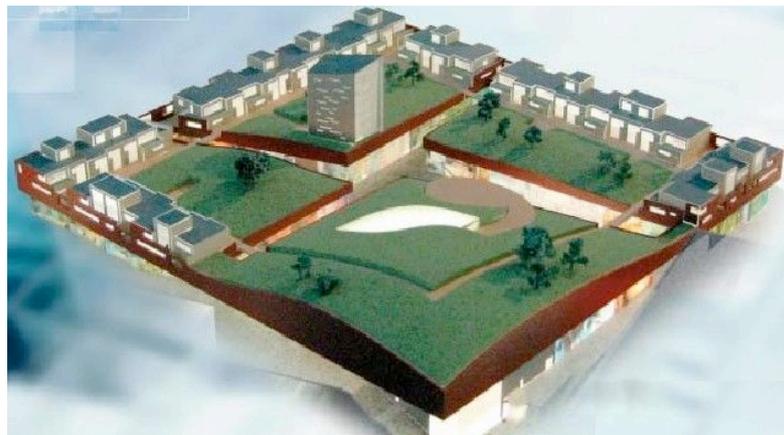
architects to visit, thus defying the city's general public image as being ugly. By their height, shape, color and the materials used (e.g. metal) the new buildings also defy the surroundings built in the 1980es.



Figure 12. *La Defense* by UN Studio (van Berkel and Bos), 2004.

The *pièce de resistance* of the master plan, though, is the open-air shopping mall, Citadel, designed by de Portzamparc and completed in 2006. The Citadel is located between the old grid of shopping streets and the landmarks at the shore, and its road map diverts considerably from the pre-existing infrastructure by being twisted obliquely thus creating sharp angles with blind spots as well as wider places for public display. Built on an artificial hill, the roads of the Citadel rise to 6 metres above ground level and as the whole area is restricted to pedestrians some “foot-work” has to be done, when entering the mall from either the lakeside or the old centre. Another way of entering the mall is by escalators from the parking lot for 2400 cars underneath. This space, aptly baptized “the Underworld” by its planners, is built at the actual ground level and is also being used for transporting goods to the shops above, on base level, implying that the backstage of commerce – i.e. the “hell” of supply – is efficiently hidden from the view of the customer, who is set free to indulge in the delights of demand.

Figure 13. Sketch of the *Citadel's* “Upperworld”, with housing at the fringes of the “park”. The top of the hill is 3 metres above the lowest point.



With its walls in patterned brown concrete (resembling rocks) and its slopes, the Citadel appears to be a fortress of consumption, controlling its surroundings. In that case the masters of this fortress are neither the shopkeepers nor the customers but the inhabitants living on the upper level of the mall, what consequently must be the “Upperworld”. How life might be in this heavenly sphere one can only glimpse from a roof terrace in the mall’s department store, V&D, as there is no public access to the upper layer. Surprisingly, the main part of this area is laid out as a mildly sloping park landscape of 11.000 m<sup>2</sup> with housing at the fringe of the field (52 dwellings) and footbridges suspended not over a pond or brook but over the abysses formed by the two streets traversing the area at base level some 15 or 20 metres below. The bridges connect the roofs of the four blocks to form what might seem like a small countryside village, but quite ironically located on top of what pretends to be the very heart of the city.

The design of this multilayered mall thus keeps some aspects out of the pedestrian’s sight (i.e. the banalities of commercial life), while others are only partially visible for all others than the happy few or “suprahumans” (i.e. the pleasures of being on top of the “World”). The effect being, that the world of leisure (shopping, consumption and entertainment) is separated from the underworldly realm of toil but also from the heavenly sphere of luxurious living. On the one hand the mall corresponds with the ideals of contemporary urbanism: namely versatility and a mix of functions (cf. Jantzen and Vetner 2008a). These functions are on the other hand kept sharply segregated. They are not meant to be mixed, which implies that the design lacks or refuses flexibility. Taking this mall to be emblematic for the entire plan, we will now discuss, which kind of urban experiences “the quantum leap” generates.

#### **An urban centre for suburban residents**

Having visited Almere’s City Heart on three separate occasions during 2008, we have made two basic albeit rather trivial observations. Firstly, the city centre is spectacular: it is indeed everything that the surroundings are lacking. It is varied and heterogenic, whereas the environments are harmonic or even monotonous. Its high-rise buildings remarkably contrasts the moderate proportions of the older grid’s low level building blocks. Erected on an artificial hill the sloping profile of the mall at base level furthermore negates the flatlands of the polder. The new centre is spectacular in the sense of being awesome. But it is also spectacular in a literal sense: it is a place for having dazzling vistas of the cityscape or nature (the lake), for watching other people hurrying by or for window-shopping. This also indicates that the built environment to a much lesser degree supports intensive interactions between people in the crowd. Its spacious layout does not favour surprise encounters.

Secondly, and closely connected to the first observation, the centre is never really crowded, not even on market days (i.e. Saturdays). Most people passing through appear to be shoppers. And after shopping hours these people apparently withdraw to the suburbs. This is of course for a large part caused by demographics and economic infrastructure. Almere does not have a sufficient amount of young well-educated people nor does it have a considerable number of knowledge intensive businesses to generate a mass of urbanites actively seeking contact. But the design of the master plan does however not support such urban behaviour either. Functions are kept apart in separate blocks or on segregated layers, and the ample space between blocks as well as the fact that the different forms of traffic (public transportation, cars, bikes and pedestrians) are still strictly separated, preventing an impression of the city as a pressure cooker or a combustion engine, bursting with energy. The architecture and urban design hence impede the urbanite experience, physiologically relying on stimulation (arousal) and emotionally on impulsivity and spontaneity, from being evoked (cf. Jantzen and Vetner 2008a).

The City Heart is not an intensified urban interior for producing surprising experiences that may challenge or even change its users’ identities. On the contrary, it is a sumptuous décor intended at enhancing the qualities of suburban living. It might even be very successful at

that. This is precisely due to the spectacular character of the design. It is aimed at visibility: i.e. at creating an image of Almere as more than a network of suburban settlements – a “real” city. In the experiential economy, visibility is increasingly becoming a token of existence (Have 2004), implying that the city needs to convey a prolific image in order to exist. It adds to the attractiveness of the city as such, making it easier to persuade prospective settlers to move. This visibility also contributes to the identity of its (middle class) inhabitants. They don’t live in the middle of nowhere, but can take pride in belonging to a highly visible place. The City Heart might thus have a significant branding effect and at the same time increase the self-esteem and social status of Almere’s residents.



Figures 14 & 15. The *Citadel* with footbridges and the roof terrace (left). The artificial slope on base level is clearly visible.

View from the roof terrace with houses on the fringe of the “park landscape” and a footbridge connecting two blocks on the upper level (above).

But visibility is not only an issue of cool cash (branding) or of some reflexive work on identity (self-esteem, status). The highly visible décor grants the stroller invisibility or anonymity as partaker on an urban stage without having to perform him or herself. It safeguards the pedestrian from having to take a stance, at the same time giving him or her an overview of the situation. In other words, the spectacular City Heart enables its users to play the role of the spectator: of the bystander seeing without being seen, bodily part of the scenery yet emotionally detached from it. This spectator can be interpreted as a suburban descendant of the *flâneur*, once walking the arcades of Paris, “the capital of 19<sup>th</sup> century modernity” (Benjamin 1999, Harvey 2005). The charm of this role being, that it puts the spectator in control of the situation (i.e. anxiety reduction), simultaneously allowing him or her to engage in an activity (e.g. buying, talking, eating) at will. Spectatorship is in other words comfortable. It does not question the relevance or significance of lives led, although it contributes to the flavour of existence. It is a time-out from the routines of quotidian life, which does not challenge the values and qualities of this life. Urbanity hence becomes a source of inspiration for continuing everyday life in suburbia.

Ironically, the only thing really blocked from the spectator’s perspective is a full view of the existence lived by the residents on top of the mall. The roof terrace only allows a partial glance at life in this microcosmic suburban heaven. What probably is most similar to the spectators’ actual life might thus very well become the most luring and attracting image,

because of its hidden character. With the danger of over-interpreting the significance of this architectonic element, it could be said to result in the worshipping of ordinary life.

The people populating the City Heart and especially the mall are by and large visitors from the city's suburban precincts. They could be called tourists, allegedly another descendent of the *flâneur*, touring their own hometown: i.e. people having a break from their ordinary shopping outlets, while pursuing activities confirming the relevance of their everyday life. It is very well possible that the accompaniment of friends and acquaintances adds to the meaning (reflexive level) and satisfaction (emotional level) of the experience, turning it onto a sociable event. In such case the relevance of existence is utterly confirmed, as pointed out by Urry (1991) in his theory on tourism. We can now summarize how visiting the City Heart contributes to the suburban way of meaningfully experiencing urban space:

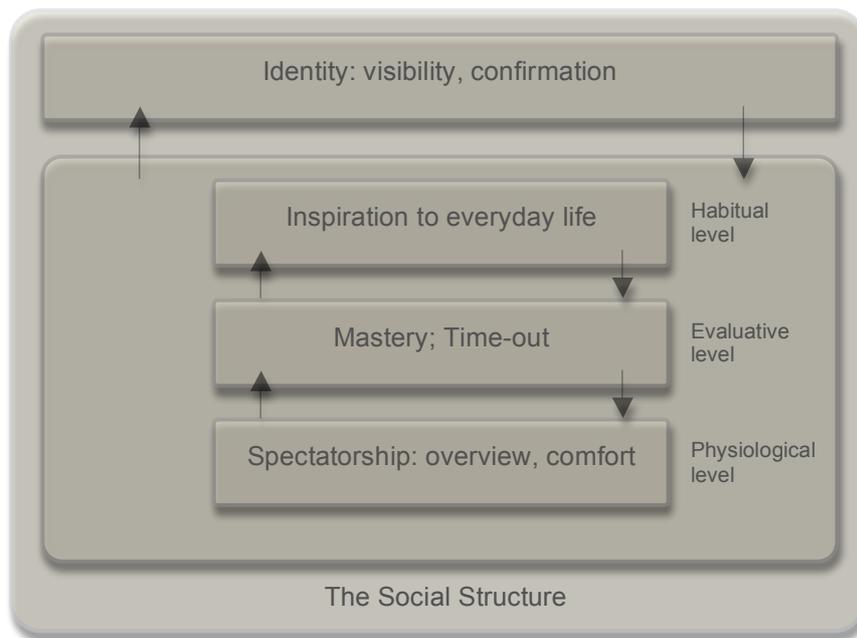


Figure 16. The suburban experience of the City Heart

As stated earlier, there is no such thing as *a* suburban way of experiencing. At the emotional level at least three different clusters of motives prevail, and two of them are in the market for experiencing urban space. To the extroverts motivated by sociability, the inner city is a source of inspiration that supplements everyday life by generating new impressions. The possibility for having a time-out from the ordinary surroundings and experiencing something “extra” together with close friends and family adds flavour to life. The urban stage is attractive because it promises variation, while at the same time leaving the relevance of existence intact. The introverts motivated by preserving or increasing personal status and self-esteem are gratified by the spectacular décor. The inner city is predominantly a space and an ambience that feels good to be associated with in terms of their own identity. The city brand is in a way entangled with the way, they want to be seen and known by others. If they actually visit the place, it is to be inspired by its *grandeur* or to learn about its *couleur locale* or its *genius loci*, which obviously in the case of the City Heart is still largely absent. Those introverts motivated by control will on the other hand reject a visit to the inner city as relevant for their life project. City life is an unnecessary disturbance that should better be avoided.

### **Designing the unique, making it quotidian**

With the completion of the Carlton hotel and office tower sometime in the next decade, Almere will have an even more pronounced skyline. This tower will be among the top ten skyscrapers in the Netherlands and only 3 metres smaller than the largest building in the neighbouring Amsterdam, the Mondrian building. But it will not transform Almere into a metropolis, although it without a doubt will strengthen the city-like look and image of the municipality. The urban ambitions of the city council may influence the physical shape and appearance of the city, but it cannot alter the demographics radically nor change the mental predispositions of its population. Commissioning, planning and implementing an urban environment in what used to be a suburban network of settlements will not generate a sufficient amount of urbanites to create a truly metropolitan ambience. Although the master plan emphasizes the new, innovative and experimental qualities of Almere, it does so solely in terms of materials used, forms shaped and buildings erected. It does not and cannot in and by itself produce a versatile, heterogenic and wildly creative population.

This, however, does not imply that the whole endeavour is a mistake or failure. On the contrary, one might posit that the City Heart is a splendid realization of the suburban dream or image of how a relevant urban environment – a *Città Ideale* – should feel, look and be like. If this should be the case, the master plan may prove crucial in fulfilling the ambition of becoming the country's fifth city in terms of population in just a few decades. To reach this goal Almere must foremost continue doing what it is best at: i.e. offering opportunities for gratifying suburban living, matching distinct tastes, preferences, income levels and life stages. But next to that, Almere has to continue working at becoming visible as a place that offers something “extra” to suburban life: i.e. something that adds to the quality of this existence without questioning its value or legitimacy.

The master plan seems highly suited for this purpose. It is a unique ensemble of landmarks, some of them showpieces of contemporary architecture (e.g. La Defense, Citadel, The Wave). Products only become “extras”, however, if they allow their users to appropriate them physically, mentally or experientially, meaning that city-strollers should be able to exert a way of behaving that seems relevant or interesting to them, when confronted with the built environment. The cityscape must fit its users life projects and support their personal goals. In this regard, it is our contention that this master plan although perhaps pretending to aim at residents with urbanite tastes and preferences, is well-suited for catering for the habits and emotions of a substantial part of the municipality's middle-class suburban population. The new City Heart conveys a relevant image of their hometown, thus leading to an increased pride in living in Almere. As indicated by the increase in the population's pride, the master plan appears to have been extremely successful in branding the city for its own residents, who in the end are the owners of the brand. Furthermore, the master plan seems to fit the emotional make up and behavioural predispositions of many users in a relevant way. They can go about in a quotidian way, although they are strolling through a unique cityscape.

The mall being relatively new, the new frames for shopping and strolling may suffice to generate something “extra”. But this will certainly change in due course. When we visited the site some of our informants actually expressed their dissatisfaction with the choice of stores at hand. Firstly many stores are located in the new mall as well as in the old main streets leading to redundancy. Secondly most stores are typical main street stores (chains) to be found in any other Dutch city of comparable size. And thirdly many of the locally based speciality stores (e.g. delis focusing on ethnic products) have disappeared since the opening of the mall, as they are not able to pay the increase in rent, which the whole area has experienced. It thus seems appropriate that the investors in the area start considering the content and the formula of the site, if the City Heart is to remain a relevant and interesting provider of urban experiences for suburbanites.

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