RC 21 Conference Amsterdam

The struggle to belong.
Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.
7-9 July 2011

'Arabian Kasbah' for sale in Rotterdam

The appeal of a themed and gated residential area for the urban middle classes

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Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011, 7-9 July 2011 Amsterdam
Session number 7: Gated communities

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Abstract. Throughout the last two decades, the renewal process of deprived neighbourhoods in the Netherlands has more and more been accompanied by place marketing. Part of this place marketing strategy is to *theme* new homes that have been built within these districts. Here, theming means to apply a narrative to homes and the neighbourhood to make them as a 'package' more appealing then they otherwise would be. Main target group for the new homes is the urban middle class. This social group is assumed to appreciate multiethnic vibrant city spaces. Nevertheless, they hesitate to buy a home in a deprived neighbourhood by reason of safety and prestige. With the creation of a gated housing project in the deprived Rotterdams' neighbourhood Bospolder, called Le Medi, building professionals attempt to provide a residential ambiance which is able to convince people to settle down. The theme 'Arabian Kasbah' symbolizes an exciting, urban place which is at the same time collectively controlled, and hence safe. This paper deals with the question how far theming, on the one hand, and enclosure, on the other, affect peoples' locational choice. Due to this question, the group of interviewees could be categorized into three subgroups. First, there are young people with a Dutch background who strongly identify with the theme while spatial enclosure is besides the point for them. Second, for the interviewees having a non-Dutch ethnic background enclosure is important cause of safety reasons while they fear for stigmatisation caused by the theme. The third group, Dutch families, appreciate the theme and in particular the feature of enclosure meets their search for collectivity.

Key words: gated community, theming, urban middle class, urban renewal, symbolic boundaries, the Netherlands

Introduction

Since the beginnings of the 1990s, Dutch national housing policy stimulates socio-economic 'mixing', i.e. the attraction of middle classes to disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Ministerie van VROM 1997). Traditionally, these groups are expected to be politically engaged, economically stable and to produce a vibrant cultural climate (Butler 1995, Van der Land 2007). Urban middle classes identify with urban life because it offers opportunities for a wide range of cultural and symbolic consumption. Moreover, they expect a safe and high quality residential environment including good educational infrastructure for their children (Zukin 1982, 1998). One way to satisfy urban middle classes' preferences is to built owner-occupied housing. Though, to meet their sophisticated desires and lifestyles, Dutch building professionals have developed two more strategies: first, they attempt to renew ambiguous place identity of deprived neighbourhoods into a clear-cut positive one by means of place marketing (Reinders 2007). Here, *theming* of new housing projects is part and parcel

of the creation of neighbourhoods' new place identity: stories which are repeated told about the homes and the neighbourhood are applied to salient architectural and urban forms (Bryman 2004). At second, building professionals tentatively have started to built gated housing projects within deprived neighbourhoods (Meier and Reijndorp 2010). These projects are small-scaled, have collectively owned, enclosed spaces and are characterized by an intimate, safe and manageable ambiance. Because a not insubstantial part of the Dutch urban middle classes are (young) families who are interested to stay in inner city districts (Boterman et.al. 2010, Karsten 2007, Karsten et.al. 2006), building professionals regularly advocate the building of single-family, owner-occupied homes there.
Owner-occupied houses arranged as an enclosed urban form (Fig 2) and theming have been realized in the project Le Medi. It is situated in the neighbourhood Bospolder which is part of the Rotterdam's city district Delfshaven. The building consortium (consisting of civil servants of the municipal authority, representatives of two housing associations and one private developer) has invented the theme 'Arabian Kasbah' to create an enclosed and imaginary residential ambiance. Over the past years, Bospolder has been object of urban renewal and has been marketed as a multiethnic vibrant city space where recreation and consumption of exotic, multicultural products is provided (Gemeente Rotterdam 2006).
This paper examines whether themed architecture and/or spatial enclosure of Le Medi influence the locational choice of home buyers who are members of the Dutch urban middle classes due to their degree of sociocultural and economic capital, lifestyle, patterns of consumption and aesthetic preferences (Ministerie van VROM 2007, Karsten et.al. 2006, Boterman et.al. 2010). Empirical evidence comes from interviews with 24 buyers of homes, held before they moved in. It is focused on personal narratives that contain judgements about the self and others, and about aesthetic and functional characteristics of the architectural and urban design.

Middle classes and gated residential areas

New (urban) middle classes
In academic literature, the middle classes are traditionally taken to be non-independent white-collar workers. Bourdieu (1984) refers to a specific group of white-collar workers as the 'nouvelle petite bourgeoisie'. According to him, from the 1970s onwards, this group practises new occupations in culture and service sectors for which there were not yet clear-cut admission requirements. As the people in this group are not 'born into' a social layer with self-evident privileges and have not had a conventional education, they attach great value to a non predetermined life course. Leading a dynamic life shapes their sense of self. Mostly they see themselves as artists or intellectuals. Through a consumptive lifestyle (e.g. preferring certain foods, participating in selected cultural activities and purchasing products to create prestige), they socially construct and reproduce their sense of self. This conspicuous consumption is characterized by distinguishing oneself from others by the consumption of goods having a high symbolic value (Velben 1965[1899]). The French

philosopher Baudrillard (2007: 61) describes conspicuous consumption as *"… [Y]ou never consume the object in itself (in its use-value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by making you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status."* How choices for the 'right' goods of consumption and a distinctive residential location are made depends on someone's habitus. Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus is a concept that is closely related to social disposition and (middle)class formation; a relationship which is discussed elsewhere in detail (Savage et.al 2006, Butler and Savage 1995, Ley 1996). Here, we focus on the argument that habitus is constituted by the degree of sociocultural and economic capital through which social disposition is represented. Social disposition, in turn, is consistently reproduced by personal attitudes, behavioural intentions and individual (aesthetic and locational) preferences in everyday life (Duncan and Duncan 2004, Ley 2003). Sayer (2005) adds to this view the idea that the search for social distinction also depends on moral judgements relating to primary emotions such as rejection, shame, anxiety or guilt. These judgements arise in the day-to-day social context and include aesthetic judgements through which the subjective desire of belonging to a certain social group is represented.
As a fraction of the middle class, the urban middle class attempts to reproduce social disposition by choosing property at an urban place. Urban gentrifiers (as Zukin (1998) calls them, in turn, as a one fraction of the urban middle class) often define themselves as being cosmopolitan and political tolerant (Lees et.al. 2008). They *"work[ed] as teachers, lawyers, artists, writers, creative staff in advertising firms or retail stores and government or corporate managers"* and are interested in good food, high culture and want to provide a high-quality education for their children (Zukin 1998:831). Gentrifiers generate the gentrification process of old urban neighbourhoods from inside. The presence of them stimulates not only privatisation of public institutions but also the appropriation of city spaces which enforce the building of enclosed residential areas (Smith 1996).

Gated communities (in the Netherlands)
The term 'gated community' is an elusive concept which is defined in a variety of ways (Housing Studies 2005). However, there are two characteristics through which it is distinctable from other communities. First, a 'gated community' is more or less physically enclosed. The access is in some way restricted, for instance by a gate, a person who supervise the entrance or by a symbolic marker like a plate, an archway and so on. Second, these areas are most often built by private developers whereby property and traditional public space like streets, courtyards and surrounding greenery were sold out to the homeowners. They manage common spaces and sometimes run certain amenities (McKenzie 1994). Reasons to create a 'gated community' are different, but in many cases particular social groups aim to protect themselves against 'strangers', unexpected events or a perceived danger (Atkinson & Flint 2004, Low 2003). Moreover, some individuals are in search for collectively organised activities and hence, a sense of community (Blakely and Snyder 1997). This sociospatial retreat is closely related to 'new emotions of home', as Low (2008) calls it. Some residents

seem to get more and more fearful and afraid of (neighbourhood) change. Those feelings are not individually developed but are *"constructed out of a discourse of fear and crime and others that resonates at many scales including the local, regional and national"* (Low 2008: 62).
In the Netherlands, the emergence of 'gated communities' is a controversial issue that is from time to time discussed by architectural critics and the daily press. Throughout the last two decades, more and more collectively managed residential areas have been built (Lohoff and Reijndorp 2006). Following Hamers et.al. (2007), Dutch 'gated communities' are not so much characterized by lockable gates but rather by the creation of 'soft' boundaries like water, green zones, 'defensible' architecture and enclosed urban forms. Moreover, these areas are often of small size and accommodate no other infrastructure than housing. Dutch 'gated communities' are mostly planned and built by commercial developers and sometimes by a consortium consisting of housing associations and private developers. Hamers et.al. (2007) argue that the emergence of more enclosed or collectively managed residential areas is not alarming. Last but not least, because a number of enclosed urban forms has been part of the Dutch planning history for hundreds of years (it is compared with the housing block, Dutch medieval courtyard houses or collective staircases). However, there are scholars who are more concerned about the fragmentation and accessibility of public space within residential areas (De Cauter 2005, Hajer 1997). Though, these studies have highlighted a variety of issues, they have not sought to investigate the reasoning of people to choose for residential life within a gated residential area. This paper contributes to the burgeoning field of 'gated housing' within Dutch urban deprived neighbourhoods by exploring the appeal of those places for the urban middle class that consists of social groups of Dutch and non-Dutch ethnic background (Ministerie van VROM 2007).

The invention of an 'Arabian Kasbah' in Rotterdam

During its period of office from 1998 to 2002, the Rotterdam municipal authority developed the diversity policy of the 'multicoloured city' (*Veelkleurige Stad*). The multicoloured city had to be expressed through cultural activities and in the built environment. An immigrant of Moroccan origin and an urban planner (who works at the Rotterdam municipal authority) developed the idea of introducing Moroccan architecture into housing. They launch a working group, existing of civil servants of the municipal authority, agents of housing associations and an architect, and ask them to identify a number of essential characteristics of the Mediterranean and Arabian building traditions. This working group constituted a 'codebook' for the design which included - next to the required usage of certain brick, roof terraces, colours and so on - the prescription of the enclosed urban form, a courtyard with a water fountain and a salient doorway (Le Medi 2002).

Photo 1 Collectively owned and managed courtyard. Source: Geurst and Schulze Architects

Although, the idea was initially to express the richness of traditional Moroccan building styles in Dutch housing, the initiators argued that the theming of the project should *not* be unequivocal Moroccan (Le Medi 2008). In the contemporary Dutch sociocultural and political context, Moroccan (and Arabian) identity evokes ambivalent associations. In order to create a clear-cut positive architectural marker, they incorporated references to the entire Mediterranean area. However, the choice to use the architectural codes as a potpourri generated another problem: how to avoid the making of a housing project that resembles a theme park (where basically an eclectic mix of codes serves for an imaginary and artificial ambiance). To get around the creation of artificiality, Le Medi's architect refused to make an accurate copy of a 'real' respectively typical Arab gate. Instead, a parabola-shaped main gate was chosen.

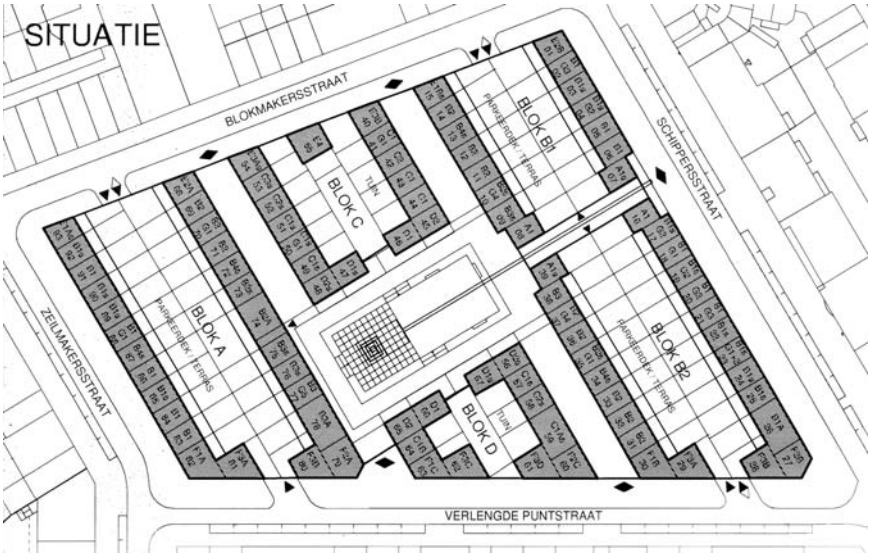

Figure 1 Plan of Le Medi. Source: Geurst en Schulze Architects

Partly as a result of a changing political climate in Rotterdam from 2002, the focus shifted from expressing non-Dutch culture to the theming of a Mediterranean holiday-feeling which is captured by the following quotation.

> *"… we were sitting around discussing the Mediterranean and so on. At one point my friend said: 'Couldn't you call your project Le Medi!? You have an immediate association with the Mediterranean, holidays, beautiful colours, easy communication with others, tolerance, a friendly atmosphere – actually, everything that needs to be strengthened in the Netherlands!' First I thought of the name Medina, but that's too evocative of traditional buildings, authentic patio homes inside a walled city. It is also Arabian, Arabic-Islamic. Medina? No! There were politicians who said: 'No, not that. Le Medi? OK!' It has a Mediterranean flavour, a Southern European flavour. That is acceptable" (Le Medi initiator)*

The project is located in the Schippersbuurt area and comprises 93 single-family, owner-occupied homes. Along the six rows of houses there are brick walls to give the impression of an enclosed housing block (Fig.1). The inward-looking streets and courtyard are property of the residents. Access is via five gates that are closed at night. Le Medi has been promoted with a brand comprising the slogan "*Live where the sun always shines",* a Le Medi-logo in red mosaic letters on a white background, and the story that the project is an "*oasis of peace and safety"* in vibrant Rotterdam. The story is told in the sales brochure using a mix of photographs of Arabian gates, mosaics, Rotterdam eateries, a woman doing yoga, the old harbour at Delfshaven, a table set for a meal and so on. The photos refer to enjoying food and drinks on a terrace with friends and to holidays in warm places (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 Sales brochure for Le Medi. Source: ERA Contour

Interviewees and narrative analysis

Contact with buyers was sought at buyers' meetings. Twenty-two households were willing to participate, and fifteen of these were selected (in total 24 respondents), allowing for a nearly equal distribution in terms of age and cultural background. The project has now been completed, and it has attracted buyers from a wide range of socio-cultural backgrounds (Table 1). All the interviewees pay a price of between €180,000 and €350,000 for their dwelling due the additional features they have chosen to the basic house type.

Table 1 Native country of all buyers*

Buyers born in	%	N= number of buyers (not households)
Netherlands	60	83
Morocco	10	14
Turkey	9	13
Surinam	7	10
Germany	3	4
Cape Verde	2	3
Pakistan	2	3
Serbia	1	2
Cuba	1	2
Tanzania	1	1
Ghana	1	2
Iran	1	1
Spain	1	1
	100%	139

* 100% means all adult buyers of 84 of the 93 homes;
sales as of 14 May 2008. Source: ERA Contour Zoetermeer

Of the 139 adults who had bought a home before May 2008, 60 percent were born in the Netherlands and 40 percent elsewhere. However, 36 percent of the 60 percent have at least one parent who was born outside the Netherlands. If we adhere to the Statistics Netherlands definition of 'allochtoon', 76 percent of the buyers have a non-Dutch background (western or non-western). 20 percent are younger than 30 years, half are between 30 and 39 years of age and almost one-third are aged 40 or older. The majority of buyers come from old urban districts in Rotterdam. A few of them come from districts near to Rotterdam centre such as Ommoord, Zuidwijk and Overschie.
For the purposes of this research, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 24 respondents and 15 selected households have been held. Their ethnicity and education level are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Ethnicity and education of respondents

Ethnicity of all respondents (N=24)	Education level
Hindustani	Senior Secondary Vocational Education (MBO*) in Administration
Moroccan	Mechanic / company training course (MBO)
Moroccan	Academic education (WO): Law
Moroccan	Higher education with an applied emphasis (HBO) in Chemistry
Surinamese	Pedagogy (HBO)
Turkish	No qualifications
Turkish	Architecture & Construction Engineering (HBO)
Cape Verdean	Biology (HBO)
Iranian	Chemistry (HBO)
Dutch	Academy of Arts (HBO)
Dutch	Cultural Social Work (HBO)
Dutch	Institute of Technology (HTS*): Mechanical Engineering
Dutch	Education Theory (MBO)
Dutch	Youth Education (HBO)
Dutch	Personnel Policy & Human Resources (HBO)
Dutch	Academic education (WO): Medicine
Dutch	Logistics (HBO)
Dutch	No qualifications
Dutch	Medicine (HBO)
Dutch	Social Work (HBO)
Dutch	Social Work (HBO)
Dutch	Social Work (HBO)
Dutch	Social Work (HBO)
Dutch	Cultural Social Work (HBO)

*MBO & HTS: Non-college graduates [(general) secondary vocational education]
** HBO & WO: College or university graduates [higher vocational or further education]

The vast majority (18 of the 24) of the interviewees have a college or university degree, while only 6 have no or a non-college degree. Many of them had received education in the field of welfare, chemistry, biology and medicine (Table 3).

Table 3 Fields of education

kind of occupation	interviewees
(cultural) social work & youth education	9
chemistry, biology, medicine	5
mechanics, engineering, logistics	4
administrative work, human resources	2
law	1
arts	1
no qualification	2
Total no. interviewees	**24**

The preference for a certain location, urban form and architecture (theme) is related to someone's sense of self. According to Giddens (1991) self-identity is conceived as being socially constructed via personal narrative. Personal narrative refers to *"stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories)"* (Riessman 2008:6). People construct narratives to give meaning to themselves, their relationship with others and - last but not least - their relationship with residential place. In the in-depth interviews respondents' reveal their attitudes, including their aesthetical and moral judgements, emotions and behavioural intentions. The structure of the interviews was based on a list of items, namely 1) daily life, social and functional connections (time-space behaviour), 2) reasons for choosing this specific housing project and for that neighbourhood, 3) expectations with regard to living in Le Medi, 4) attitude on urban renewal programme, architecture and the urban form, 5) attitude on and knowledge about Bospolder and the city district Delfshaven, 6) reaction of friends and family to their purchase decision, 7) consumption preferences, 8) aesthetic judgements on architecture and urban form in general and finally, the history of their housing career. During the in-depth interview a street plan of Rotterdam, a plan of Le Medi, the sales brochure and the house plan of the plot were used to gather additional information. On average the interviews took 90 minutes, were tape recorded and fully transcribed. Besides age, gender, education level, kind of education, the data recorded included household composition, job details and the house price paid. The analysis of the transcripts focused on the process of identification with theme, the fact that the project is gated at night, the dwelling itself and the location. For this purpose, the interviews were coded according to five attitudes, namely the attitudes towards the location, the themed architecture, the enclosed urban form, the interviewee's own past, and expectations for the future. The analysis of all Le Medi interviews are part of a broader study of themed neighbourhoods and were analysed using ATLAS.ti. The method uses semi-open coding, a combination of top-down and bottom-up (Muhr and Friese 2001). Codes differ depending on type and hierarchy. There are descriptive, analysing and conceptual codes. Descriptive codes contain text fragments in which the respondents describe the built environment. Analysing codes are used when respondents assess the built environment and people, stating implicitly whether they identify with these or

oppose them. The conceptual code is the network of codes that combine to form a theoretical concept (e.g. identification). Hierarchy means that codes are ordered by theme, with a main category (e.g. views on location) divided into a number of subcategories (Böhm et al. 1992). The respondents are then classified by type, e.g. they share the same views of the architectonic space, have similar reasons for moving house or the same expectations with regard to the future (Kluge 2000). The narratives that will be discussed in the following sections are i) doubt about the safety of the location, ii) their hope for progress and upgrading of the neighbourhood and iii) the appeal of the themed and gated housing project.

Narrative I: Having doubts about safety

For the respondents with a Dutch background in particular, Bospolder was not at the top of the list of preferred places to live. In many cases, they discovered the project by chance, at the Funda website [1] or in an advertisement. On first reading or hearing about it, they were spontaneously fascinated by the Mediterranean-style architecture. However, that fascination was soon overtaken by disappointment with the location. A 32-year-old man with a Dutch background comments:

> *"We were very enthusiastic. But when we found out where it was we thought 'oh, no… that's near the Marconiplein, by the Bas van der Heijden [shopping centre]… oh no, not there! That's such a bad area.' When I cycled there to have a look, my first reaction was: 'no, no, no.' Then we went back again and you see more of the context of the neighbourhood, how it's laid out and, well… that you actually don't have anything to do with the Marconiplein itself."*

This quote expresses not only disappointment about the location, but also the reflection on doubts: he observes the negative aspects and, at the same time, puts them into perspective. Like him, all respondents state that they had doubts. But the level of doubt varied, depending on how familiar they were with the neighbourhood or how much they knew about it. Those who have only visited Bospolder a few times, or do not know it at all, reduce the negative aspects to symbols that they associate with decline, such as call shops, satellite dishes or 'ugly houses'. By contrast, the buyers who grew up in Rotterdam West are familiar with the history of drug problems, crime and socio-economic problems. The respondents who are involved in the process of urban renewal as professionals can also identify locations that are safe, not so safe, or have improved in recent years and have confidence in how the neighbourhood will develop in the future. A 31-year-old Dutch woman, who works as a professional in the welfare sector, says:

> *"We are able to make our voices heard in Delfshaven. You know which organisations and which people to approach. And we're not the only ones. I think you can empower Bospolder if the people who live there know who to go to… But you shouldn't want everything cut and dried, or want to know*

everything in advance. Yes, you have to have confidence – in the residents and in the goodwill of the relevant organisations…"

A man with a Moroccan background, who originally lived in Bospolder moved to Spangen [2] and is now returning, indicates that he is aware of the problems but is not concerned by them:

"There are a lot of people who don't want to live in an old area of the city like that. Obviously, it's often in the news. But we're not bothered by it. Here in Spangen we've never had problems either. You get to hear all sorts of things … but everyone is busy with their own life. As long as you leave people in peace there isn't a problem. As adults, you do have some control over that."

The other respondents, who have less knowledge and experience of living in old urban districts, were more uncertain, basically due to the reactions of friends, colleagues or family to their purchase of a house in that neighbourhood rather then due to themselves. A 35-year-old Dutch woman, married to a man with a Moroccan background, is embarrassed and prefers to refer to the location as the whole city district Delfshaven – which is broadly associated with the historic centre – rather than to the neighbourhood Bospolder within that district.

"Woman: 'The reaction is often: What!? Why on earth are to going to live in an area like that! It's got such a bad name!?'
Husband: 'At one point she didn't dare to tell anyone at work either.'
Woman: 'That's true, I said: 'I'm going to live near Delfshaven'.'
Husband: 'Yes, no, no, I didn't tell people that. Look, as soon as someone says to me … 'Are you going to live there!?'… I'm not going to bother explaining how nice it is. I won't do that. Too much negative energy.'"

The feeling of embarrassment is linked to the fear of losing social status. Sayer (2005) describes embarrassment as the most social emotion, because it is evoked by the individual failure to maintain a social disposition that is valued and internalised. Moreover, the perception of the future home for their children seems to be important: parents attempt to provide their children a childhood within a neighbourhood that has the same (or higher) social status than the place where they grew up. A father of Moroccan origin, for example, is concerned that his child will experience discrimination as a result of growing up in Bospolder.

Narrative II: Hope for upgrading

For the time being, the negative aspects of the location can be 'pushed aside' in thoughts. The interviewees focus on the positive aspects of their already made decision to move there. Hence, the predominating frame of mind is, apart from doubt, hope: all respondents are hoping for ongoing upgrading of the neighbourhood

Bospolder. They know about the urban renewal programme from the media, are involved in it as a professional, or have seen the improvements for themselves. In particular, the construction of the park next to the housing project Le Medi - which is in fact a business park with a huge green park above it – is seen as indispensable for the improvement of this city district. The urban renewal programme serves as a guarantee for a constant exchange value of the homes in the future. This aspect was mentioned mainly by non-Dutch respondents of around 30 years of age. They see Le Medi as a stepping stone, and do not envisage spending their old age there. Typically, they relate the upgrading explicitly to the hope for many different, exotic and luxurious shops and restaurants nearby in the future as the following citations capture.

> *"The area might seem to be nothing but call shops, but when you walk along the street you see that there's a Turkish bakery, a Moroccan butcher, a French wine merchant and an Indonesian supermarket. We think that's very special. If people from a different income bracket come to live here soon, then these small shops will survive and hopefully others will open too! Don't you think? Then, I think, it will do nothing but good for the area." (man, 30, Dutch background)*

> *"Yes, just a sort of hopelessness, gloom. That's obviously what I thought at first about the Bas van der Heijden [near Le Medi]. Just like the Bas here at the Middellandse Straat: just people who only buy rubbish, eat rubbish and feed their children full of sweets. They argue in the shops, and the supermarket is much too small, but… since then I've been to the supermarket there [near Le Medi]. It's a very big supermarket. It is different… At first you think, 'it's a run-down district,' but then we saw the new developments around it and… the plan for the park you realise that it will soon be a nice area." (man, 32, Dutch background)*

Furthermore, all respondents define a role for themselves in the upgrading process. Half the respondents with a Dutch background are actively involved in the buyers' association activities. Moreover, they want to have social contacts with local residents and aim to organise joint activities. A sense of solidarity with other groups is evident in the way they speak about themselves like this woman.

> *"… I thought the house, and the whole plan, was very unique. Then I thought, yes… perhaps you should give a neighbourhood like this a chance… Otherwise, er, whites, shall we say, will never come to live there. Then it will always be a black area, perhaps with problems. And if that keeps people away too… I thought, yes, we think it's such a unique project, and of course they're working hard on renovating the old houses." (woman, 35, Dutch)*

Solidarity with local residents of Bospolder is explicitly linked to the willingness to take a financial risk by buying a house at that location. The quotation contains the moral judgement that the 'black neighbourhood' needs 'white people', such as their own peer group, to progress. Thus, taking a financial risk is being compensated with a sense of pride and satisfaction. Some of the respondents see themselves as pioneers and

creative people because they have invested in a home in the deprived neighbourhood Bospolder. They perceive themselves as a member of social group who 'dare' to accept insecurity. A pride that comes to the fore in the following citations of two young women with a Dutch background argue.

> *"I think the buyers who are moving in now, and the buyers we've met so far, are a certain type of person: there is something that appeals to them about living in the city, in a neighbourhood that is evolving. They're a certain type of person – people with a really positive approach and who also dare to invest in something when we don't really know how it will turn out." (woman, 30)*

> *"[Le Medi] attracts a different sort of person. People who think… who are more broad-minded… there are a lot of creative people. That is what struck me. A lot of people who are culturally active… yes… not so narrow-minded." (woman, 29)*

Respondents with a non-Dutch ethnic background did not mention the sense of pride at having the courage to take a financial risk. Neither did they mention the sense of being a pioneer or the preference for more luxurious shops and multicultural, exotic places to eat and drink. For this group, upgrading means, above all, the presence – or return – of affluent Dutch people. In the interviews, some of them are opposed to other immigrants who behave anti- socially and thus damage the reputation of the whole group with the same cultural background. Some interviewees of that group of buyers made sure that there is a relationship between a higher standard of behaviour and home ownership. A man (38) of Turkish origin, who is married to a Turkish woman, explains for example:

> *"On the way to a buyers' meeting I met a friend who asked: 'What are you doing here?' I said: 'I'm planning to buy a house here.' 'What??' he said, 'it'll be all Moroccans and Arabs who live there. Why do you want to be among all those Arabs!?' I had to laugh about that, but we had the same thoughts too. But there were many more Dutch people than I was expecting. I think that's a good thing.*
> *…*
> *It's simply a fact that owner-occupied homes… the people who come to live in them are more decent! Yes… [tries to find the right words] They look after it. They're more socially minded, it's… it can help to stop the decline a bit. The overall decline."*

All non-Dutch residents are reassured by the fact that many of the buyers in Le Medi have a Dutch background. Some of them were concerned that the design theme would discourage homeowners with a Dutch background from living there.

Narrative III: The appeal of 'Arabian Kasbah'

As the respondents had not yet moved to Le Medi when they were interviewed, they relate the narratives about themselves and others to the visualisation of the project in the sales brochure. People with a Dutch background naturally think of holiday spots in Southern Europe or other 'warm' places. They indicate Le Medi as a mix of western, non-western or invented culture and building traditions. It is precisely this mix that encompasses uniqueness and 'un-Dutchness' as a conversation of a young Dutch couple captures.

> *"… in Italy you have those small charming villages and little streets, and there are houses painted in bright colours. The sun is always shining there, you're on holiday. Obviously they're trying to recreate that atmosphere in Le Medi. But to me it doesn't really feel typically Moroccan… no, to me it seems more as if they have taken that and 'packaged' it in the Dutch style." Her husband answers: " Obviously, this type of home is not typically Dutch… [hesitates] You see, normally you feel as if you're living in a goldfish bowl. You have a very big room that's 8 metres long, with a window at each end. In general, that's what Dutch terraced houses are like. You don't have that feeling here at all!"*

The respondents with a non-Dutch, ethnic background judge the urban enclosed form and the architectonic symbolism in terms of a synthesis of western and non-western building traditions. For some, these are reminders of their native country. They appreciate the gesture: the fact that policymakers and urban planners have used Arabic or other ethnic symbols in the Dutch context. However, they do associate it with safety, relaxation and privacy; it does not evoke a holiday feeling. A man (38) with a Turkish background comments:

> *"It's pure Mediterranean, but it's not our area! It's also Dutch: too rigid. It's something like the coast of Morocco, between Libya and the Aegean perhaps. But it isn't Turkey. This feels purely North African to me.'*
> *Interviewer: 'Which symbols remind you of North African building styles?'*
> *Respondent: 'First, the arched gateway, and secondly the block-like facades. Third: because it's hot there, you always have thick walls and small window openings. You have that association straightaway with the small windows. But it's just as if a Dutchman has married someone from North Africa, and this is their child."*

Although all respondents were fascinated by the theme Arabian Kasbah, interviewees with a Dutch background attach greater value to the externally visible symbolism than the respondents with a non-Dutch ethnic background. A woman, who moved to the Netherlands to marry with a Moroccan man living in the Netherlands after finishing her studies in Morocco, said that she will always feel Moroccan and will furnish her home in the Moroccan style. She thinks it's a shame that her three-metre-long traditional Moroccan sofa do not fit in the house, because the sitting room is not a central but a long narrow space (and there are always doors in the way).

The majority of respondents with a Dutch background stated that they would not have decided to buy a house at this disadvantaged neighbourhood if it had no salient architecture. The reference to non-Dutch, ethnic places enables them to express their cosmopolitan individuality. Different-coloured facades and the option to choose a front door with a different Arabian strap-work than one's neighbour are perceived as added and symbolic value. Some respondents regard the clay-coloured bricks on the houses in the outer rows as distinctive in comparison to the existing buildings that surround them. It reminds them of the clay-coloured soil of 'real' Arabian Kasbahs. Such associations reflect the appeal non-western cultures have to them; those symbolize authenticity and purity. Moreover, Mediterranean traditions and culture have an inspirational effect: a Dutch woman, for instance, was inspired to remodel her kitchen entirely into the Mediterranean-style because she feels a connection with the French and Italian lifestyle she has experienced on holiday and abundantly observed in magazine illustrations.
Furthermore, the buyers with a Dutch background would not have bought a home in Le Medi if the project had been situated in a suburban region. Suburban living does not apparently fit in with their sense of self as an urban person. They perceive the houses in the suburbs as all the same, the shops and other commercial facilities are not diverse enough, and the population there is seen as monocultural and colourless. Respondents with anon-Dutch ethnic background also prefer the city to suburbs, but for other reasons: they are concerned about discrimination in day-to-day life, and would not be close enough to family and friends.
In addition to identifying with the kind of theming, some of the interviewees are reassured by the idea that the collectively managed courtyard and streets at the inside of the block can be closed off at night. The houses in the outer rows of Le Medi – with front doors facing the public street – and the five gates form a clear spatial division between the collectively managed space and the public street (Fig. 1). Parents with young children in particular are already 'claiming' the courtyard in their thoughts. The children will be able to play safely in this car-free space while parents keep an eye on them, watching them from the benches or the kitchen window. The fact that the five gates are closed at night evokes a sense of being 'indoors'. A sense of community, like-mindedness and intimacy is particularly mentioned by respondents who bought a home in one of the inward-looking streets like this woman.

> *"Those few moments when the children have half an hour before a meal or bedtime. It's good if there's somewhere for them nearby… you can give them chalk or marbles to play with. That's the time you usually go and chat to neighbours when you come home. It's much more personal than in a block of flats with a staircase." (woman, 42, Dutch)*

When asked whether people living outside Le Medi should be able to make use of the courtyard, all the people interviewed said they hoped this would not be the case. They hope that the gates - even if there are open - will serve as a symbolic boundary to people from 'outside'.

> Interviewer: *"What do you think about the fact that the courtyard is closed off at night?"*
> Respondent: *"I think it's a very good idea. Simply to prevent all the bother, break-ins, and simply because of the… idiots. There are so many idiots around here, that's really typical of a city. I mean, it livens things up, but [bursts out laughing] you also have to keep people out. There are plenty… er… plenty of people who would like to get in here" (man, 32, Dutch)*

The sense of being part of social group which live spatially enclosed, symbolizes the desire for a high social status, on the one hand, and for living in an imaginary, magic place, on the other. A respondent indicates that the fact that the common courtyard can be closed off gives the comfortable feeling of living in a "gated community". In addition, the majority of the interviewees argue that they found the view of the existing buildings from the public streets ugly and shabby. They stated that is was basically the colourful inward-looking streets that are responsible for the creation of the Mediterranean ambience. Moreover, they believe that the homes in the inward-looking streets will keep the exchange value better than the houses facing the public streets. While the respondents who buy a home that face the public street legitimate their choice with functional and aesthetic reasons. The inward-looking streets are "too claustrophobic", they state, and the public streets are more vibrant. Moreover, they feel close to the neighbourhoods' market place and like the fact that their homes are accessible from the public street because this feature enables them to open a home-office, to receive customers or to rent out a room on the ground floor. Next to this, the prices of the basic house types (without optional features) facing the public streets were lower than the basic types faced the inward-looking, coloured streets.
However, the sense of being part of an enclaved community evokes ambivalent feelings. Some of the respondents with a Dutch background do not want to be associated with a housing project built for 'yuppies', as the quotation below illustrates.

> *"The very first time, we thought 'Oh no, don't say this is going to be one of those paradises for yuppies'. Later you think, no, it's so mixed. People who are motivated to come back and live here, who grew up there, who have a connection with the area. Look at the sort of jobs those people have: they work in the social sector… feel involved and not only… [hesitates]… of course, it's possible that you just want to have a nice house. Everyone wants that to begin with. But you also have to have some idea of 'yes, how do you approach that' or 'how do you profile yourself in this neighbourhood." (woman, 42, Dutch)*

Those doubts are removed by the hope that residents will engage with each other and by the hope that through upgrading of the neighbourhood social differences will decline in the future.

Conclusion

This paper addresses the key question how far the aspects of theming and spatial enclosure influence peoples' locational choice. Empirically, three subgroups of the interviewees have been found who could be seen as fractions of the urban middle class. These groups judge theming and enclosure differently, but there are similarities. All interviewees bought a home in Le Medi because they feel themselves as 'real' urbanites and have no intention to change this. All of them distinct themselves from middle class people who move to a suburban area. They have social connections with people living in Rotterdam and the region. In particular, the buyers with a non-Dutch ethnic background have family and friends living close to Le Medi or the neighbourhood Bospolder. The single-family house fulfilled a number of functional desires, like the required number of rooms, sufficient outdoor private space, intimate collective space shared with fellow residents, a direct relation between front door and (inward-looking) streets, and last but not least parking spaces nearby. Besides to these sociofunctional advantages, the salient themed architecture and the spatial enclosure are 'goods' of conspicuous consumption through which fractions of the urban middle classes attempt to reproduce (and achieve) a certain social dispositions (Bourdieu 1984, Zukin 1998, Ley 2003).

For the first subgroup of the interviewees (respondents in their thirties and with a Dutch background) a home at this location provides them the opportunity to feel as pioneers. With their capital investment into a home at this location, they take a financial risk through which they feel to go against the tide. With this, they earn the enjoyable awkward of friends who express incomprehension as well as admiration. The unique theming of the 'Arabian Kasbah' within the urban context fits in with their sense of self as being cosmopolitan, tolerant, creative and different from the mainstream. However, this sense of self is ambivalent: they wish to be different but, at the same time, they do not want to extend the boundary of social acceptance. They hope that other urban middle class people also 'dare' to invest into the same housing project. With their preference for symbolic consumption, the fascination for the authenticity and purity, and the explicit desire to distinguish themselves from a suburban and 'non-creative' lifestyle, these respondents have much in common with urban gentrifiers described by Zukin (1982, 1998).

The interviewees of the second group, families with parents older than 35, do not feel to be pioneers and have initially more doubts about safety. For them, the gated residential area with its clear spatial and symbolic boundaries solves two problems at once: first, it makes it possible to live in the 'lee of the city' - as Karsten et.al. call it (2006) - while having vibrant city life close by. Second, they are affirmed by the convenience of an owner-occupied, single-family home surrounded by a safe and guarded space for children's' play. The common residential space serves as a buffer zone between residential everyday life and the public space of 'strangers'. The people living in the inward-looking streets do not have to look at the social housing surrounding Le Medi. Their aesthetic judgement conceals a moral judgement on 'the other' that is associated as belonging to those 'ugly' streets outside (Sayer 2005).

Respondents of the third group (interviewees with a non-Dutch background) have at least one young child. The fact that the inward-looking collective space of the housing

block can be closed off at night is an advantage, but it seems not to be the main reason for buying a house in Bospolder. They state that they were interested to buy a home in this deprived, but restructured neighbourhood anyway, even if there were no gated housing available. To the theme 'Arabian Kasbah' they have ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, they appreciate it as a gesture of acknowledgement that Arab and other non-western immigrants are citizens of the Netherlands. Moreover, this architectural theming is able to evoke pleasant memories of non-western countries with which they have a social and cultural bond. On the other hand, they perceive the architectural representation of their non-Dutch culture as a potential source of stigmatisation. It is striking that they are not willing to appropriate this kind of theming, unless the Dutch urban middle classes do identify with it as well. The living next to native Dutch residents in Le Medi provides them the social disposition they search for and through which they are able to distinct themselves from lower-income groups (and from the first immigrant generation, see Karsten et.al. 2006).
Though, the aspects of theming and enclosure are perceived differently, all interviewees are captivated in such a way that they invest a great amount of money into a home situated at a deprived neighbourhood. The gated residential area guarantees a safe residential life. Moreover, by the combination of spatial enclosure with Mediterranean colours, mosaics and the accessible narrative of a '*oasis of peace and security'*, the harsh spatial boundary retains a casual character and evokes associations with holidays and a fairytale world.

Notes

1 A website where almost all homes for sale in the Netherlands could be found: www.funda.nl
2 Spangen is an urban and deprived neighbourhood within the Rotterdams' city district Delfshaven

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