

Person-centered design in Dutch architecture

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Research with a mission

During my design education and my contacts with (interior) architects and commissioners such as local government, I've noticed that in The Netherlands the concern for human factors in architectural design is often limited to physical aspects. Dutch legislation for buildings and working environments shows the same focus. Though both the designer and the user want their buildings to have full functional quality as well as technical and esthetical quality, it isn't common practice to consult a specialist such as an environmental psychologist in design projects to improve the fit between buildings and people.

I want to contribute to the well-being of people in their daily lives by stimulating the acquisition and use of behaviour-environment knowledge in the design process. To gain a basis for effective communication I decided to analyze the actual practice of architects and their clients according to person-centered design in a field study.

Method and measures

The inquiry consisted of semi-structured interviews with (major) architects about recently (i.e. 1 to 3 years ago) completed building projects. I have selected 15 cases from different architects and commissioners, divided into 6 different building types according to their functional use: living, working, learning, healing, leisure and commercial activities.

I've asked the respondents how they addressed the needs of the users of the building in three main questions.

1. In the different stages of the design process - programming, designing, construc-

tion and use - what has been done to ensure that the building or space fits the needs of the users, meaning that it is for instance:

- adequate for the planned activities;
- communicating the right things;
- providing the adequate amount of arousal and challenge;
- able to adjust to different needs or circumstances?

Which analyses did they make, which design solutions or technology did they choose and how did these turn out: how do the users feel about the space?

I've connected their answers to psychological subjects such as way-finding and orientation, personal space and territoriality, crowding and noise. In this way the cases provide examples of effective and non-effective design according to these psychological subjects.

2. How did they involve the daily users or visitors in the design process?

3. Which sources of behaviour-environment knowledge did they use?

Results

These case-studies give us an indication of the extent to which architects and their clients in The Netherlands are aware of the influence of the built environment on people's behaviour and well-being, and how they deal with it in the design process. This provides starting-points, such as best practices, for communication about the application of environmental psychology in Dutch architecture.

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