

The story of LEGO City

A study of the representation of the city in LEGO catalogues

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Abstract

This thesis is focused on the representation of the city in LEGO catalogues and explores what pre-existing norms and values are at work in such representations. The city is an amalgam of buildings and people and is full of diversity and differences, while LEGO is a toy that in a simplified and miniaturist manner, mimics various aspects of urban life. Toys have the powerful ability to teach children and to make them familiar with all kinds of societal norms and rules of conduct. Therefore, playing with LEGO City can teach the child about the city and what kind of behaviour is considered to be proper in the city. The city in this thesis is understood as both a spatial and a social phenomenon. The answer to the question as to how the city is represented will be given by observing 38 years of LEGO catalogues, from 1978 until now. As I will demonstrate, life in the LEGO revolves around work and various jobs, a lot of which have to do with the police and the fire department. Most of the buildings and dolls in LEGO have to do with those themes, although there have been other important themes throughout the years, like construction working, coast guard and transportation. There is not much diversity among the minifigures, since they all have the same skin colour and it took a while before there was any diversity in clothing and hair styles. The division of roles in the city is very stereotypical and gender confirming, with almost only male minifigures working for the police and fire department and not too many women in uniform or working at all, although, as I argue, there are small steps towards a more nuanced division of roles. When looking at the city in terms of spatiality, it is evident that it is very structured and planned. All buildings are new and functional, which signifies the importance of progress and innovation in the LEGO city, and is very fitting for a construction toy. The affordances that LEGO offers its customers are limited, because the city may not speak to the imagination of children all over the world, and the imagination of those who the city does speak to may be very strongly directed by the narratives that are present in the catalogues. Although it can be argued that the lack of cultural references may offer children more possibilities to add their own.

Keywords: spatiality, social city, LEGO, toys, diversity

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Introduction

As a child, LEGO did not particularly grab my attention, but it did at a later age, both as a toy and as an object of academic study. LEGO is very much present in the media, thanks to all the collections that have been created based on popular movies, games and other expressions of popular culture. Besides the countless number of building guides, histories and theme books on LEGO and these collaboration themes, there is also an academic interest in LEGO, shown by the recently published *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon* (2014) by Mark Wolf, which combines a focus on LEGO as a company with a focus on the actual products that LEGO produces. After all those years, LEGO thus still has a role in Western culture.

An element of LEGO that has gotten a lot of attention is LEGO City, which has been part of LEGO since 2005, but has known several predecessors (City, n.d.). There is not only a stand-alone product line named after the city, but it is also a theme that has gotten a lot of attention in books made by LEGO artists, for example Warren Elsmore, who wrote the book *Brick City* (2013) in which he has created a number of landmark buildings from cities all over the world by using LEGO bricks. And this is just one of the many books that have been published by LEGO artists about buildings in one's own city by making one's own creations, instead of using only the official LEGO sets. Therefore, not only is the city an attractive theme for a lot of builders, it is also a theme that is fit for additions and elaborations, since there are many books that discuss these fan-made elaborations (see for example Lyles & Lyles 2014 and Klang & Albrecht 2013). What I want to do in this thesis is focus on the city as it is presented by LEGO and the idea that is communicated through the catalogues of what the ideal city should look like according to LEGO.

As Balshaw and Kennedy assert, "Literature, film, architecture, painting, tourist guides, postcards, photography, city plans – all provide selective representations of the city and shape the metaphors, narratives and syntax which are widely used to describe the experience of urban living" (2000, p.4). What is not mentioned by Balshaw and Kennedy though is the representation of the city in the form of toys that equally shape our conceptualization of urban life. Toys are mostly played with by children who absorb, enact and re-enact the values and norms communicated by the toy's affordances. This is why it is relevant to study what kind of metaphors LEGO shapes about the city and what affordances LEGO offers children to re-enact values and norms.

Michael Batty's (2007) insights about representations of the city in miniature are very helpful for my purposes here. Batty explains that models can be abstractions and/or simplifications of already existing cities, but they can also be ways to design an ideal city. Batty claims that models can help scientists to explore the world, and even predict it, but that does not only go for scientists. Users of LEGO can also use LEGO as a model of the world, or of a fantasy world, and explore the world by using the model that they built. Children will even use that model to learn about the world outside of that model and therefore it is important to study what model children may get to see and thus what they may learn about the world and how to position themselves in it. Rommes, Bos and Oude Geerdink (2011) argue that toys will teach children "about societal norms and preferred ways of living in the world" and that is exactly why it is important what norms are taught by LEGO.

In this thesis I will therefore explore how the city is represented through LEGO catalogues and what preconceptions about urban society those representations communicate. I have chosen for the catalogues rather than the physical sets, because in the catalogues, all the sets are presented next to each other, often against an elaborate background and they are given a context, which gives more information about how the city as a whole is being represented than the sets would, which have no such background. To answer this question about representation and the communicated preconceptions I will firstly answer the following sub questions: "In what sense is the catalogue different from the physical set?", "How is the spatiality and structure of the city represented in LEGO and what preconceptions does that communicate?" and "How are the social dynamics, like race, age and gender, of the city represented in LEGO catalogues and what preconceptions does that communicate?".

The data I will use to answer the research question are the catalogues that LEGO publishes every summer and winter¹ to introduce customers to the new products. These catalogues will give an overview of all the products. In the catalogues the sets are often presented both individually and in a bigger picture with several sets together. This will give a good impression of what a city should look like. Analysing just the sets would give information about what should be in a city according to LEGO, but not what it should look like necessarily. A disadvantage of the catalogues is that they are produced for marketing purposes and that the goal of these catalogues is to make people want to buy the products that are in it, which is less so the case for the physical sets. This will be kept in mind during the observations.

¹ This has been the case since 2001. Before that time a catalogue was published once a year.

I will analyse all the catalogues from 1978 onwards, because that will show the changes that have been applied to the concept of the LEGO city and what changes the creators of the sets felt were necessary to create the ideal city. The name of LEGO City was introduced in 2005 (“City”, n.d.), but I want to investigate the previous product lines as well. Firstly, because there are quite some similarities between LEGO City and its predecessors and secondly, because that allows for a larger time span to be analysed, making the results of the analysis more representative.

The first chapter in this thesis will consist of a theoretical framework that focuses on the city and on the social aspects of the city. Moreover, in this chapter I will give a short history of the LEGO toys and, more specifically, of LEGO City. Besides that, in this chapter I will investigate the role and importance of toys and I will explain what affordances are and how they are relevant for this study. Finally, in this chapter I will elaborate on the methodology.

The second chapter is a case study that will compare a physical LEGO set with its representation in the catalogue. As said, this study is geared towards the visual and textual representations of the sets and not so much on the physical sets themselves, but those physical sets are still very important, since they are the ones that children play with. Therefore the difference between the actual physical set and its representation in the catalogue is one that cannot be ignored. I will explore the relation between these in a short case study and will answer the first sub question: “In what sense is the catalogue different from the physical set?”,

The third chapter will be dedicated to the sub question “How is the spatiality and structure of the city represented in LEGO and what preconceptions does that communicate?” Important in this chapter will be what kinds of buildings can be seen in the LEGO City, how they are presented in the catalogue and how space is produced in these catalogues.

The fourth chapter then will deal with the social aspects of the city and will give an answer to the following sub question: “How are the social dynamics, like race, age and gender, of the city represented in LEGO catalogues and what preconceptions does that communicate?”. I will mainly focus on the role of race, age and gender in this chapter and the diversity thereof in the city. The minifigures will thus be very important in this part of the



Figure 1: Towns Person City (Classic Towns Person). (no date). Retrieved from: <http://www.theminifigurestore.co.uk/shop/towns-person-city-classic-towns-person/#prettyPhoto>

research. Minifigures are the small dolls that belong in the LEGO world and which bear a lot of resemblance to humans and human-like dolls (see Figure 1)².

² In this thesis I will talk about minifigures as if they were human beings.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework and methodology

Firstly, in this chapter I will focus on the toyness of LEGO, because LEGO is in the first place a toy and that may have implications for how the preconceptions about the city are communicated. Moreover, this chapter will entail a review of the literature on the city, because when talking about representation of the city, it is necessary to first study what other theoreticians have written about the city and what it exactly is or can be. Both the structural and social elements will be discussed in this chapter. After that, I will discuss LEGO in greater detail and connect it with the theories on the city and on toys. This chapter will be concluded with an explanation of the method that will be used during this research.

§1.1 The role of the toy

It is important not to forget that LEGO is in the first place a construction toy that children can play with, and therefore it is important to discuss the toyness of LEGO into some greater detail. Toys are an important part of the childhood, because as Sandberg and Vuorinen argue, they are “prominent in children’s memories of play” (2008, p136). Playing with toys became a real part of the life of Western children only since the end of the nineteenth century, before which children were supposed to work and help out in the household. Thrift (2003, p.394) gives reasons why the toy exploded and children started to have so many toys. Firstly, Thrift says, it is because toys were linked to mass media, which is very obvious within the products of LEGO and which is probably one of the reasons why LEGO has been popular for so long. Another argument that Thrift gives and that has to do with the first one is that adults are no longer needed to help make sense of the toys, since the toys started to become parts of fantasy worlds that can be purchased, be it as a whole or in smaller packages, which again very much applies to LEGO, which has several product lines that are based entirely on a fantasy world that can be explored or that children know from movies or games for example. Finally, Thrift (2003, p.395) argues that toys are nowadays seen as something that children can play with as well, rather than only learn from, although toys still play a great role in teaching children certain values.

Lauwaert speaks about toys from the 19th and 20th century, but her claim applies to toys from the 21st century as well: “These toys mimicked the changing world in their miniature versions of technological wonders [...] and brought these changes into the home” (2009, p.39). Gary Cross (1998, p.20) argues as well that toys used to be a symbol of the

progress that was being made in a society. He speaks about the trains and little machinery that emerged in the 1910's and 1920's and that could be seen in toys as well. However, thanks to the Depression in the 1930's, he writes, toys became less about technological wonders and more about heroes. Toys thus have a strong connection with the society in which they are created and played with, and they are a "cultural icon" and thus represent the culture from which they stem (Brian Sutton-Smith, 1986, p.161). If that is indeed the case, the LEGO catalogues should reflect the city and follow the way in which cities are developing.

There is no doubt that toys have an important part in teaching children something about how the world can be and are generally considered to have an educational role. Rommes, Bos and Oude Geerdink claim that toys are very important for children's learning, because it will teach them "cognitive abilities, social and emotional skills and physical capacities" (2011, p.186). Moreover, children will "learn about societal norms and preferred ways of living in the world" (Rommes, Bos & Oude Geerdink, 2011, p.186) and part of that for Rommes, Bos and Oude Geerdink is learning about gender relations. Rommes, Bos and Oude Geerdink (2011, p.193) mention that the location that a game or toy refers to can also influence the gender roles that are expressed in that toy, since there are a lot of locations that are traditionally associated with specific genders, for example the police station, or the beauty salon. Francis (2010, p.335) argues that a lot about gender roles is said in toys by not showing a lot of women, suggesting that they belong to the periphery. Toys can convey "didactic information" and may teach children something about gender, but also very directly about how to construct a car for example (Francis, 2010, p.328). Francis (2010, p.333) explains that toys are capable of teaching children capabilities that they are not being taught at school. Ozanne and Ozanne (2011, p.265) are even bold enough to claim that toys are a way of preparing children for the future. So what message is conveyed by the LEGO catalogues to the children that play with it about the city and the people in it and what do children thus learn from a toy like LEGO City?

To examine what toys can teach children, it is also helpful to look into Gibson's theory on affordances. Gibson (1979) writes his theory on affordances about animals but his theory is also very fruitful when discussing LEGO and the way in which it communicates a message. Gibson says that "the affordances of the environment are what *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill" (1979, p.127). The word 'affordances' has strong ties with the verb 'to afford', since that is what an affordance does, it affords someone something. For Gibson the most important thing about affordances is that both a subject and its environment play a role. It is precisely that combination that makes that an affordance

cannot be measured according to general standards. On the other hand, an affordance is also not as subjective as a meaning or value. An “affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like” (Gibson, 1979, p.129) Moreover, “it is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour” (Gibson, 1979, p.129). Gibson notes that the environment may be changed, so that it will afford other or more things, which is what man has done with the earth. “An affordance is an invariant combination of variables, and one might guess that it is easier to perceive such an invariant unit than it is to perceive all the variables separately” (Gibson, 1979, p.134). Affordances are even so important and present in this world that Gibson says that one person’s behaviour will afford a certain type of behaviour from another person or animal (1979, p.135). It is important to realize about affordances that they do not change according to men’s needs. Affordances are inherent to the object and one will only recognize them when he needs them.

This theory on affordances can very well be applied to LEGO and it will help understand the different aspects that are part of this study. By studying what affordances the LEGO sets offer the public, it will become clearer what their view is on the city and its people. Moreover, it will become evident what children will learn through playing with these particular LEGO sets and what message about the city is communicated to them through LEGO. It is important to note that I will use the term ‘affordance’ in a slightly more elaborate way than that Gibson did, because I will use affordances also as a possibility that is created by for example a metaphor, thus not only object can provide affordance in the remainder of this thesis.

§1.2 The city

When studying how the city is represented, it is important to have an idea of what the city exactly is and how it can be structured. An important basis for such an exploration of the city can be found in Kostof’s book *The City Shaped* (1991), in which Kostof explores the way that cities have been built and have evolved. The definition that Kostof gives of a city may be simple, but it is a useful starting point: “Cities are amalgams of buildings and people” (1991, p.16), thus a mixture in which both parts of the equation are important. Spengler gives a slightly more elaborate definition of what a city is, namely a place upon which history is built and from which all important things come, like “peoples, states, politics, religion, all arts and all sciences” (Spengler, 1969, p.65). While Spengler’s definition may be very broad and may incorporate a wide variety of elements, and while both authors published more than twenty

years apart, these quotes show that the city is often considered a collection of people, things and ideas and that these are connected. Spengler (1969, p.66) says that a city will feel like a unity, even if there is a lot of diversity in it. A city has a soul that binds everything and which is what makes a city a city (Spengler, 1969, p.66). The idea that a city consists of endless different buildings and people but still seems to be whole is put into a nice simile by Kostof, who says that the city is like a: “machine that must function effectively” (1991, p.16). Therefore, in the end, no matter how many differences there may seem to be in the city, these differences will have to be united to create one city. This idea of the city is one that I would like to test when analysing the representation of LEGO city in catalogues. The LEGO city is a toy and is thus not like an actual city. However, that does not mean that diversity and unity are not still very relevant concepts to use on the LEGO city, since the catalogues might show a lot of diversity, both in terms of buildings and people, or they might not.

The city is not a static entity, and according to Kostof a city is never finished, never at rest: “Thousands of witting and unwitting acts every day alter its lines in ways that are perceptible only over a certain stretch of time” (Kostof, 1991, p.13). He says that there are always all kinds of influences that eventually change the shape of the city as it was once meant. For LEGO this idea is very much present, because of the ease with which the city and its shape can be changed. However, it is of course not the minifigures who are changing the city, but the person playing with it, meaning that the change within a LEGO city is not internal. It is important to realize that even though the change in the LEGO city is always made by human hands, that are not part of the city, the suggestion of internal change and development might very well be present in the catalogue. Moreover, it is possible that these themes are part of the city in the sense that they are part of the story that is being told about the city through the representations in the catalogues.

However, the claim that a city is continuously changing needs to be nuanced, because landmarks and old monumental buildings are an important part of cities as well. Landmarks hardly change in looks over time³, and therefore give a glance into the history of a city. The importance of these landmarks in the city becomes evident in all the LEGO building guides and inspirational books that are supposed to be about building cities, but actually only contain the landmarks that can be found in these cities, for example the previously mentioned book by Warren Elsmore, in which building plans can be found to build for example the Sagrada Familia, Westminster Abbey, the tower of Pisa and Versailles, but not for houses and offices.

³ This does not mean that the role of such a landmark cannot change drastically over time. What was once an actual functioning palace can nowadays be nothing more than a tourist attraction.

Kostof (1991, p.240) narrows it down to buildings that show the power of the people once living in them and ruling the city, be it kings or socialist leaders. This is a very limited view of how buildings mirror the city's history, since old buildings do not necessarily need to remind people of past glory, but can also remind them of dark parts of the city's history.⁴ I want to find out how the process of a city's change is represented in LEGO catalogues, if there are traces of change at all. Moreover, I want to find out if the city is represented with old buildings in it, or whether these have no part in the city, because that tells a lot about the message that is communicated, which might tilt towards progression or towards preservation.

Kostof (1991, p.43) gives a lot of attention to the structure of the city in his book. He sees the city as a pattern, be it thought out up front or naturally and randomly grown together. In the city that is planned, the streets often know a very regular geometry, which is not the case in an unplanned city. Even though Kostof makes a difference between the planned and the unplanned city, he also says that no city can ever be entirely unplanned (1991, p.52). The location and especially the structure of the city is very much dependent of the natural surroundings and circumstances, so there always needs to be some kind of planning. Different natural sites ask for very different ways of building and putting buildings together. In principle there are no natural surroundings when one is playing with LEGO and is creating a city, since this mostly happens inside the house. However, in the catalogues there might definitely be a suggestion of natural surroundings that influences what the city looks like. I am not particularly interested in what exact type of pattern is used in LEGO sets, because Kostof (1991) mentions several, rather, I am interested in whether the city in LEGO catalogues seems to be planned or not. Because when a consumer buys several LEGO City sets, he or she is entirely free to put them together in the way one wants, but there might be a very clear suggestion that is given by LEGO in the catalogues. It is important to note that I will thus use Kostof's notion of a planned city in a different way than he did himself, because that is more fit for this study, since the city in LEGO catalogues is not a real city that has developed over time, but is merely a representation of it.

Kostof's (1991) account on the structure of the city and the way it is planned is not enough when studying the suggestion of space, because it is very limited and stays on a rather shallow level. Therefore, it is useful to take a closer look at Merrifield's (1993) theory on space. Merrifield discusses Lefebvre's theory on space and place and offers a good starting

⁴ Artist Zbigniew Libera created a concentration camp out of LEGO bricks to show that LEGO can indeed be used for anything. Not just peaceful or fantastical scenes, but horrible ones as well. See also: http://raster.art.pl/gallery/artists/libera/libera_lego.htm

point for understanding these concepts, although he does not clearly define them, but mainly places them in a relation to one another. Merrifield wants to go further than a dualism like that of Descartes and argues for a more dialectic view on space. He explains that a place can be seen as a part, on which meaning can be endowed, that operates “over the domain of *space*” (Merrifield, 1993, p.520). He argues that in order to understand both of these concepts it is important to realize that they are always in relation to one another, which he illustrates with the following sentence: “The space of the whole thus takes on meaning through place; and each part (i.e. each place) in its interconnection with other parts (places) engenders the space of the whole” (Merrifield, 1993, p.520). Place and space should not be seen apart, “since they are both embodied in material processes – namely, real human activities” (Merrifield, 1993, p.520), “place is wherever everyday life is *situated*. And as such, place can be taken as *practiced space* [original italics]” (Merrifield. 1993, p.520).

Merrifield comes up with a conceptual triad of space, to make the different levels on which space functions clear. This triad which exists of representations of space, representational space and spatial practices. Representations of space consist of a space that is abstract and conceptualized. It is the space that planners, architects, geographers etcetera use. The representational space then “is directly lived space, the space of everyday life. It is space experienced through the complex symbols and images of its ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (Merrifield, 1993, p.523). Finally, spatial practices have to do with perceived space and are about deciphering space in a way, so the actual usage of space, for example the way you walk to work. Merrifield admits that Lefebvre is not entirely clear on how these three levels of dealing with space interrelate which each other, but it is evident that all three are necessary when analysing any kind of space or spatial practice, or the suggestion of it, as is the case in the LEGO catalogues, which is why I will use Merrifield’s triad of space during the analyses.

De Certeau (2007), who gives another view on the space in the city, which will help understand the way in which the photos for the catalogue are taken and how that affects one’s view on the LEGO city. He argues that there is a city that is the everyday city, in which everybody walks, and the city that can for example be seen from the top of a high building or on Renaissance paintings. It is a city that is shown through a perspective that is not available for everyday man. This division between the city seen from above and as if one is walking through it has great influence on how the city is perceived and is without a doubt something that is very relevant for the catalogues, because one is not walking through the LEGO city, but sees a representation of it, so the image of the city is strongly mediated and it will be interesting to study what perspective the catalogue’s viewer is allowed.

All of these theorists attach great value to the experience of space and the way in which it is brought to purpose, which is a refreshing take on space that allows for more depth of the concepts instead of just focussing on the more literal take on space that Kostof took by investigating how cities are built and according to which patterns. I want to investigate what type of space LEGO shows in its catalogues. Does it show the city from above or does it feel like you are walking through the city? The notion of lived space is particularly relevant in the case of LEGO, because LEGO has the freedom to represent the city and its space in the way that they want, and can thus choose what type of space can be seen by the customer.

After having explored space in a more global way, it is useful to discover how the LEGO city is structured, because the LEGO city is not just a place, but it is made up out of several elements. Lynch's theory on the city will prove very useful, because he gives a very clear account of the different elements in a city that play a role when cognitively mapping it. Lynch (1960) divides the city into five elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks, which he bases on the idea that everybody has got their own idea of a city, but there is also the general idea of the city in which those personal pictures fit. The paths are "the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally or potentially moves" (Lynch, 1960, p.47). People observe the city while they move through it, Lynch says, which is why these paths are so important in their picture of the city. The edges then, "are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity" (Lynch, 1960, p.47). They are important in one's picture of a city, because they help organize it. Edges "are uniting seams, rather than isolating barriers" (Lynch, 1960, p.65). Another way in which some people organize the city is through districts. "Districts are the medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters "inside of", and which are recognizable as having some common, identifying character" (Lynch, 1960, p.47). The fourth element that Lynch describes are the nodes, which are "points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is travelling" (Lynch, 1960, p.47). And finally there are landmarks, which "are another type of point-reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain" (Lynch, 1960, p.48). These landmarks are often used as points of direction. Lynch (1960) notes that in practice none of the elements are solitary. For someone a road may be a path, but for someone else it might be an edge. Moreover, it depends on the scale of the area, whether it is a node or a district for example. Clear cut categorisations as the one that Lynch uses are always problematic, because

in practice not everything found in the city will be able to fit into these categories. Despite that, a categorisation like this is a good starting point for analysing the LEGO city, because it will give some structure to the observations. Moreover, the toy city is not as complex as a real city, which will probably make Lynch's theory easier applicable.

The city is not just composed of buildings; there are people in it as well. It is therefore important to examine those social aspects of the city. Balshaw and Kennedy state that a city can only be a city when there is difference and diversity in it, and they quote Aristotle by saying that "similar people cannot bring a city into existence" (2000, p.12). Archer and Yamashita (2003) also state that the city is a multicultural environment. Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke (2009, p.38) give several examples of the people that they feel have an important place in the city, where diversity is accepted. First of all, there are more and more young people coming to the city: "young urban professionals", people with "dual income [and] no kids yet", or "dual-career families" (Jarvis, Cantor & Cloke, 2009, p.40). Another important part of the city's population for Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke (2009, p.42) consists of gay people. Although these are the most important population groups for Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke (2009), it must not be forgotten that they are not the only population groups in the city and might not even be the biggest part of city's population.

The diversity in the city for Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke (2009, p.106) can also be based on the city as a global city and its relation to the rest of the world, which is connected with the multiculturalism in the city which LaVeist and Bell McDonald (2002) have written about. They note that "Although inner-city neighbourhoods [...] are grossly segregated by race, predominantly white and predominantly black inner-city areas may cluster together in close proximity and by virtue of their compounded disadvantage have similar characteristics" (LaVeist & Bell McDonald, 2002, p.833). LaVeist and Bell McDonald argue that people with different racial backgrounds will interact with each other, "willingly or unwillingly, over resources and institutions common to them all" (2002, p.833). They thus hold the opinion that in cities, people of different races will not be too keen on living in racially mixed environments but will most probably live together with the other people that are of the same race. However, there are certain institutions and resources that the people of all the races need to use together and over which they will have to interact with each other, whether they want to or not.

Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke correctly argue that "cities functions as keys in the production, consumption and reproduction of gendered norms and identities" (2009, p.1). "At the same time", they say, "cities are themselves shaped by the gendered embodiment and

social reality of daily routines – at home, in public, and on the move” (Jarvis, Kantor & Cloke, 2009, p.1). That is why it is so important to take a closer look at the gender roles that are portrayed in the LEGO prospectuses; there is a two-way traffic in terms of producing and consuming gender roles in the city.

When talking about gender roles, it is interesting to employ Wolff’s (1985) insights, because he addresses the position of women in the city, by claiming that until the eighteenth century the city and the public domain in general was the territory of men. When women started to be accepted in the city, their experience of it was different than the experience of men. Wolff notes that “the establishment of the department store in the 1850s and 1860s provided an important new arena for the legitimate public appearance of middle-class women” (1985, p.44). Pollock makes it clear that for men it was perfectly fine to move around between the different types of spaces in society, but for women that was not the case, they actually only belonged in the domestic sphere and stepping outside of that would mean a decline in womanhood and would entail all others kinds of risk (1988, p.68). For men, going out in public was a way to escape his daily life, to become invisible in a way, while for women it was a way to scandalize herself (1988, p.69). This was a long time ago and times have without a doubt changed, but that does not mean that it is still relevant to see how LEGO represent the role of the woman in the city; more like that of the woman we see in the city today or of the woman that Wolff and Pollock describe. It is important to keep realizing that the things that the female or male minifigures in the catalogues are not doing can say just as much about the gender roles as the things that they are doing.

It is clear that there are several social aspects in the city that are part of the message of the ideal city that LEGO communicates. I will therefore study the LEGO City sets and find out how diverse the LEGO city is, in terms of race, age and gender, and how the different groups in LEGO City are situated in relation to each other, if there is a form of mixing or not all. Moreover, the role of gender will be studied, in terms of what different genders do in the sets, where they are located and with which gender they are interacting.

§1.3 LEGO

It is also important to know with what kind of toy is being dealt here and what relevant studies have been done on the topic. LEGO was founded in 1932 by the Danish Ole Kirk Kristiansen. At first, the company made all kinds of wooden products like stools and other furniture, and toys were just one of the products that they made (Mortensen, 2012, January 9b). The name LEGO, which comes from the Danish words for ‘play well’, was adapted by the company in 1934 (Mortensen, 2012, January 9b). The wooden toy developed into a plastic brick and in 1958 the brick as we know it today was introduced (Mortensen, 2012, January 9b). The small company grew into a huge one that had a 13% revenue growth in 2014 and has made 7.0 billion DDK profit in that same year (The LEGO Group, 2014). *The Telegraph* has given a couple of numbers about the LEGO company that make it clear how big this company is and thus how important it is to study what they do and which message they convey. Apparently, every second there are 7 LEGO sets sold around the world (The Telegraph, 2011, 30 August). These LEGO sets are sold in 130 countries all over the world and children around the world together play over 5 billion hours with LEGO each year (The Telegraph, 2011, 30 August). This ‘around the world’ may be a bit exaggerated though, since LEGO is only available through official shops for people in Europe, the United States and Canada. There are no official stores in Latin America, Asia or Africa, nor does LEGO ship products from the web shop there (“LEGO Shop”, 2015).

LEGO City was introduced under that name in 2005, after its predecessor LEGO World City had been discontinued (“City”, n.d.), although in Dutch catalogues there has been mention of LEGO City as early as 1999, because the 2005 introduction was a reintroduction of the product line. This LEGO World City was a subtheme of the LEGO Town line (“World City”, n.d.), which in its turn was introduced in 1978 (Lipkowitz, 2009, p.50). LEGO City knows several subthemes that have to do with for example the airport, police, and construction (“City”, n.d.). It must be noted that LEGO Town was called LEGO Legoland in the Dutch catalogues and that the city-themed sets got their own name in 1986, when its full name was LEGO Legoland Miniland⁵. Before that time, the sets were simply part of LEGO Legoland, which had subthemes like Trains, Boats and the Middle Ages.

There has been a lot of research on LEGO, but in most of those cases, LEGO itself is not the subject of the study, but it is used to study something else, for example how DNA

⁵ In this thesis sometimes abbreviated to LEGO Miniland

functions, or how LEGO teaches children about creative construction, and helps develop their spatial skills or it is used in behaviour studies (see for example Mann 2001, Coxon 2012). Studies that do focus on LEGO itself, focus mainly on LEGO as a company, on the combination of digital and physical that is present with LEGO (see for example Smith 2011) but there has not been much attention for the actual sets and the catalogues and the themes that are covered in those sets and catalogues.

Lauwaert (2009) has done an insightful study on LEGO, which does focus on the products and the content, rather than solely on the company as an organization. She argues that from the 1990's onwards, LEGO has made a shift in terms of what their toys are supposed to be about; the main point used to be creativity, designing and construction, but now narratives have been pushed more to the front and role playing plays a much bigger role than it used to, which is shown by the cooperation that LEGO has with countless films, games etcetera from Western popular culture (Lauwaert, 2009, p.59). Since 2005, Lauwaert (2009) claims, there has been a tendency within LEGO to give a bigger role to construction in their sets again. This development that Lauwaert describes might have a big influence on the catalogues and the way in which the city is represented in the periods that Lauwaert distinguishes. It is very likely that in times where construction was central to LEGO toys, the space in the catalogues was mostly a representation of space, while in times where narratives were central to the LEGO toys, there might have been an emphasis on the spatial practices. This might even have an effect on the way that the LEGO city is photographed: from high in the air, or from one of the streets in the city. I will examine whether the shifts that Lauwaert describes are visible in the catalogues as well, and what that means for vision on the city that LEGO communicates.

§1.4 Methodology

I want to go deeper into LEGO instead of studying it as a company that has developed and adapted itself to developments in the field of media and I want to study LEGO as a toy, as products that children engage with and as a product that helps children learn about the world around them. It is therefore that I focus on the representations of the city in the free catalogues that LEGO distributes every year. It must be noted that I will analyse representations of sets that have to do with the modern city, so sets that include castles or other historical scenes that might be seen as some kind of predecessor of the modern city, will not be included in the analysis.

In the previous paragraphs I have studied several texts on the city, the social aspects of the city and the importance of the toy and I have mentioned several questions that were inspired by those texts and theories. These questions will be the focal points of my analysis, but they are not restrictive. The way I will collect my results is by opting for an open unstructured observation of the material (Baarda, 2009, p.95). I will observe the pages dedicated to LEGO City and its predecessors and in each catalogue and write down how the city is presented and which indications are given for that. The reason for choosing such a fairly loose framework to work with during the analysis, is so that nothing that could possibly be interesting gets filtered out. The theories discussed in the previous paragraphs will guide my analysis, both on purpose and unknowingly, and will offer a lens through which the material that I am studying will be argumentatively processed.

I will analyse the catalogues that have been published by LEGO each year. LEGO releases these catalogues to present the entire collection and to bring the new products to the attention of possible consumers. I will start analysing catalogues from the year 1978 onwards, since that is the first year that LEGO Town, or LEGO Legoland in the Netherlands as it was called in the Netherlands, was introduced. I have chosen not to start with LEGO City, because the development and change over the years might provide some striking results. Moreover, such a wide range of data allows for more funded generalizations to be made. The theme Legoland also entailed subthemes like space but I will only study the pages that cover the main theme LEGO Legoland, or later on LEGO City.

I do not own all the catalogues that have been published over the past 38 years and will therefore have to rely on online databases. On www.brickfactory.info the catalogues from 1978 until 2011 can be found⁶. In order to find catalogues of the later years, I will have to rely on other digital sources, for example the official LEGO website, which features some of the most recent catalogues. This does mean that I will not be studying the actual paper catalogues, but their digital representations. I will study the catalogues that appeared in the Netherlands as much as possible. Whenever a Dutch catalogue is not available for a certain year, I will study the catalogue for the country that is geographically the nearest to the Netherlands, for example Belgium or Germany, or a catalogue that was released to all of Europe. When there is no Dutch full catalogue available I will choose the big European catalogue over the small

⁶ The website www.brickfactory.info will appear as one reference in the list of references. The catalogues that were not found on this website will be mentioned individually, but all the catalogues that were found on www.brickfactory.info are listed under one reference.

country-specific catalogues for the simple reason that such a catalogue will provide more information.

Chapter 2: The physical and its representation

In this chapter I will examine the digital representation of a physical set and the way it is represented in the catalogue to answer my first sub question: “In what sense is the catalogue different from the physical set?”. It is important to compare these two ways of representing the set, because there are some very important differences between them that may have implications for the way in which the city is represented in the catalogues. Most importantly, the actual physical set may give a lot more information about the set than small pictures in a catalogue will, which must be kept in mind when drawing conclusions from these representations. Moreover, building a physical set may contribute to a large extent to the suggestion of space, which may be lost in the set’s representation in the catalogue. Besides that, narrativity is a concept that plays an important role here, because in the catalogue there is most likely a lot more narrative context for the set than there is for the physical edition of the set. At least in the sense, that for the physical set the narrative has to be created by the child, or adult, constructing the set. I have selected the set in the Dutch LEGO catalogue that was published for the first half of 2015. It must be noted that I do not have access to the physical set and will have to do with pictures and building instructions that were found online on the official LEGO website and reviews of the set on YouTube.

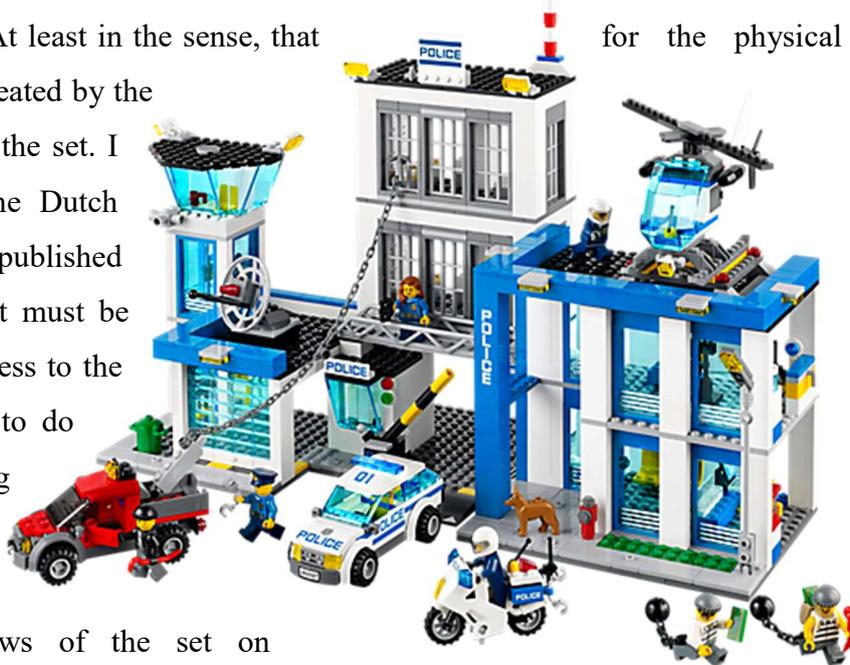


Figure 2. [LEGO Police Station 60047]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 2014. Retrieved from lego.com. Copyright by LEGO.

The set that I have chosen is the LEGO City Police Station with set number 60047 (see Figure 2).

The set was released in 2014 and is marketed for children between the ages of 6 and 12 (“60047 Police Station”, n.d.). The set contains 7 minifigures, four of which belong to the police and three of which are criminals, plus one police dog. Beside the actual police station itself, which includes offices and cells, the set contains several police vehicles: a car, a helicopter and a motorbike. A tow truck belonging to the criminals is also included. Again, there is no access to an actual physical edition of this set, but there is access to other, smaller

sets that belong to LEGO city, which also give some information about the feel of LEGO pieces in general and other elements that cannot be seen or experienced in the catalogue alone.

§2.1 The physical set

I will begin with an elaborate description of the physical set, which I will base on pictures that are published on the LEGO website, building instructions that are also featured on the website and several YouTube videos and reviews of the set. The set is three stories high and is divided into three parts. The set is very open and one can access the inside of the police station from the back, while certain places can also be accessed from the sides. On the most left side of the station is a garage, where the police car can be parked. Above the garage are a control tower and a satellite-like device. The ground floor of the middle part is fairly open with only an office window and it houses the reception of the station. Above this reception room there are two stories of cells. The last part is the biggest one and features two stories of what appear to be offices on top of which the landing place for the helicopter is situated.

There are several channels on YouTube that do reviews of LEGO and other construction toys and whose videos give detailed information about the sets. One of those You Tubers is a user who goes by the name of JANGBRiCKS, who does quite a lot of reviews of LEGO sets and has also reviewed the 60047 Police Station (JANGBRiCKS, 13 December 2013). JANGBRiCKS shows that the office part of the police station is very open, both on the side and on the back. The lower part of the office is a waiting space, where according to JANGBRiCKS civilians can come in and do whatever business they have with the police. The upper office can be used for taking mug shots of the criminals and other administration duties. In the cell block, JANGBRiCKS shows that not only can the toilets be used to escape, but there is also secret storage room inside the beds, where the criminals could hide stuff like a crowbar to try and escape. Another way to escape that JANGBRiCKS shows, is by using the tow truck. A couple of the barred windows are designed to be easily taken out of the wall, so that a very well planned escape can be executed. The final section of the set is the garage with the control tower. The door of the garage can be opened up, so that the police car can be parked there. JANGBRiCKS concludes his review by stating that this sets has a very high level of playability, thanks to the different escapes that can be played out in the set, and that most of the kids will most probably enjoy this set very much, which is confirmed by the review of The Brick Show, which is another reviewing channel on YouTube, and whose

reviewer places the vehicles and minifigures on different places than JANGBRiCKS did and mention different purposes for the rooms in the police station (The Brick Show, 10 December 2013). Not only do these reviews show all the different possibilities that this set has and the secret trap doors for example, they also show that this one set can be used in several different ways, since both the reviewers come up with different functions for some of the elements of the set. It has thus become clear that the physical set leaves room for different nuances in the narrative that is created around the set, more so than a catalogue would, even for a set like this that is fairly straightforward.

§2.2 The catalogue

Now I will turn to the question how LEGO has represented this set in their catalogue. The whole new collection is presented in this booklet, for children between the ages of 1.5 to 16 years old. In this catalogue numerous product lines are presented, varying from LEGO City to LEGO Minecraft and from LEGO DUPLO to MINDSTORMS, which serves to show Lauwaert's (2008) thesis that LEGO has diversified its products.

The first thing that catches the eye when looking at the two pages containing the police related sets, is that a lot is going on in the city. On the left there are tons of sets presented together and slightly mixed up with each other. On the right, the sets are presented individually and they are separated from each other with thick lines. The backdrops of these sets are blue with green, showing the grass, the sky, and the skylines, which contain a lot of high buildings. Firstly, I will describe how the set is presented individually, and then I will elaborate on the representation of the set in combination with other sets. The police station is situated on the side of the road, on which no other traffic can be seen. Behind the police station, a lot of grass is present and the other buildings seem to be miles away, since we can only see their outlines in the skyline. The air is nice and blue in this photo. The photo of the police station seems to be taken from a bit lower than the ground level of the police station, making it look very big and impressive. The fact that the picture is not taken right in front of the police station but more on its right side, makes that it looks smaller lengthwise than it actually is. Moreover, the office part of the police station looks emptier in this picture in the catalogue than it will turn out to be once having purchased the set. The set is depicted with all the minifigures and vehicles that are included in the set, even the dog. The police car is just driving away from the station and the motorcycle can be either just arriving as well as just leaving which goes for the helicopter as well, that hovers closely over the roof of the building.

The tow truck is clearly moving away and since the hook that is attached to the truck is also attached to one of the barred walls of the cell, this wall is taken down, giving the criminal inside of it an escape route. Movement in this picture is suggested by using two very light white stripes next to the object that is supposed to be moving, so the tow truck and its chain, the dog, and one of the criminals that is already on the street and far away from his cell. In a red box, it is noted that this set has a new escape-function.

This small representation of the set has a small drawing of a LEGO stud in it, which means that it can be scanned using the 3D Catalogus App. When doing this, an animation of the set appears on top of the catalogue and one needs to turn the phone a little bit to see the whole animation. A lot is going on in that animation: the tow truck is seen pulling away the prison wall, the helicopter is descending, the police car is driving out of the garage, and the motorbike is seen driving around the station. All the minifigures are moving as well: the female police officer is seeing moving wildly when she realizes that one of the inmates is trying to escape, the dog is jumping up and down, the crook that is still in his cell is waving his arms around, and so is the inmate that has escaped from the cell on the upper floor. Even the satellite is moving around. This little animation even hints at the outcome of the escape, because the tow truck is seen driving around the building and driving into the cop on the motorbike, which was also driving around the building. The animation is not just things moving around, but making sounds as well: the sirens can be heard clearly, and so is the barking of the dog. There are also sounds that are probably caused by the moving of the garage door and the breaking away of the cell wall and the creaking noise of a device like a walkie-talkie can be heard.

The set is also placed within a larger context in the catalogue. On the left page of the two pages dedicated to the LEGO City police themed sets, a lot of the sets are situated next to each other. The police station is situated in the left bottom corner of the page and is on the front of what we can see of the city. Other things that are visible in the city are a harbour, what seems to be a factory, some houses, a mobile police station and a rural area where the criminals appear to have their headquarters and several vehicles, like a police helicopter, a police boat etcetera. Everything that is happening in this part of the city revolves around trying to catch the criminals. When comparing this big mix of all the sets with their individual photographs, it turns out that all the sets in the big picture are not that mixed up, but the elements of the different sets have stayed close together. As for the 60047 police station, all the minifigures and vehicles that belong to this set are very close to the actual police station.

Furthermore, the photograph showing all the sets has several text balloons, like the ones seen in comic books. There is one minifigure that could belong to either the 60047 police station or the mobile police station truck, who is saying that one of the crooks has escaped from the prison. There is another text balloon, which contains words that are being spoken by a drawing of a minifigure which does not belong to the scenes in the photograph. This mark-up balloon refers viewers of the catalogue to a website where they can see more action. When going to this website, the visitor will control a minifigure and will be able to walk across the different themes within LEGO City and can play games there, as well as watching and creating small LEGO movies. It takes too far to analyse this whole website, but it is important to note that the website offers even more narrative context to the set than the catalogue already did and makes a great effort to involve the player and visitor of the website in the city.

§2.3 Comparison

The catalogue is in the first place meant to introduce possible customers to the new sets and trying to tempt them to buy one of the sets, or maybe even several. This analysis has showed that that is not the only purpose of these catalogues, but that they serve to contextualize the sets. Since the sets are not only presented, but mixed up with each other and furnished with texts and references to websites and apps where the sets will come to life, it must be concluded that the catalogue places the sets into a narrative and gives the customer very clear directions on how to play with the set and which sets to buy with it in order to have the ultimate playing experience. These relations with other sets and the place within an entire world are not clear when looking only at the individual set itself. On the other hand, the catalogue does not give all the information about the set that there is. It is for example not visible what the back of the police station looks like and what can be done in that area of the set. Moreover, from the catalogue alone it does not become clear how the police station feels, like plastic. The LEGO bricks are a lot smoother than actual bricks would be. Moreover, a representation of the set does not show the ease with which the vehicles can be moved around, or the ease with which the limbs and heads of the minifigures can be moved around. Finally, the catalogue shows only one angle of the building, which causes for only several details of the set to be clearly visible. The details at the other sides of the building are not visible for the viewer of the catalogue. The physical set on the other hand allows the player to see the building in a close-up and from the sides, thus as if the minifigures would see it when walking through the city. The catalogue gives a context to the set and creates an entire LEGO reality

for the sets, which consists of hills and woods, things that are not present in a child's room. The physical set is played with in a room where the floor and the walls and the other toys that might be scattered around the room remind the child that there is a world outside of the LEGO. What the physical set offers the child is the physical and phenomenological experience of building the sets, or tearing them apart. The catalogues do not offer that experience or even hint at it, even though this is an important part of the experience of playing with LEGO.

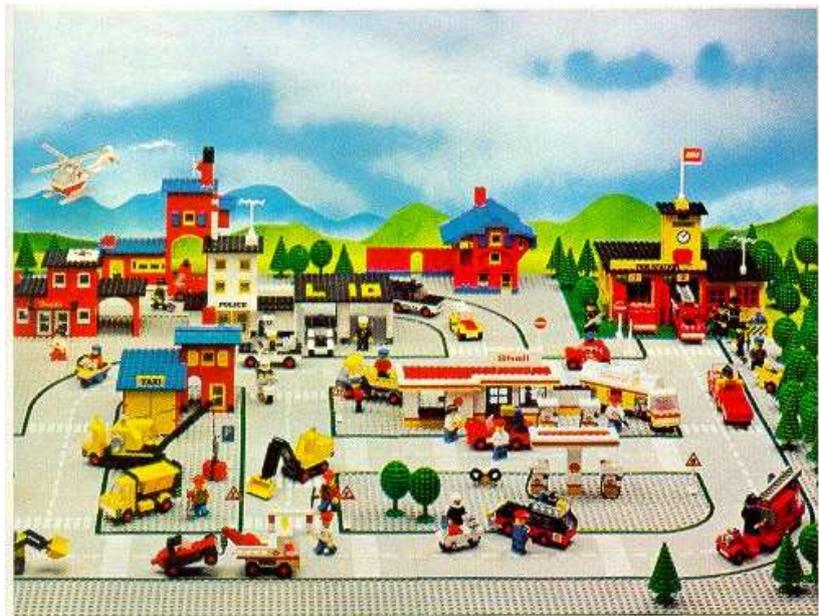
Therefore, the catalogue is absolutely different from the physical set, since it lacks some information and possibilities that the physical set does offer, but on the other hand, it provides a context and a narrative for the set that might stir the imagination of the one buying and playing with the set, and that context is less present in the actual physical set. The physical sets tell more about the affordances of the set itself, while the catalogue shows the affordances of the sets combined and the universe in which they belong or that they do not officially belong to, but that might be very appealing to the customer. Lauwaert (2009) spoke about two important concepts that are present in LEGO and how narrativity has been important in a certain period, while construction having been important in another period. When comparing the physical set with the catalogue in which it is represented, it becomes clear that these two concept of narrativity and construction are not just alternating and that one is not per se more important than the other. Rather, these two elements of LEGO are working together and complete each other. The physical sets are in the first place based on construction and on building, but a set like the 60047 Police Station is for an important part also based on narrativity, because there is a story that belongs to the set. The catalogue however, offers a lot more narrativity because it places the sets in a context with other sets and places them against a background, in which the viewer gets a closer look at the different representations of space, the triad of space that Merrifield (1993) explains, which gives the narrative more depth and more layers. In the catalogue the child sees suggestions for how to use the space and the different spatial practices within that space that is represented within the catalogue. The physical set however, will transform that conceived space into a lived space when the child starts playing with the set and organizes the buildings to his or her own likings. It is thus important to keep in mind that the catalogue has a higher amount of guidance, it gives more explicit suggestions about what the city should look like than the physical sets do. The physical sets leave more room for the own interpretation of the child than the catalogues do.

Chapter 3: Spatiality in LEGO catalogues

This chapter is dedicated to the following sub question: “How is the spatiality and structure of the city represented in LEGO and what preconceptions does that communicate?”. In this chapter I will observe the catalogues for each year and present the results of my analysis in a chronological order and will give attention to the changes that can be seen in the course of the passing years. It is important to note that my main focus will be on the photographs in the catalogue that feature a combination of the sets, instead of the individual sets, because these overview pictures, as I will call them, often show a suggestion of a city and contain more than just the sets, but also a background and they give information about the suggested relation between the sets.

§3.1 The 70's

The first catalogue that is part of this study is the one that was published in 1978. The sets that are presented in this catalogue are not named according to their themes, but they are organized according to it. Almost all the sets are presented individually, without also being presented in a larger photograph. There is only one image that features more sets together, which can be seen in Figure 3.⁷ There are various subjects found among the sets: several types of houses, sets with a couple of minifigures, a lot of vehicles, and buildings like a doctor's



Met deze nieuwe straatplaten wordt je eigen LEGOLAND compleet.

Figure 3. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 1978. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

⁷ The figures that are taken from catalogues will not be separately mentioned in the list of references, since the websites on which these catalogues were consulted, are already mentioned there.

office, a barber's shop, a fire station and a gas station. The picture where some of the sets are presented in the context of a city is meant to promote the street plates that can be used to design and build an entire city, which is shown by the caption of the picture, which states the following: "These new street plates will make your LEGOLAND complete (my translation)". This causes the city to look very spacious and well organized with a lot of room for the minifigures and their vehicles to move around. The background of the photo is a bright blue sky and green hills and trees, which does not give away much information about a real life equivalent of the location of the city. The photo is taken from rather far away and the sets are thus only seen from one angle and that angle leaves out a lot of details and certainly does not make the reader of the catalogue feel like he or she is part of the city, which, as De Certeau (2007) argues, would have been the case if the picture looked like as if it was taken by one of the minifigures. That would have given a view on the city that is available to the regular citizens, but a picture taken like this, from far away, gives a more panoptic view of the city and according to De Certeau (2007) that means that we merely see a representation of the city, and are not clasped by it.

In 1979, there are not as many houses in the catalogue anymore, but there are a lot of small vehicles that have to do with the police, the fire department, the hospital and the gas station, which suggests that safety and infrastructure are a big part of the LEGO city and communicating that these aspects are important in the city and that, for example, the police is a natural and necessary presence in the city. The street plates are clearly visible and definitely form the basis of the city, since all the buildings and vegetation are placed alongside the roads, with a fair distance between the road and the building. The paths, in Lynch's sense, are the most important part of the city in this catalogue, but they only allow the minifigures to move through and observe the city that way, because the reader of the catalogue does not move through the streets, but only sees the city from above, and is not allowed to see into the city and experience the city in the way that De Certeau (2007) described. Apart from a police and fire station, there are a couple of houses and some small shops. What is striking is the amount of trees and flowers in this image, there are quite a few of them and the fire station is even built upon a field of grass, but despite that the city looks very much planned out, and the natural elements in the city seem to be added in after the streets had been built, because of how well everything fits together. It does convey a positive message about nature, namely that there should be room for it in the city, which is in line with Lefebvre's (2000) claim that nature is making its entrance into the city. This is however before Lefebvre wrote about it and thus foreshadows the development. Merrifield (1993) argues that the representation of space

is the space that for example planners use and is a conceptual space. It can be argued that the catalogue is a conceived space, because it offers a scenario, a possible way of ordering space, but it is up to the customers to make an actual space out of it and to differ from what was suggested by the LEGO employees who created the catalogue. The catalogue hardly offers insight in how people use the space and what it means to them, because it gives too little information about the users of the space in order to understand their spatial practices.

The image of the city that LEGO offers in these first years is one of a city that is structured and where great value is attached to structure and safety. Moreover, LEGO communicates a certain respect for the natural surroundings of the city. The city is still very much something to look at, and from the catalogues it does not speak too clearly that this is a city that the child can become part of, which is for a great deal because the viewer is not allowed to see into the city and experience the tactics of the minifigures, only to look at it.

§3.2 The 80's

The focus of presentation of the city themed sets in the 1980 catalogue is again on the individual sets and thus on showing what kind of products LEGO has to offer its customer. The theme of sets again has mainly to do with the safety in town and the gas supply. The sets that revolve around the house and household have been transferred to a theme called LEGO Dollhouse. This time the overview photo is taken from the front, with the camera peering through a group of trees, rather than from right above it, which gives the viewer the impression that he/she is part of the city, and is able to observe the city from that point, and combines De Certeau's (2007) tactics with Lefebvre's (2000) claim that citizens feel that they have a right to nature. The camera is still placed high enough to see several rows of buildings and to get an overview of the city, but the buildings closest to the camera can be observed with great detail. This allows for a glance into the representational space and the spatial practices, for example the way in which one of the minifigures walk away from a snack bar. There is no official road to the snack bar, but there is some kind of pavement. To see that this pavement is used as a path to the snack bar, shows the representational space, or the actually lived space, within the conceived space that the catalogue as a whole could be considered as. Besides that, the minifigure is not desperately looking for a path to get back to the main road, but simple uses this pavement as his path, which is the deciphering of space, and can thus be called a spatial practice. Since the picture is taken more from within the city than from above it, it is easier to see what all the figures are doing, for example buying a snack or driving their

car. The minifigures are thus doing very everyday things, there is not much exciting going on in the city, to which feel the angle of the camera is contributing, because it allows the viewer to get a close look at the faces of the minifigures, who all have the same generic smile and thus do not radiate any excitement or other extreme emotion.

Besides all the individual photos of sets in the 1981 catalogue, the picture showing a city impression is taking up a large part of the pages that feature the city themed sets. There are a couple of houses on one of the hills, a small hospital and on the highest hill we can see the police station. This accounts for a slightly less organized city than in the catalogues of the previous years and shows a city that has been adapted a bit more to the natural surroundings instead of the other way around. On the ground level the streets are still a very important tool to organize the city, and since the pictures has been taken from a point somewhere on these streets, the reader of the catalogue feels part of the city and can observe the city from these paths.

The 1982 catalogue features a boy putting together street plates. He is not only connecting the street plates, but appears to have built some other sets as well and actually is building an entire city. The fact that a real boy appears in the middle of the sets does take away from the LEGO world that could be created in the catalogue, as if there exists no other world than the LEGO one. Without this photograph the LEGO city would have been another world for the viewer, about which he or she still can learn. The boy interrupts that fantasy by showing that it is not a fantastical other world, but that it is just a toy, that obeys and is formed according to the fantasy of the one playing with it. The streets on these street plates still play an enormous role for the structure of the city, as can be seen by looking at the police station that is built as some kind of bridge, because there is a street running underneath it. There thus seems to be a certain respect for the streets and how they structure the city. The picture that features a general impression of the theme no longer gives an overview, but rather a very small selection of the sets and is more focused on the action in the city. The most important thing in this picture seems to be the helicopter that is flying over the city and that everyone is looking up towards.

Compared to the previous year, there is not that much that changes in the catalogue for 1983, apart from one important difference which has to do with the overview picture. This picture now takes up the whole page and other sets and pictures are printed on top of it, which again slightly takes away the suggestion of an autonomous LEGO world, which exists outside of the 'real' world.

The 1984 catalogue looks a lot more colourful and playful than the previous ones. The pages are no longer white, but yellow or blue for example. The pages often consist of a large photo on top of which the photos of the individual sets have been printed. The background of the first two pages is a close-up shot of the city, where the sky is no longer blue, but yellow,

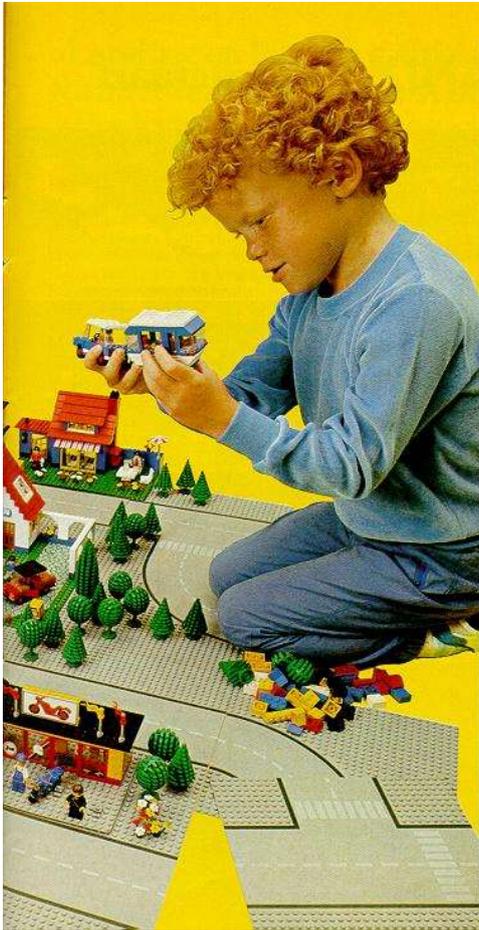


Figure 4. [Excerpt from catalogue].
Reprinted from *LEGO*, 1984. Retrieved from
brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

making the city slightly more unrealistic. What is also new is the use of text balloons in this picture. There are no words in them, thus drawing attention rather than telling a story, which is still done by the photograph. This contributes to creating a LEGO world and it gives a great amount of contextualisation to the sets. Moreover, in this catalogue there are some clear hints present at representational space as Merrifield (1993) explained it, in the form of a minifigure walking on the street, and a police officer parking in a flower bed. Both of these cases clarify in what way the given space is actually used on a day-to-day basis. For the other two pages there is a background of a child playing with the sets and the street plates (see Figure 4). This picture shows a lot less action and is more about the endless possibilities of LEGO, represented by the emptiness of the plates and the pile of bricks that is lying around the boy's feet. The picture of

the boy and the street plates, places the LEGO city in the reality outside of the catalogue and suggest the possibility for the child of having this world of

LEGO in their own play or bed room. This is an entirely different city than the other one in this catalogue, since the city is no longer seen from within, as if the viewer was one of the minifigures and it is thus another way of representing the LEGO city, namely as something that can be played with and that can also belong to the child viewing the catalogue. The angle here is again that of someone who gets to see the entire city, but who does not get to see what is actually going on and how the everyday life looks in the city and the tactics, in De Certeau's (2007) terms, of the minifigures. This can be ascribed to difference in products that need promotion. The photograph that absorbs the viewer by treating him or her as a minifigures is meant to promote the individual sets, and is a technique that has been used in the catalogues for several years in a row. This way of presenting the city gives way to the

imagination of the child, but also allows the parents a glance into the play world and fantasy of their children. The photograph taken from out of the air, on the other hand, is meant to promote the street plates and therefore benefits from a photograph that shows as many street plates and possibilities as possible and that gives an overview of how these street plates might structure the city.

There are several new sets in the 1985 catalogue that have to do with the airport, with transport, and a few have to do with shopping and living. These last themes have not been very present in the city-themed sets of LEGO so far, but it does make a valuable addition to the city, since it allows for a bigger role of the citizens instead of only the police officers. Besides that, it offers the children more possibilities in terms of stories that they can create, and may make it easier for some children to recognize themselves or their family in the city, because of the jobs that their parents have. More themes in the city allows for more jobs and thus a greater variety in the city. The hills on the background picture are not as high as they were in the previous catalogues anymore and there are no buildings or people on them anymore, only trees, which makes the city as a whole look a lot smaller and even more respectful of nature. The angle from which the photo is taken is one of the lowest that has been seen in the catalogues so far, which makes the reader of the catalogue really a part of the LEGO world, especially since the photo is taken somewhere in the very centre of the city. The next two pages are still dedicated to LEGO Miniland, but feature more sets about the transport and the airport. The background, suitably, is an airport, with some houses and a police station in the far background. The airport is very crowded and there are planes and helicopters taking off and touching down. The street plates still play an important role and are used to bring a certain structure to the airport. Again, the point of view is that of a minifigure, which brings the city to life and the viewer might even hold his or her breath for a second when seeing the plane that is taking off and seems to be come close to the one taking this picture. By using this kind of point of view, the catalogue suggest that the city is a place where everyone is welcome, since every viewer of the catalogue, whoever that may be, can get a very intimate view of the city and is allowed to be a part of the activities. Moreover the viewer gets a chance of experiencing the city, or as De Certeau (2007) says, to be clasped by it.

The layout of the 1986 catalogue does not differ that much from the 1985 one: there are again photos of the LEGO city that function as the background of the individual sets, which are still presented against a blue background. The hills in these large pictures are not just background but serve again as foundation for some of the buildings, thus being an important part of the city. Another remarkable difference is found within the inclusion of new

sets. Some of them have themes like emergency services, transport, houses and shops, but there is also a riding school added to the theme, which is another extension of LEGO's idea of what belongs in a city and communicates the idea that leisure is an important part of the city.

Again, there are not that many changes in 1987 compared to the previous catalogue. The large photos of several sets together seem to be getting more and more important, since the photos of individual sets make room for them, making the photos of the individual sets serve as a mere clarification of what is present in this city and thus which parts of it can be bought. Some of the minifigures in the middle of these general impression photos now have text balloons, turning those pictures into a story and definitely placing the sets into a context and into their own world. The text balloons also offer the viewer more opportunity to immerse oneself in the LEGO world, since the viewer now knows what is going on in the city, and gets an impression of what the minifigures are talking about, causing the viewer of the catalogue to have a greater feeling of belonging to that city as well.

In 1988 there is another new development: there are now entire pages dedicated to impression pictures, without photographs of individual sets placed on top of them. There are tons of things happening on these photos and some of the vehicles have lights in them, which makes the pictures very life-like and dynamic. There is an emergency going on in one of the pictures, shown by the police stopping everyone and a fire and police truck driving with their lights on. Despite the possibility of chaos that could come from such an emergency, the city still looks organized, which is due to all the buildings being placed neatly next to each other and with enough space between them to allow for all the people to move around and see what is going on. That feeling of a planned city is also thanks to the point of view of the camera, which is no longer on one of the streets, but from above, as if the photographer is standing on a large building that is still within the city, but is able to provide more of an overview of it, while in previous catalogues the point of view was a lot closer to the actual action. A possible explanation for that is the introduction of light and sound effects to the sets that are portrayed in the catalogue as well. Light is portrayed by large white beams that reach quite far. By giving an overview of the city instead of an intimate view, the power and reach of the light and sound effects can be communicated better to the customer.

The 1989 catalogue shows a very interesting photograph: it seems to be taken by one of the minifigures who must be on a really high increment in the city, maybe a hill, because the rest of the city is really far away and seen from above, which shows very clearly how the city is structured, again mostly by the paths, but offers less detail on what is actually happening in the city. Photographs like this are a privileged view in the sense that they offer a

sight on the city that is not available to everyone, but on the other hand, these photos distance the viewer from the city, it certainly does not help making the viewer part of the city. The viewer had been allowed to be part of the city for several years in row, which probably triggers the viewer's imagination, and therefore as well his/her desire to buy one of the products. The city seems really spacious from so far away with a lot of free space between the buildings. There are several new sets in this catalogue, some of which are very remarkable choices for the city, for example the racing circuit and smaller sets that have to do with racing and even a holiday home, which is not often found in the centre of a city.

In the 1980's the LEGO city is still respectful of nature. Lefebvre (2000) argues that citizens feel that they have a right to nature and this seems to tie in with the presence of nature that is very central to the organizations of the city. This decade is one in which the viewer is very much made part of the city and is able to observe the city like the minifigures, since the photos are often taken from a minifigure's point of view, who is standing on one of the streets, or on a node.

§3.3 The 90's

The 90's are the period in which, according to Lauwaert (2009), LEGO products become more about narrativization and less about construction, which is partly shown by the way in which the sets are presented. As has become clear, narrativization has been part of the LEGO catalogues before that, only in a less obvious way. First of all, the background seems to have become more important than the individual sets, which indicates more attention to the context and the narrative around the sets. But what has undergone an even heavier change is the atmosphere

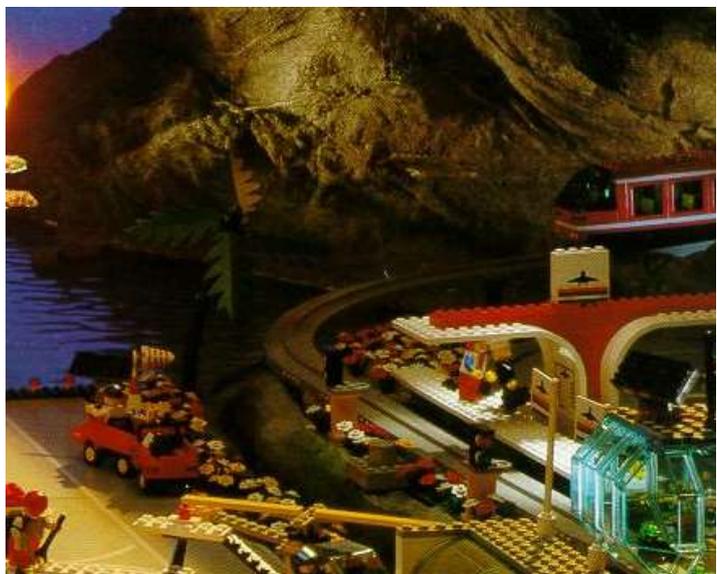


Figure 5. [Excerpt from 1990 catalogue]. Reprinted from LEGO, 1990. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

of these overview pictures. First of all, they are a bit darker than they used to be, creating a sharper contrast with the individual sets. Besides that, the background is no longer composed of merely green hills, but also shows rocks and water that look realistic rather than being

drawn or painted, making the LEGO city look more real and serves as an even stronger contextualization of the sets. The background no longer exist to fill up the pages, but has become a crucial element for creating a coherency between the individual sets and making both the surroundings and the sets equally important in visual terms. The surroundings of the city have been manipulated to make room for the city, which is clearly shown by a road that goes right through the mountains (see Figure 5). This picture shows that traveling has become part of the city, which is a good selling-point for the products, because this image leaves a blank space as to where the train is going, which can be filled in by the children and their imagination, or by other LEGO products. Another change in the city is that a lot of the buildings have several stories, which suggests that there is not enough space for everything on the ground and it was necessary to start building into the air more, which again shows the expansion of the city and connects the narrative of the city with problems in the real world of rapidly growing population and the subsequent housing crisis. Most of the pictures are taken from a point somewhere up in the air, likely to make sure that the photos do not become too chaotic and that the sets are still visible, because the pictures are quite dramatic. On the other hand, there are also a couple of photographs that are taken from a minifigure's point of view and that offer a more detailed view of the events. That way the narrative around the events becomes a bit clearer to the viewer, he or she gets more indications to reconstruct or construct the story that belongs to this image.

In 1991, once again, many things are happening in the city, a lot of which are accidents. For example, there is a collapsing bridge, and the collapsing of what seems to be a construction space where minifigures are being carried away by the ambulance or are still buried underneath the debris. This is an example of the spatial practices that are important in Merrifield's (1993) theory on space and place, because this photograph is about trying to find other solutions and other paths, when the actual paths have failed to exist, which gives an extra layer to the narrative that is used to communicate about the city, namely that nothing in LEGO Legoland is severe enough that people will become paralyzed by panic, which is a relevant message in a children's toy.

What is striking in the 1992 catalogue is that the images of the whole city are a lot less dark and maybe even less dramatic and cinematic than they were in 1990. The camera no longer seems to be in right in the middle of the action, but has taken a step back, giving more of an overview of the city, even though there is still a lot going on. The events seem to be a bit less stressful than in the previous catalogue though. The mountains and the sea are still there, but the sea is a lot calmer, which draws the attention more towards the actual sets,

which eventually is the main goal of such a catalogue. There is another spatial practice visible in this catalogue, which is one of the minifigures sitting on a fence that is not supposed to be sat on, since it separates sea and land from each other. I think this spatial practice serves to show that the minifigures of the LEGO city are involved in their own lives, and are no longer just there to serve as some kind of decoration, as they did in earlier catalogues. On the contrary, spatial practices like these, and a glance at the tactics that are used by the minifigures, give a personality to the minifigure and are part of a story or narrative that can be created around the minifigure.

The slightly lighter colour scheme is still present in the 1993 catalogue, but the



Figure 6. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from LEGO, 1993. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

impression photos have become real action shots again taken from within the city, or in one case from one of the airplanes that is flying high above the city. These photographs tell stories about the sets and show more than just the sets. In fact, on some of the pictures the sets are actually hardly visible (see Figure 6) and it is mostly about the story that is suggested, in this case a story is told of a car racer that is speeding away and bumping into the things. There is also a police car visible speeding, which suggests that they are looking for the car

racer and that the car racer has done something against the laws of the LEGO set. This picture is in line with Lauwaert's (2009) point that narrativity and stories, although she does not specify which ones exactly, start to play a greater role within the products that LEGO brings to the market and the way they are presented to the customers. More importantly, presenting the sets like this makes them very sellable, because this looks like a scene that children will be very eager to re-enact. In one of the general impression pictures there is a lot of action going on, although it is not quite clear what exactly is going on; the fire department and police are involved, as well as the people from the gas station and a car racer. The interesting thing about this picture is that it shows a view that stretches deep into the city: the road, alongside which all the buildings that are present are situated, goes into a vanishing point far away, suggesting a lot of space in this picture, and a space that is very much part of the everyday

city, through which the minifigures observe the city as well. For the first time this year, the background does not exist of only hills and other natural surroundings, or small LEGO houses, but out of very high and large skyscrapers, indicating a clear development in LEGO's idea of what the city looks like, namely like a modern city, in which progress and technological development are appreciated. Moreover, these skyscrapers are very fit to function as landmarks in Lynch's sense, because their size causes them to be able to function as a point of reference from a large part of the city. There are a lot of these skyscrapers and most of them are on the edge of the city, or in the far background, meaning that they serve as a symbolic foundation of the city. Even though the central action and events have not much to do with the skyscrapers, they, and especially the things that happen inside, are important to keep the city functioning and to make sure that it keeps progressing.

These few skyscrapers were only the beginning, because there are already a lot more of them in the 1994 catalogue. Skyscrapers are interesting buildings in any city, because not only do they symbolize technological innovation, but also a certain power and dominance, because humans have found out how to rise above the ground level and are able to place



Figure 7. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from LEGO, 1994. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

themselves literally higher than the rest of the surroundings. This dominance becomes clear as well in other aspects of the catalogues, where parts of the city are built in the mountains and around a river, because that signifies that the minifigures intervene in the natural surroundings and manipulate it for their own good. The catalogue contains a lot of pictures on which fairly exciting things are happening, ranging from a pizza chef who drops all of his pizzas to a driver crashing his car mid-air or a fireman trying to rescue civilians

from a burning apartment building, and all of these things are perfect events to start building a story on and trigger the imagination of the customers. The building that is on fire is not one that can be bought as a set, which shows that in the catalogue the sets are placed in a city that is larger than customers can create with all the sets from that theme. These additional

buildings have an important influence on the narrativity in the catalogues, because they allow for more elaborate stories to be told. The catalogue also triggers the child's imagination by bringing the viewer close to the action. The photographs are not taken on street level, but they are taken very close to a burning apartment building or a helicopter, making the city come to live (see Figure 7), and thus do show the lived space of the minifigures.

The 1995 catalogue makes it clear that the LEGO Miniland theme is still a bit more than only the inner city centre, since the first impression photo is one of a spaceport in the middle of a very rural area, with only one road connecting the spaceport to the city centre, which is visible in the background of the picture. Space travel is a standalone theme within LEGO, but has apparently found its way into the LEGO Miniland theme as well. This means an important change within the LEGO city, since space travel has become common enough to be seen close to the city, and is not something that is far away from everyday people. Moreover, it again signifies technological progression, just like the skyscrapers do. The racing circuit that in the previous catalogue was right in the centre of the city, surrounded by for example the hospital and shops, seems now to be a bit more outside the city. There is a lack of regular people, since most of the minifigures are wearing their uniforms, which makes for a LEGO world that triggers the imagination of the catalogue readers and allows for exciting narratives to be created, for example of astronauts who are going to the moon or firemen who are putting a train back on the tracks. These kinds of stories speak to a child's imagination, more so than a shopping minifigure would do, because these are events that a child does not encounter that often and therefore wants to explore these things with the help of his or her imagination and of course the LEGO sets and catalogue. Moreover, it is a way of selling the products, since an exciting catalogue will make the kids more eager to have the sets than a more casual one will.

The Miniland collection shows some striking changes in 1996. First of all, it shares one of its pages with the LEGO Paradisa theme, which consists of buildings that belong on a tropical island or at least on a holiday destination and which has a lot of pink and white colours, giving the area a more feminine look than the city. The most important page in this catalogue shows a giant billboard in front of some flats and office buildings. The billboard promotes some kind of movie, with a truck speeding away and bursting through road blocks. This is a case of a story being told within the story of LEGO city, which is its own story already, driving Lauwaert's (2009) claim that narrativity is LEGO's main focus point in this period to an extreme, since it has now come to the point where the viewer only sees stories and hardly any actual sets in the overview pictures. In the final LEGO Miniland photograph is

that of a race with water scooters, where one of them races extremely close to the camera, sucking the viewer right into the event and the allowing him or her to observe the city from so close and to experience the lived space of the minifigures, that it feels as if the viewer is actually part of the city and the community of minifigures.

The 1997 catalogue offers an important change in the way the sets are presented. Whereas in the previous years the photographs have been very dramatic and full of action and

wild nature, in this catalogue it is all more basic. There are still narratives told, but no longer as much through the actual sets and the way in which the minifigures are placed, but rather with text balloons. The streets form a very neatly laid out grid and the rocks and mountains on the background no longer seem real, but are very clearly painted. Moreover, the city is very spacious and while there are still things going on, it is no longer the busy centre of activity



Figure 8. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from LEGO, 1997. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

that is has been presented as in a couple of previous years. This most likely has to do with the fact that the individual sets are no longer presented in their own frames, but are presented within the background (see Figure 8). The point of view of the camera is from somewhere high up in the air, which also contributes to the calm feel of the LEGO city, since all buildings can be seen, but in lesser detail. This also causes the viewer to feel less part of the city, since he or she cannot connect to the minifigures, but can only watch from a distance, which is different from previous photos, which were taken from a minifigure's point of view. This makes the city look neater and feel calmer. This phenomenon could indicate a change back towards construction instead of narrative, even though Lauwaert (2009) claimed that happened in 2005, these might be indications for that change.

The drawings that serve as background in the 1998 catalogue are hardly realistic anymore, but rather cartoony. The resemblance to comics is enforced by the used of big coloured words, conveying sounds, like “vrrr”, that are stretched over the pages in the typical white cloudlike text balloons. Even the streets, that have been a very important part of the

LEGO city throughout the years, are no longer made with the LEGO street plates, but are drawn. This style is not used in the other, newer themes that are presented in the catalogue and it almost seems as though there was no more time or money to make an elaborate background for this theme and that LEGO wanted to focus on other themes, since the other and newer themes are presented much flashier and cooler than Miniland. The effect of the cartoony presentation of the sets is that it does not really feel as an actual world anymore, the lack of unity has a distancing effect on the viewer of the catalogue.

In 1999 the name LEGO Miniland is changed into LEGO City, although the theme

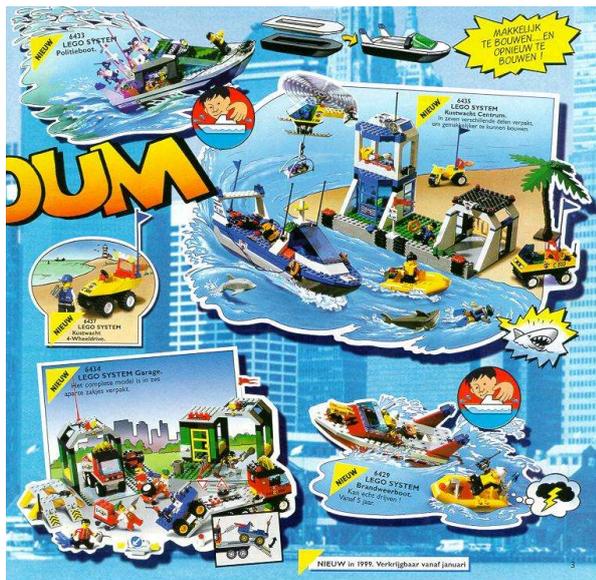


Figure 9. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 1999. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

does not change that much, it is still about the police and fire department, about racing and all kinds of transport. The comic style is still present and all the backgrounds are painted, making them look very unrealistic compared to previously used backgrounds and making it harder to imagine the city coming to live. An important difference is that the sets are presented individually and no longer in one photo that gives an impression of what it could

all look like together. The city that the reader of the catalogue sees is a not really a coherent city, but a very fragmented one (see Figure 9). The

catalogue shows the sets, but does not offer an actual city in which they all come together, and that shows how the sets are related to each other and how the city could be structured. This does leave more room for customers to create their own city, without being too heavily influenced by the catalogues suggesting which building ‘belongs’ next to which one and the perceived space constructed by the creators of the catalogue is thus less directing than in previous years.

This decade has known some major shifts in the representation of the city: there is for example less room for nature, since the city is dominating it and manipulating it. Moreover, the city is filled with symbols of technological development, communicating a positive feeling towards these developments, for example skyscrapers. Besides that, the city has become a place where interesting stories take place and can start.

§3.4 *The 00's*

The turn of the millennium holds a remarkable change, because the pictures with several sets combined are back again. The photos of the individual sets are also still present and the background of these small pictures consists of comic style drawings. There are several comics to be found in the catalogue that give some background on what is happening in the city, and yet again are providing a narrative and a context for the sets that could serve as a starting point for the children's imagination, like the collapsing of a bridge and the people who have to repair it and have to save the minifigures and vehicles that were there when the bridge collapsed. This event shows that human structures are not sacrosanct and are not unbeatable. The overview pictures are not as dramatic as they have once been, but they do show a lot of things happening, for example the building of a bridge and the fire department getting ready to go and extinguish a fire. The photographs are taken from close by, which affords the reader of the catalogue to see a lot of details of what is happening and yet again making him or her feel like they are part of the city and are at the same level as the minifigures, thus also able to experience the city from their point of view.

There is extremely little space for the LEGO City theme in the 2001 catalogue, only one single page. That is probably due to the fact that there are a lot of different and new themes introduced in this catalogue, like LEGO Harry Potter, which makes an earlier mentioned remark about LEGO not caring as much about the city theme as much anymore very plausible. The most attention in the catalogues will naturally go to the themes that are the most popular. The fact that there is only one page of LEGO City sets, makes that there are only three sets presented. These are all vehicles that have to do with the building and deconstruction of buildings or streets, there are no police cars or fire trucks, even though they have always been an important part of LEGO Miniland and LEGO City. This communicates the message that construction is a key element of the city and that the city is a place that constantly changing. In 2002, LEGO City has disappeared from the catalogue, despite the catalogue being almost 100 pages big. This confirms my earlier mentioned thesis that LEGO City has lost attention within the LEGO family and could not compete with the newer themes. In the second half of 2003 an equivalent of LEGO City, LEGO World City, is introduced in the catalogue. A big difference with the previous LEGO City theme is the prominent presence of trains, which used to be a separate theme within LEGO System, which emphasizes the mobility of the minifigures and the connectedness of the city with other places. Besides that, the police station and vehicles are very often seen sets within LEGO World City, as they also

were in LEGO City. The amount of sets presented is rather small and the focus is on large sets pictured against an elaborate background. The background of the small sets consists of very large and tall grey and black buildings that form an entire skyline and can very well be used as a landmarks in the sense of a point of reference, which have not really been present in the catalogues, making this type of background very different from the previous ones that were rather flat. Moreover, it shows that the city is very modern and indicates a development in LEGO's view on the city, which has now become more human-centred instead of involving nature and pays more attention to technological progression, which goes against Lefebvre's



Figure 10. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 2003. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

(2000) thesis and proves that a representation of the city is something entirely different from an actual city. The police sets in this catalogue are presented right in the middle of the city, on the streets, rather than using the city as just the background (see Figure 10). Again, despite the somewhat extraordinary event of trying to catch criminals, the city is presented in a way that is also available to the minifigures. That also means that the story that is being told by the catalogue has a

good chance of coming alive in the viewer's minds, because the criminals are very close to the lens of the camera and the viewer can actually look them right in the eye and thus is absolutely in the grasp of the city in De Certeau's (2007) terms and has no other choice than to experience it.

The 2004 catalogues still feature only LEGO World City and the pages look pretty much exactly the same as the ones in the previous catalogues, so with a lot of dark skyscrapers and other tall buildings.

In 2005 LEGO City is back again, and the dark and full skylines have disappeared from the background for these sets. LEGO World City still exists as well and does make use of this dark skyline. The skyline of LEGO City is a lot lighter, less tall, and shows more variety in the types of buildings that are pictured, causing the LEGO City and the LEGO

World City to be two entirely different places. 2005 is the year in which construction started to play an important role again, according to Lauwaert (2009), and indeed the viewer gets a better look at all the sets and more importantly, there is a lot of attention for the construction vehicles within LEGO, that are trying their best to make something out of a rocky and dusty wasteland, which is a very literal interpretation of Lauwaert's (2009) claim, but nonetheless important to note. Moreover, there is text placed over the photographs that introduces the sets and explain that they are easy to build. There is still a lot of attention for narrativity though, since there are police men and construction workers seen driving around trying to bring order into the chaos that has come to the city.

In 2006 the city in the catalogue is a bit more chaotic and the buildings in the background, which are LEGO buildings instead of drawn ones this time, have been built taller than can be captured by the camera. The photographs are taken from very close to the action, which allows the viewer to observe a lot of details and even the spatial practices, for example a police officer who is driving across the pavement. The ability to see everything in great detail also means that the viewer can really see how the sets are built and which parts have been used to build them. Some of the buildings even have very small pictures of what their interior looks like. This is a very clear example of the renewed focus on construction that Lauwaert (2009) observed within LEGO in this period. Moreover, seeing everything from so close, also allows the viewer to get drawn into the story, which means that narrativity, again about trying to help minifigures who are in danger and about trying to structure the chaos, still is important as well. The large buildings that are in the skylines, are no longer just skyscrapers, but some appear to be monuments, which are very much fit to function as landmarks in Lynch's (1960) sense, because they can be seen from many points in the city and structure the city. In 2007 the reader of the catalogue sees the background layers in the same way as the minifigures would, thanks to the camera standing point. Besides making the viewer part of the city it also allows the viewer to observe the detail of the sets, and see how they are constructed, which is very informative in the case of the airport that contains a lot of see-through coloured bricks and the huge crane. This again confirms Lauwaert's (2009) claim about the central role that construction has again taken in the LEGO products, because for example the image of the crane (see Figure 11) gives a lot of information about how the crane was built, which pieces were used for that and how the crane functions as a LEGO construction. There are not as many tall buildings in the background as there were in earlier edition of the catalogue, meaning that the amount of landmarks has been greatly diminished.

In 2008 there are green hills visible in the background, which are very different from the rest of the city and therefore may very well function as landmarks. Nature had disappeared from the LEGO city in the previous years, but it is now finally coming back again, hinting at the realisation of the LEGO Company that nature is an important element of the city that should not only be dominated but respected as well and. In terms of perspective, the catalogue

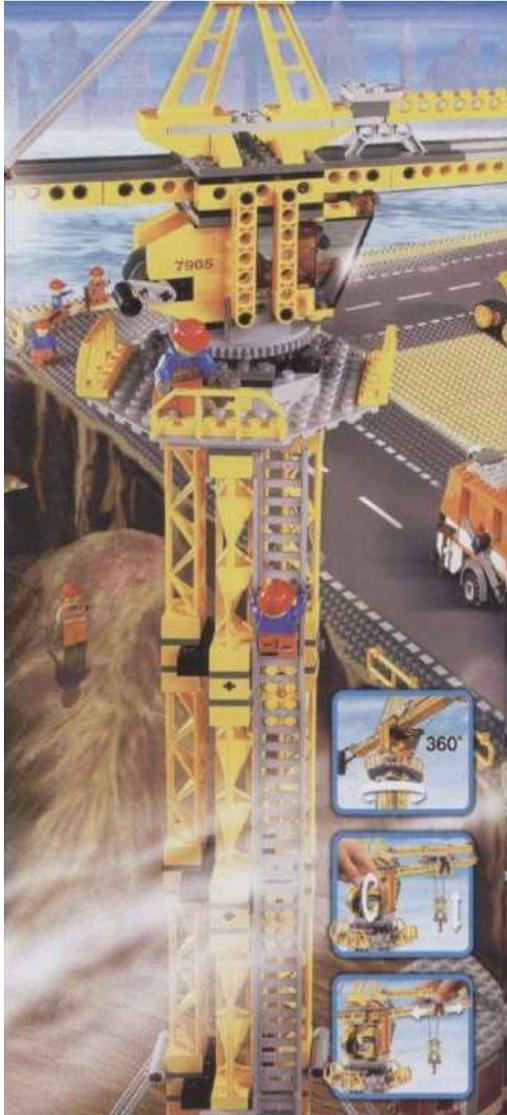


Figure 11. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 2007. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

is not very constant, since there are some pictures that give a minifigure's view on the city, while other are taken from a far away and high angle, providing an overview of the city, which is most likely done to show how large the city has become and how diverse in terms of buildings it has become.

In 2009, there is again a category added to the already existing ones. This time it is the farm, which is portrayed as being far away from the city, with all the buildings in the far distance and a lot of hills and even a bit of forest between the farm and the city, thus allowing for even more nature to be back in the city. Thanks to the farm category, for the first time a lot of animals can be seen within LEGO City, granting natural elements and even bigger role in the city. Moreover, this proves the relevance of Lefebvre's (2000) claim that citizens feel like nature is their right. A farm is a very necessary way of having nature in the city, or at least connected to it, because it provides citizens, or in this case minifigures, with food. Shops, houses and leisurely activities are also added to the LEGO city in this catalogue, making the city look more like an everyday city, which is also reinforced by the spatial

practices that are clearly visible in the pictures, for example a skateboarder who uses some stairs to skateboard instead of walking on them. The different activities also make the city look more diverse and welcoming to all kinds of people.

The 2000's are a time in which the LEGO city is very chaotic and the minifigures are trying to bring structure to the city. Besides that, we see that nature slowly comes back into the city, while still profiting from technological innovations, which conveys a strong message about the need for progress in a city. This storytelling has reached an extreme in this decade, but after that starts to become a little less important again, because the focus shifts towards construction again.

§3.5 The 10's

A lot of the pictures that are used in the 2010 catalogue are the same as in the 2009 catalogue, and thus there are not many differences on the level of the contents of the pictures.

In 2011, it is remarkable that there are more and more civilians on the streets, regular people who are not wearing a work uniform, but are just shopping or walking home and are portraying scenes that belong in the everyday life of the city. However, the photographs are taken from further away than usually and do not offer a perspective on the city that could be shared by an inhabitant of the city. This is most probably done to make sure that all the sets are clearly visible, since there are a lot of them in one picture. The skyline with tall buildings has been diminished to just a far background in the far distance with almost the same colour as the sky, but is present on almost all the pictures and thus all areas of the city, suggesting either a very large city, or another city nearby. The increase of everyday activities and the decrease of skyscraper's importance in the city conveys the message that the city is not only a place of chaos and change, but also one that should allow people to be able to lead their lives in the way that they please or that is convenient to them, which is shown by two minifigures who are relaxing at the beach, while others are boarding their plane.

The fading away of the tall city skyline is even stronger in the 2012 catalogue, where it seems to be disappearing behind a lot of fog, meaning that the city is very big and communicating the idea that the city is a diverse place that exists of many different areas. It is also in this catalogue that some sets are clearly placed on the foreground and others more in the back of the picture, creating a lot of depth in the picture. Some sets even appear twice, once in the foreground, and once serving as a background for other sets. This also adds a sense of coherency to all the different views on the city making one city out of all the diversity in it. The presence of nature is also very strong in this catalogue, with grass, rocks and large trees made out of LEGO and taking up big parts of the city, making the city look very colourful and communicating the important message that nature has its place in the city

and that the two can go together. On some of the pictures the nature is very much present in the foreground, allowing the viewer to observe what the trees look like and out of which bricks they are made, which does again support Lauwaert's (2009) claim that construction has found its way back into LEGO again.

The complexity of the background is even higher in the 2013 catalogue, where there are tons of houses, shops and other buildings that are not shown in the individual sets and thus are not really a part of the LEGO City theme, but serve as a background for the City sets. Despite the complexity of the city and its background, the buildings are all still built in accordance with the streets, which are laid down according to a very logical grid, making the city very neatly arranged and accessible, and because everything is happening on or near the streets, these paths are very present in the city and play an important role not only in structuring the city, but also in being a way through which the city can be observed.

The development of more complex backgrounds goes on in the 2014 catalogues. One really needs to take a look at the small frames that picture the sets individually to recognize what belongs to the LEGO City theme and what does not. Besides all the categories that have been a part of the LEGO City theme for over the past decades, like the police and fire department, the airport, the coast guard, construction workers and all kinds of vehicles, there is now a category introduced that is situated on either the North or the South pole, and is called the LEGO City Pole Investigators. Even this category, which is a very remote one, has a skyline in its far background, be it that this skyline is very small and does not at all immediately catch the eye, it is definitely there. Apart from this new category, not a lot changes, because the pictures from previous catalogues are recycled. There is one set, however, that is new and that entails an important shift: the museum. This is one of the first buildings within the history of LEGO city that shows something about the city's past and culture and thus gives another dimension to the city and adds another layer to the narrative around this city.

Finally, there is the 2015 catalogue, which is the most recent one. After the introduction of the arctic part of the city last year, this year the swamp is being introduced. A lot of green and brown water can be seen here, along with a lot of plants, most of which are hanging down. These plants and trees mostly serve as a background for the sets that are all in the water, mostly on the foreground. As with the arctic sets, the swamp sets also are portrayed with a city skyline in the far distance, full of skyscrapers. This communicates again a renewed respect for nature in all its forms, while still maintaining an eye for technological development and trying to bring those two in balance.

Over the last couple of years, LEGO has been communicating the message that the city is not just an exciting place where a lot of things are happening and danger is everywhere, which may appeal to children and thus be an important selling-point, but the city is also a place of relaxation. Moreover, the ideal of a diverse city gets communicated, in terms of buildings and areas, because there are very diverse elements of the city visible in the catalogues.

Chapter 4: LEGO city as a social place

This fourth chapter of the thesis is about the social aspects that make the city into a place that is alive, which means that I will focus on the minifigures and their roles in the city and what kind of values that might communicate to the viewers of the catalogue and the people playing with the sets. In this chapter I will find an answer to the final sub question of my thesis, which is the following: “How are the social dynamics, like race, age and gender, of the city represented in LEGO catalogues and what preconceptions does that communicate?” Again, the results of the analysis will be presented in a chronological order.

§4.1 The 70's

The sets in the seventies were not yet that big or elaborate; most of the sets that are portrayed in the 1978 catalogue consist of a vehicle with a minifigure that goes with it. The minifigures do not show a lot of distinctive features: they are all yellow which takes away the suggestion of different races, and all the minifigures have a faint smile and two eyes painted on their faces, taking away the suggestion of different emotions and expressions. Their bodies are very straight and do not show any definition at all, nor do they differ from each other. The female figures do have hair, but the male figures are bald and are wearing a hat or other headgear. A lot of the minifigures in the sets presented in this catalogue are male figures and go with the fire truck, the gas station, the police or a vehicle that is linked to construction working. The ambulance and a Red Cross Jeep are accompanied by female minifigures though. Because of the lack of any facial expression it is hard to tell the age of the minifigures, but thanks to their lack of wrinkles and grey hair, they seem quite young and thus capable of working.

In 1979 it becomes clearly visible that there are more people in the city that are talking to one another or are walking around in the city, not really performing a specific paid job at that moment, which was the case in the 1978 catalogue. This hints at a belief of the LEGO Company that the city is not just the centre of business, but of everyday life as well.

§4.2 The 80's

In the 1980 catalogue the development of more and more minifigures just hanging around in the city and talking to other citizens becomes even more visible. This means that not only the viewer gets to share the his or her perspective on city as a spatial phenomenon with the minifigures, and is thus as De Certeau (2007) argues in the hold of the city, but the viewer

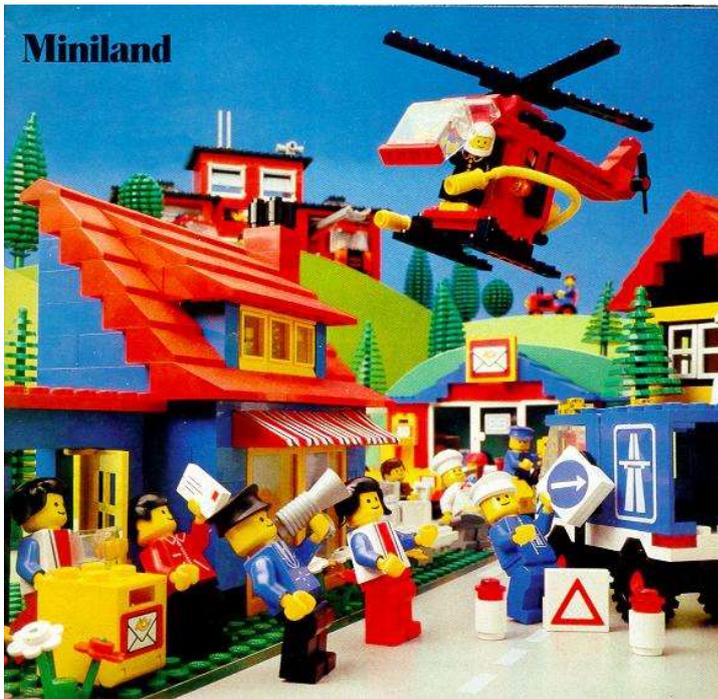


Figure 12. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 1982. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

also gets to see what the minifigures are doing on a day-to-day basis and is thus experiencing the actual lived space of the city even more. The 1981 catalogue nuances that everyday life of the city a bit, since it shows not only minifigures in casual outfits, but also in working uniforms, who are either at work or on their way to it. They are also more prominently placed within the picture, being the focus point of the camera.

In the overview picture in the 1982 catalogue there is something exciting happening (see Figure 12): the minifigures are not interacting with each other, but they are all looking up at the sky, where a helicopter is flying, but the pilot of this helicopter seems to be looking at the same thing as the minifigures on the ground, which therefore cannot be himself, but must be something that the viewer of the catalogue cannot see, which is very different from the previous catalogues where all the minifigures were interacting with each other and the city was filled with everyday activities. The viewer is here thus excluded from the city, the distance becomes painfully clear when it turns out that the viewer cannot understand the excitement amongst the minifigures. The viewer is not allowed to experience the city as the minifigures are.

The same goes for the 1983 catalogue, where there is less interaction between the minifigures and they all have their attention geared towards a police officer driving his motorcycle away from the city, whom the viewer of the catalogue can see as well this time

and thus is made part of the city and gets on the same level as the minifigures. This shows that the paths in the LEGO city are not only a way of structuring the city, but also play a central role in the way in which the minifigures observe the city, which is an important way in which the elements that Lynch (1960) uses to cognitively map the city can be used. Another interesting development of which the start can be seen here is the diversity in hair colours of the female characters. In the previous catalogues, they only had dark hair, either black or dark brown, but in this catalogue one of the female minifigures has bright red hair, which is a development that continues in the 1984 catalogue.

In 1985 more male minifigures have actual hair instead of being bald and wearing headgear, which yet again is a step towards a greater diversity, even though it is still on a small scale and a superficial level. In this year's catalogue it is striking to see that there are two large impression pictures, in which some of the more casual minifigures, who are not wearing a work uniform, can be seen on both the photographs. There are not that many casual minifigures included in the LEGO Miniland sets, so by doubling them, the city gets slightly more like everyday life, instead of looking like a gathering of everyone who is at their job.

The decline of working people continues in the 1986 catalogue where even more minifigures are wearing casual clothes. The activities that the minifigures are doing vary greatly from doing groceries to driving a fire truck or filming that same fire truck. Because of the generic smiling faces that all the minifigures have, it is hard to make out whether the fire truck is on its way to a fire or whether the scene depicts something less urgent. It must be noted that again the paths are where the action takes place and from which the minifigures observe the action. The paths thus play an important role in the city, but that also has to do with the fact that LEGO is a toy and the city is thus not very elaborated or complex, since that would not be suited for children to play with. The city consists in these years of a couple of buildings that are separated from each other with streets, and it is thus not strange that the lives takes place on those streets.

The 1987 catalogue shows some important shifts. First of all, there are a lot more minifigures than there were in previous catalogues. This is due to the fact that there is a car race going on near the city centre and all minifigures are gathered to watch the race. There are both minifigures in casual clothes and minifigures who are wearing their work uniform watching the race. Most of the minifigures who have hair have either dark brown or black hair, and a few have red hair, but blonde hair is still not seen. When having such a large gathering of minifigures, the way of clothing becomes really striking: there are three colours of which almost all the casual outfits exist: blue, red and white. All the minifigures, male or

female, are wearing pants and a top. There is hardly any difference between the male and female outfits, only that some of the female outfits have striped tops, instead of a plain coloured top or a dress shirt, which means that despite the growing diversity, the LEGO city still does not have a very diverse population. In terms of age, it is very hard to see what age the minifigures are supposed to have, because they all still have the exact same face and the exact same height. There are no hints at old or young age, like grey hair or a smaller face. The only sign of old age might be baldness but this baldness has a more practical reason: a minifigure cannot wear both hair and headgear, so the ones who are wearing headgear are bald.

In the 1988 catalogue, a lot of the minifigures are running around and because most of their faces are not visible, it looks more serious than it would when their smiling faces would have been visible. There is a lot of traffic, and quite some vehicles are driving on the left lane, even though this is the catalogue for the Netherlands, not for England. This most likely is due to the reusing of the images, meaning that this picture might have been originally created for an English catalogue and for financial reasons is not re-used in the catalogue for the Netherlands. The second overview photograph is a lot more crowded and even more serious, because the hazard warning lights on the fire and police truck are on. Despite all the commotion that this causes, the people working at the gas station are going on with their jobs like nothing is happening.

The 1989 catalogue does not bring much change in comparison to the previous ones. There are still a lot of minifigures that belong to a certain vehicle and that are wearing a uniform. The picture that portrays the city is taken from quite a far distance, making it very hard to see most of the minifigures. Since there is another race going on in the city centre there are a lot of minifigures visible, both working minifigures but also a lot of minifigures in their casual clothes. The prevailing colours of the clothing are still the red, blue and white and the colours of the hair are still brown and black. There is one female minifigure who wears a pearl necklace, and is dressed entirely in white, which could indicate that she is not wearing pants, but a dress, although her legs can still be moved around independently from each other, like all the other minifigures who are wearing pants.

Balshaw and Kennedy (2000) have not specified how diverse a city needs to be in order for it to be considered a real city, but the LEGO city is at this point not diverse at all, since all the minifigures are wearing more or less the same clothes and have the exact same faces. What is obvious in these catalogues is that both working and leisure time have their

place in the city, although there are not many activities that could be done in one's leisure time and the amount of uniforms suggests that working is more important than leisure time.

§4.3 The 90's

In 1990, there is another car race going on in the city, which attracts an enormous crowd, filled with numbers of minifigures wearing casual clothes. Interestingly enough, there have not yet been any noticeable shifts in the clothing that the minifigures are wearing, whilst there most definitely have been shifts in the trends and fashion in the real world, but these are not represented in the LEGO city. There are changes in the diversity of the minifigures; there are now also waiters, a minifigure with a cowboy hat, male nurses, and different costumes for the fire fighters, red ones and black ones. This type of big event is also present in the 1991 catalogue, because in that year, a bridge is collapsing and an accident happens during the construction. These scenes are most likely created because that it is very sellable: the events are very exciting, and which child does not want to have exciting toys?

I have said that I would not focus on the other product lines that are featured in the catalogues, but the 1992 catalogue does require me to do so, because it helps putting the city themed sets in perspective. Earlier, I mentioned that the clothing of the minifigures of LEGO Legoland Miniland is rather plain and does hardly change throughout the years, which is still the case for this year's catalogue. However, the minifigures in the LEGO Paradisa line wear entirely different clothes than the minifigures in LEGO Miniland. The minifigures in Paradisa are on a holiday and are therefore wearing bathing suits, and the female minifigures have more feminine clothing than the minifigures in Miniland do, with deeper cut necklines, more pink colours and printed beadings on them. And they clearly have make-up on, which the female minifigures in Miniland do not. This is even more remarkable considering the fact that one of the pictures of Miniland sets features a beach, where only one minifigure is wearing a bathing suit. The rest of the minifigures are in the water with all their clothes on, which are still the striped tops, although some of them now have short sleeves instead of long ones. The minifigure in general has thus developed and knows many forms, but apparently, according to LEGO the very feminine minifigure is not fit to be in the city. This means that it still important to study the woman's role in the city, as Wolff (1985) and Pollock (1988) did, because apparently LEGO makes a difference between how women should look in the city and how they should look on holiday.

1993 is again a year of changes, because the male minifigures in Miniland now have more elaborate faces instead of only the faint smile and the two tiny black dots that are



Figure 13. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 1993. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

supposed to be the eyes. Some of the male minifigures are now wearing sunglasses, which cover their eyes entirely. The faint smile is still there, but it is now covered with a stubble beard, which gives these minifigures a very rough look (see Figure 13). The only minifigures who have these new faces are the car racers. Some of the policemen are wearing sunglasses as well, but these are different and smaller than the ones the bearded faces have. Again, this is a small step towards more diversity, and more facial expressions in the

city, which gives the minifigures some more personality and also allows for more interesting narratives to be created, in which the feelings of the minifigures might play a role. Moreover, it adds to the experience of the city, which now feels a bit more like a lively city than a doll city, which it of course still is.

The 1994 catalogue shows that a lot more diversity is finding its way into the city. Some of the female minifigures in Miniland are now wearing make-up as well and for the male minifigures there is yet another addition: some of the faces have moustaches, others have eyebrows, and there are even faces that have both a moustache and eyebrows. In terms of colour, it is slowly starting to get more diverse as well, with green and grey and even some brown clothing. The female casual clothing is no longer just a plain or striped shirt, but some shirts have prints on them.

The 1995 catalogue has photographs that are taken from far away, causing the minifigures to be less clearly visible and making it hard to see the details of their face. This literally and figuratively distances the viewer from the city, who is now not able as much to be grasped by the city and to be an actual part of it as De Certeau (2007) argues happens when you are walking the streets of a city. In terms of the faces of the minifigures, there is one new addition that is still visible: printed headsets on the faces. This is a very clear representation of technological developments that LEGO wants to incorporate in their city, which they seem to see as a place of technological progress. Moreover, these types of headsets are often used by workers and thus again put focus on the importance of work in the city.

This diminishing presence of hospital sets in the 1996 catalogue also means a diminishing presence of female minifigures. This does again suggest that the theories of both Wolff (1985) and Pollock (1988) are not entirely out-dated yet. Because the car racing has become an important part within the LEGO city a lot of the minifigures are wearing helmets, which partly cover their faces, making it hard to determine what expression is on their faces. The car racing theme is one that combines both working and leisure, since the racer are probably at their job, but for the spectators it is a form of leisure, showing that both elements are of great importance for LEGO.

In the last years of the nineties, the LEGO city is getting smaller and thus also contains less minifigures, which also causes less diversity to be noticeable in the city. The female minifigures have for example disappeared entirely. Some of the heads with a distinctive facial expressions have disappeared as well. Interestingly, in 1999 the female minifigures are back again, and are even wearing make-up, which leads to the conclusion that the lack of female minifigures has probably had to do with the sparse means that a toy producer has to show all the complexities of the city.

This decade has seen some remarkable shifts, where at first slowly more diversity was found in the city, then again more bodily uniformity and at the end of the decade again steps towards more diversity. There have also been several catalogues without any female minifigures, which may have to do with the lack of means and necessity in a toy to represent all the complexities of a city.

§4.4 The 00's

In the 2000 catalogue most of the minifigures are wearing their uniforms and are doing their jobs, instead of just casually walking through the city, which is a pattern that already became visible in the previous decade. A striking change that has become visible is the printed hair on some of the heads. By printing sideburns on the heads, the minifigures can wear a cap or helmet, without looking bald. These sideburns come in different colours and even different shapes, which is again a small step towards more diversity in the city.

In 2001 the LEGO catalogue is filled with tons of different and new product lines, a lot of which are lines that collaborate with other companies, for example Warner Bros, to create the LEGO Harry Potter line. The result of that is that there is hardly any room left for LEGO City. There is only one page, on which three sets are presented and only a couple of minifigures are visible. All of the minifigures are clearly at work, trying to construct or repair

a road. In 2002 LEGO City has disappeared entirely from the catalogue, which has already been mentioned above.

In 2003 LEGO World City is introduced, which can be seen as a subtheme of LEGO City. Some of the sets are themed around trains, which means that some passengers are included in the sets, who have casual clothes, contrary to all the uniforms that have present in the city. The main page of LEGO World City features police stations and criminals. There are new haircuts for the male minifigures, which are a bit more modern, meaning that LEGO is trying to follow current trends a bit more, and there are a lot of different faces for the male minifigures: the criminals have smiles that show all of their teeth, and holes where there

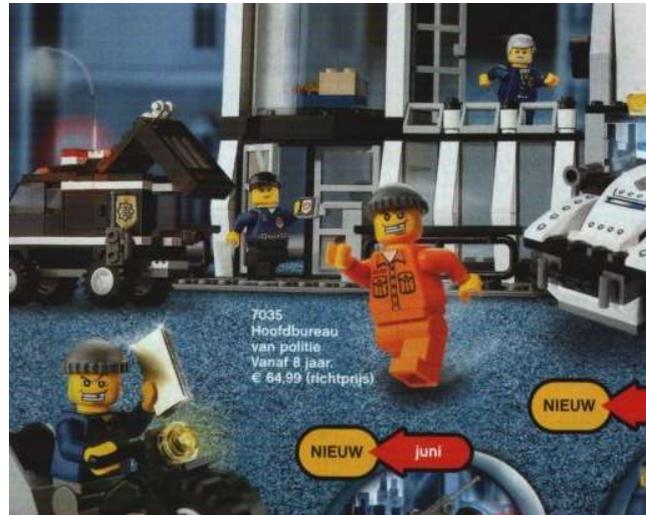


Figure 14. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from LEGO, 2003. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

used to be teeth, which is a very stereotypical representation of criminals. The policemen have faces with a half-smile, or a very serious look. The most interesting new face is the one that has a grey beard and a grey haircut on top of it (see Figure 14). This is the first time in a LEGO City theme that there are age differences between the minifigures that are clearly visible, which has a great impact on the population groups in LEGO City, because there are now several population groups, making the city more diverse. Since there are no other indications that this is a minifigure of old age, like wrinkles or having trouble walking, it is important to realize that this could also be a minifigure who just happens to have grey hair. The 2004 catalogue is a reiteration of these developments and does not add any new changes.

The 2005 catalogue means the reintroduction of LEGO City, which also means that the old themes like the police and construction workers are back. While the greater part of the minifigures still exists of working minifigures clothed in uniform, there are also a few bystanders again looking at how the fire men are extinguishing a fire. These bystanders are mainly men, but one of the minifigures has long hair, which could indicate that it is a female minifigure.

The 2006 catalogue is again filled with LEGO City sets and the city has become very much alive and crowded again. On some pages, there are still a lot of working people visible, but on the airport there are a lot of different types of minifigures getting aboard their plane,

some of which are wearing a uniform, but most of them are wearing more casual clothes, making the city a bit more balanced in that aspect. The airport can be seen as one of Lynch's (1960) nodes, because it is a way of entering the city and it connects different kinds of paths with each other. And as the city thus becomes more complex and bigger, more of Lynch's elements start to play roles in it. The 2006 also provides some more diversity, since there are now also female minifigures with grey hair, as can be seen in Figure 15. Besides that, there are minifigures with blonde hair, which had not been seen in LEGO City before. Yet another



Figure 15. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 2006. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

development is in the female clothes, which are no longer just the striped shirts, because there are now also tops without sleeves and pink shirts, resembling the minifigures from LEGO Paradisa. The

male minifigures have also changed, mainly in terms of colour and shape of their facial hair. This catalogue thus shows a lot more diversity in the city than there has been before, both in terms of gender and age, but in terms of race or cultural background there is still no observable diversity. This development is continued in the 2007 and the 2008 catalogue.

The female minifigures in the 2009 catalogue are not just walking around in the city and doing groceries, but are actually working, in a restaurant or on the farm, which is quite a change from the previous catalogues, since female minifigures only worked in the hospital. They now have more possibilities for choosing a job. Moreover we see that the minifigures are becoming part of the background. They are surely no longer only in the picture because they belong to the sets, but because they are an integral part of the city. Even though it is not clear what the minifigures are doing, it is important that they are present in the city, which is in line with for example Kostof's (1991) claim that the people are what make a city come to life.

The 00's know some shifts towards more age categories in the city and thus more diversity, but there have also been cases where the female minifigures disappeared from the city, which of course greatly diminishes the diversity and proves the importance of both

Wolff's (1985) and Pollock's (1988) theories. The different and more nuanced age categories that were introduced in this decade make the city more diverse.

§4.5 The 10's

In 2010, the casual clothing comes in a wider range of colors, making the LEGO city more diverse. What is also very noteworthy in this year's catalogue is that we see a minifigure surfing, and this minifigure is not wearing a uniform that could indicate that she is working for the coast guard. There have already been minifigures that were having dinner at a restaurant, but there are now more minifigures doing leisure activities in the city and more diverse activities, communicating a clear message that the city is not only a place of work, but a place where people should be able to relax as well.

The 2011 catalogue is very colourful, which is partly due to the background against which the sets are presented, but can also be ascribed to the minifigures. The colours of their clothing and their hair are more and more diverse and include very nuanced colours like beige, burgundy, and an orange-like colour, although the red, blue and white that have been part of the minifigures' clothes at least since 1978 are still present as well. The prints on the uniforms have already been evolving a lot throughout the years and are very detailed and differ from each other. The same applies to the casual clothes now, with a lot of prints, varying from flowers to a picture of a surfer and a naked chest with only a garland hanging from the neck (see Figure 16). For the male minifigures there are now scarfs that they can put around their necks. The 2011 catalogue is again one that is rather important in adding more nuances to the minifigures, which creates more diversity.



Figure 16. [Excerpt from catalogue]. Reprinted from *LEGO*, 2011. Retrieved from brickfactory.info. Copyright by LEGO.

The minifigure in the 2011 catalogue that was wearing no top but only a garland, is wearing a sleeveless top in the 2012 catalogue, which is remarkable, because apparently LEGO felt like a naked chest must have been a bit too much for a toy catalogue, that is mainly meant for children to watch and confronting them with a naked women's chest is apparently not deemed appropriate by LEGO, which is very conceivable for the producer of a children's toy.

In 2013 the city is again very busy and vibrant, with a lot of people hard at work. There are also several events happening that attract large groups of spectators: a rocket launch

and a stunt car show. The role of the female minifigures is very ambiguous and therefore interesting in this catalogue. On the one hand there is a female minifigure, who looks very professional, wearing a chic grey jacket and carrying around a briefcase, while on the other hand there are three female minifigures who are at the car stunt show in their bathing suits showing a lot of 'skin'. One of them is holding up some kind of score board, but the other are doing nothing else besides standing there. On the one hand, this is an emancipated view on women, while on the other hand it reduces them to things to look at.

There is some kind of car show in the 2014 LEGO city where the gallery is filled with spectators. There are no longer female minifigures in their bathing suits though. Another remarkable fact in this catalogue is that there is an addition to the range of free-time activities that can be done in the city again, to be known canoeing and camping. Moreover, in 2014 the arctic area is added to LEGO City, which means that there are some new minifigures, which have new faces with special glasses. In this arctic area there are people who are working and there are no bystanders or people who also happen to live there, making this area very different from the city centre that is represented on the other pages of the LEGO City section.

The most recent catalogue is that of the first half of 2015. The city is still quite busy and there is a lot going on, but there are no more shows or other events that attract large groups of minifigures. Almost all the minifigures in this catalogue have a clear goal, in terms of working, stealing something, or escaping from the police, but if this is the start of another shift in focus on working will have to become clear in the next years.

The 10's show give some interesting views on the role of women in the city that is a bit ambiguous, Moreover, in this decade the city becomes a bit less a place of work and more leisurely activities can be found in the city centre.

What has become clear from the catalogues throughout the years is that the LEGO city is for a large part a place where people work. There are sometimes people wandering around, but they never make up the biggest part of the minifigure population. Sometimes there are events where people go to spend their spare time, and in the last years there been more ways for the minifigures to enjoy their free time. Another development that may have gone slowly, but steady, is that of the diversification of the minifigures. In the eighties all the minifigures were wearing the same type of clothing and in only in three colours. Moreover, there were only a couple of haircuts and hair colours available. In 2015 there are tons of haircuts and several different hair colours, although they are all natural ones, and the clothing that the minifigures wear has become very detailed and with a lot more colours than a couple of decades ago. The

faces of the minifigures have also changed greatly. It started with the faint smile with two eyes, which is still used on some of the minifigures, but there is a range of other options now. These options give the minifigures more character and the facial expressions show something about the emotion of the minifigure, which affords children to create more layered narratives. What has also become clear is that the paths in the LEGO city are not only important for structuring it, but also for observing it and are a way for the minifigures to experience the city and be possessed by it, and sometimes this even goes for the viewer of the catalogue as well.

Conclusions

The two concepts of construction and narrativity that Lauwaert (2009) connected to LEGO are indeed very much present in the LEGO sets and her thesis that that from 1990 onwards narrativization has been important in LEGO and from 2005 construction became more important again is visible in the LEGO catalogues. There have been years that deviated from that theory, but to a large extent Lauwaert's (2009) thesis goes for the catalogues as well. However, when comparing the physical set with the catalogue in which it is represented, it becomes clear that these two concepts of narrativity and construction work together and complete each other on a smaller level, when studying the interaction between the physical set and the catalogue. The physical sets are in the first place based on construction and on building. It must be noted that a set like the 60047 Police Station is also for an important part based on narrativity, because there is a story that belongs to the set. The catalogue however, offers a lot more narrativity because it places the sets in a context with other sets and placed against a background. Moreover, there are minifigures who are speaking about what is happening and in the newest catalogues the sets actually come to life thanks to an app.

Besides that, narrativity has been visible in the catalogues to make the city come to life and has been one of the tools to get the viewer of the catalogue involved in the stories and events of LEGO City. Other tools that were used to obtain a similar effect are the camera placement, which makes the viewer of the catalogue feel like he or she is actually part of the city, and the use of text balloons and comics and stories to get the viewer of the catalogue involved in the events that are taking place in the LEGO city. When the viewer of the catalogue is visually on the same level as the minifigures, he or she gets a glance at the tactics of the minifigures and will be clasped by the city, to speak with De Certeau (2007).

Whether the viewer will feel part of the city partly also depends on the triad of space that Merrifield (1993) elaborates on, because in this context of the catalogues, it is an indication of how closely the viewer is allowed to see the city. The representational space is very clear in the LEGO city, the structures of the city are clearly visible and a lot of the minifigures respect that structure. The practiced space then is of course just as important and as visible, because the minifigures are using the space and the places as they were meant, but also in ways that might not have been meant. Finally the spatial practices are a lot harder to distinguish in the LEGO city.

This LEGO city that the viewer is, to a certain extent, being made part of is represented in the catalogues as a city that is constantly changing and being developed and

expanded, but with some very important continuous elements. Themes that have been a part of the LEGO city in almost all years are the police, fire department and construction working. There have been other themes in LEGO City that have been very important and big, but that have disappeared after a couple of years. The fact that the city has constantly been changing and evolving communicates a strong message about the city, namely that the city is a place of change and of development and that the city as a location should advertise these values. This message is reinforced by the construction sets that are frequently seen in the LEGO catalogues. Especially the images of digging holes in enormous rocks to lay roads or change already existing roads and nodes leave no doubt that it is important that there is a chance of changing the LEGO city, which is actually quite logical for a toy, since it allows children to enact their own changes that they want to bring to the city. Moreover, this theme of construction in LEGO is very interesting because it adds a double layer: when one builds such a set, one actually builds something that is used for building. Another result of that focus of change can be seen in the skyscrapers and other aspects of technological development, such as a floating train tracks, which are an important part of the LEGO city, which according to Cross (1998) is a feature of toys in general. At one point, it even takes such a turn that technological progress takes the place of nature, which gets manipulated constantly to cater for the city's growth. This also speaks of a certain feel of human (or minifigurian) superiority. However, that turns around, since bridges start collapsing and nature start becoming important again and the city is built more in harmony with nature, thus communicating a renewed respect for nature and the need to incorporate rather than destroy it, which for Lefebvre (2000) is a right that citizens, or in this case minifigures, feel they have.

That continuous changing of the city has also led to the fact that there are hardly any old buildings to be found in the catalogues. All the buildings featured in the LEGO catalogues are in a perfect state and will probably be for quite some years to come, which can be contributed to the fact that LEGO is in the first place a construction toy. Moreover, the lack of clear references to a certain culture make it very hard to locate the LEGO city and to determine where it is supposed to be located, or on which location it has been inspired.

In the literature review it has become clear that there are plenty of authors who feel that the city is being kept alive by the people. This is very much the case in the LEGO city, where the people are continuously working on changing the environment and are just doing their jobs, meaning that the LEGO City is a city that is alive, because people are at work and being productive, and interacting with each other to do so. In some of the catalogues there are quite a few civilians just walking around, or at least not doing their job, but they almost never

make up the greater part of the population. Besides that, when only using minifigures from the actual City sets, there would have been no possibility to create such big groups of minifigures who are not wearing a uniform. There is not a great variety in places where the minifigures are at work; there are for example hardly any shops. The city contains some restaurants and gas stations, but there are no shops to buy clothing, shoes, books, furniture or whatever else one can find in a shopping area, although these themes can be found in other LEGO product lines. It is remarkable that despite the importance of development in the sets, the LEGO city has not developed alongside the city in the real world, for example in terms of fashion or cars. There have surely been developments like the presence of skyscrapers in the background, but these changes are not as big as the changes in the real-life cities, which most likely has to do with the city not becoming too complex, because it should be comprehensible for children and to make sure that a unity can still be created when buying sets in different years.

This also ties in with Kostof's (1991) claim that some cities can be seen as a machine where both buildings and people are working effectively together to keep the city alive and well. That does seem to be the case in the LEGO city. What appears to be important within the LEGO city is saving the city from disasters and making sure that all the vehicles can go where they need to go. The city is structured to make sure that these things can actually happen and there are never minifigures who are standing in the way of a fire truck or police car that is speeding to a scene. Everyone in the city is aware of what they need to do and all the non-living parts of the city contribute to a free passage. The message that is conveyed is that the city is a place that can get very chaotic, but that needs to be saved from that drama and that needs to be brought back to a quieter state that allows the citizens to be able to do their jobs and other activities.

Lynch's (1960) theory has proven itself to be very useful for a study of a simplification of the city. The streets are the most important way of structuring the city, they are the paths, are the basis of the city around which everything is built. Moreover, these paths often function as the starting point for the minifigures and even the viewer of the catalogue to start exploring and experiencing the city. Edges also play quite an important role in the LEGO city by separating, for example, the sea from the land. Some paths are used as edges when they separate the police station from the living area of the criminals, which is something that Lynch (1960) already mentioned, that some parts of the city can function as more than one of his five elements. The LEGO city also makes use of districts, which are often presented on different pages. The airport for example has an entirely different vibe than the swamp or the police station in the woods. Since they are presented on different pages though, they do not

necessarily appear to be part of one big city. The nodes do not play a huge role in LEGO City, because the structures of the city are not that complex. The pictures that are shown often only show a small part of the city with just a couple of streets. There are definitely points in the city where the streets are being connected to a runway or to the harbour, but these places are fairly rare. Landmarks in the traditional sense are hardly present in LEGO City, there are no old castles or beautiful churches or important architectural sites, only some monuments that are only visible in the far background of the city. Landmarks in the way that Lynch (1960, p.48) means them, points of reference that can preferably be seen from many points in the city, are sometimes present. There are some large skyscrapers in the backgrounds of the pictures and the monuments in the background can function as points of reference, but since the city is not too complex, one does not really need such big points of reference; following the paths is easy enough.

There is not much diversity in the city in terms of buildings and other material elements, and the same goes for the minifigures. In the seventies and eighties there hardly was diversity, but slowly more types of clothing and more hairstyles were introduced in the catalogue and with that also different age groups. All the minifigures have the same very unnaturally yellow skin colour. This bodily uniformity, also in terms of height and weight, makes that the city looks very uniform and not what a city should look like according to a lot of the earlier mentioned authors, for example Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke (2009). There is variety in terms of gender, though, since there are both male and female minifigures. The genders are clearly based on the biological sexes, although there are no naked representations of the minifigures that show the biological differences. The lack of mixes and crossovers between male and female genders, makes that gender is used as a binary opposition in the LEGO catalogues. There are female minifigures in the LEGO city, but the male minifigures make up the majority of the LEGO population. The role of the male and female genders is very stereotypical most of the times. The police officers, firefighters, construction workers, and airport and harbor employees are mostly male. A lot of the female minifigures do not even seem to have jobs; they are often merely walking around in the city. So, in terms of what Wolff (1985), and Pollock (1988) as well, described about females in the city, a lot has changed. The idea that the city is men's territory seems to be thought of as out-dated by LEGO, since there are a lot of female minifigures wandering around without scandalizing themselves. In terms of the role of the male and female minifigures there are still some differences. Some of the female minifigures do hold jobs, but they are often very stereotypical, like being a nurse in the hospital or a waitress in one of the restaurants. It is

only every now and then that a female minifigure can be seen working for the police. It must be noted that there are years where no females at all are present in the city, meaning that the LEGO city is not a place yet where there is room for both women and men and where they are equal, more so even because there are always more men than women present. As said, LEGO communicates a very strong message about what jobs male and female minifigures hold, which in the first decades of the analysis is a very traditional division of roles, but in the later decades this message gets a bit more nuanced, with women dressed as a businesswoman.

Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke (2009) have mentioned several types of people that are often seen in today's city, for example young people without any children yet and gay people. Neither of these groups were very visibly present in the LEGO catalogue, which has to do with the fact that it is a toy, a model, and thus a simplification of real cities. The groups that Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke (2009) mention are too specific for a model of the city.

How, then, is the city represented, what metaphor is used, what affordances does that offer and what values does it communicate? It is easiest to start with a metaphor for the LEGO City and I think that the city that can be seen in the LEGO catalogues is one that resembles a beehive, one in which drama, human interaction and construction play very prominent roles. The most important parts in the city are the infrastructure and there are a lot of people in the city that are working, just as in a beehive. Besides that, both a beehive and the LEGO city are divided into several parts, in the LEGO city these are for example the harbour, the centre and the pole expedition. Moreover, there is not too much diversity between the minifigures, only small changes that requires searching for them, which is also the case for bees, which look all the same at first glance, but with a closer look, show minor variations. That means that the affordances are slightly limited. When only buying LEGO City sets, the customer can play out tons of scenarios, but most of them are in the same theme and will revolve around the same places. Besides that, customers cannot adapt their city to a place that resembles their hometown, for simple facts like the lack of racial minifigures or typical buildings for a certain area. That gives children a limited possibility to really explore the city by playing with LEGO, and using LEGO as a model to do so, because there is not as much to explore as there maybe should have been. What LEGO does do is offering children a starting point, from which they can let loose their own fantasy. The lack of cultural references may be a limitation in terms of identification, but it surely stimulates children's own fantasy and allows them to explore their imagination.

This leads to an interesting question that needs answering in further research on this subject: do children who have seen sets in the catalogue before make up different stories than those children who have not seen the sets in a catalogue before? That would be an interesting starting point to explore and explain the differences in affordances between the actual sets and the catalogues, not in terms what they represent, but how they are played with and how they function in a child's play experience.

Furthermore, it would be a relevant addition to this study to compare the findings of this study with the play experience of children all around the world. Are there differences between how children play with the sets in different parts of the world? Or are there children who do not really like the LEGO City sets, because they are not too familiar with the themes that are used and the types of buildings in general? Interviews with children all over the world could give a more decisive answer about what the real implications are of the representation of the city in the LEGO catalogues.

As mentioned, the LEGO city does not offer an extreme amount of affordances, but there are LEGO product lines like LEGO Creator and LEGO Orient Expedition that features sets that could have been in the city, but were not included in the LEGO City theme. It might be very insightful to see what the differences are with those sets when compared to sets that do belong to LEGO City. Can a motive be figured out for separating those sets or not making those product lines subcategories of the LEGO City line?

Another very interesting question that this study has raised also has to do with Gibson's (1979) theory on affordances. It has become clear that LEGO City offers a lot of possibilities in terms of storylines and in ways to put together the city, but not in terms of making the city one's own. A research focused on the way in which people across the world build their sets and which sets they use to create the city they want. A next step would be to study people's own creations that could fit in the city. On the Internet people share a lot of pictures of things that they have built and that are not part of the official LEGO City theme, or any others, and which are built from bricks that were not part of only one box. This may tell more about what people miss in the LEGO City and what they feel should have been part of the city.

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