‘At home in the oasis’
Sense of home and belonging in a middle class complex in a poor neighbourhood

Eva Bosch and André Ouwehand
OTB, Delft University of Technology

WORK IN PROGRESS

Abstract

In many deprived urban neighbourhoods in the Netherlands strategies are deployed to attract higher income groups from outside the neighbourhood. However, various studies on social mixing conclude that these higher income households moving to poor urban areas often remain symbolically and practically disengaged from the wider neighbourhood and its residents (Atkinson 2006, (van Eijk 2010) Savage e.a. 2005). This paper focuses on the ways in which residents of a recently constructed middle class semi-gated community in a poor Rotterdam neighbourhood experience and value (and establish boundaries between) their dwelling domain and the neighbourhood around it. Survey data and in-depth interviews with the residents of the complex are used to investigate their appreciation of, and sense of home in their new environment. Understanding how people can feel connected and disconnected to a neighbourhood where income levels are much lower than their own, will help to assess the effects of mixing strategies.

Introduction

Social mixing, as a strategy to improve poorer neighbourhoods, is on the agendas of many city councils in Western Europe (Kleinhans 2004, Lees 2008) and the United States (Joseph, Chaskin et al. 2007). Whereas in the USA social mixing strategies include relocation programmes of poor residents to wealthier neighbourhoods (Gautreaux Program, Movement to Opportunity (see for instance Orr, Feins et al. 2003; Popkin, Levy et al. 2004; Curley 2010) as well as restructuring programmes of poor neighborhoods into mixed neighborhoods (HOPE VI and more recently Choice Neighborhoods (see for instance Kleit 2005; Chaskin and Joseph 2011)), in Western
Europe social mixing is achieved almost exclusively through restructuring programmes: demolition of existing cheaper dwellings (often rental) followed by the construction of more expensive dwellings. Social mixing is seen as a tool that creates benefits for the city but also for poorer residents in the neighbourhood. It is thought that the presence of richer neighbours is beneficial to poor residents because it creates opportunities to build ‘bridging’ social networks, it provides them with role models, it brings in money for the local economy and political attention for the neighbourhood, to name a few proposed advantages. At the same time, research suggests that people have a preference to live among neighbours who are like them in terms of, among other things, socio-economic status (Fisscher 1982; Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005). This presents a problem to the feasibility of seducing higher income groups to poor neighbourhoods and as such for bringing about positive effects of social mixing for the neighbourhood. The attraction of middle-class social mixing developments in poor neighbourhoods is sometimes enhanced by gating them or creating physical borders around them, thus literally creating distance between the socially homogeneous dwelling environment and its surroundings (Atkinson 2006, p.828).

Another strategy is to target social mixing residential developments to ‘a new middle class’ that is ‘more inclined to find a diverse neighbourhood attractive’ (Van Eijk and Blokland 2010) and adapt the developments to the preferences of these ‘diversity seekers’.

This paper presents a case study of a middle income semi-gated community that was targeted for ‘diversity seekers’ in Rotterdam, and the way its residents experience living here. Learning about the ways in which middle class people value and use a neighbourhood that is socio-economically different from their own position is crucial for understanding the outcomes of different forms of social mixing. In this paper we will therefore investigate how residents of a middle class semi-gated community in a poor Rotterdam neighbourhood use and experience their dwelling environment. Do they feel at home in their dwelling environment and the neighbourhood, and what aspects of their lifestyle and social and physical environment mediate this? We try to answer these questions by looking at survey and in-depth interview data from residents who recently moved to this dwelling development.

In this paper we will first describe different views on the effects of mixing or gentrification on living conditions in poor urban neighbourhoods, especially with regards to social mixing through the development of gated communities. We will then look into the concept of targeting social mixing developments to people who like social diversity in their residential environment. The empirical section describes the semi-gated community of Le Medi, built in the poor Rotterdam borough of Delfshaven. After looking into residents’ preferences, evaluations and use of their
secluded dwelling environment and the wider neighbourhood, we will draw conclusions about what makes these ‘social mixers’ feel at home in a low income neighbourhood.

Social mixing

Many contributions to the debate on social mixing focus on outcomes for residents living in neighborhoods that have seen social mixing strategies. Several pathways are discerned through which these interventions can lead to improved living conditions in poor neighbourhoods (Rosenbaum, Stroh et al. 1998; Kleinhans 2004; Joseph, Chaskin et al. 2007; Lees 2008; van Bergeijk, Kokx et al. 2008). Social mixing is put forward as a way to enable poor residents to build social networks with higher income residents, resulting in an increase in the social capital of the poor residents. Also, an influx of higher income residents is thought to generate money in the neighbourhood’s economy (shops, restaurants and other facilities), so that the neighbourhood can sustain a higher quality of facilities available to all residents. Furthermore, following Wilson (1987), it is stated that higher income residents can act as role models, ‘in terms of people’s attitude and behaviour towards their home, the living environment, collective action and employment status’ (Kleinhans 2004). Social mixing would also be positive for the neighbourhood because it leads to ‘dilution’ of problems, wealthier households are thought to cause less problem behavior (nuisance, crime) (van Bergeijk, Kokx et al. 2008). Another argument is that higher income residents are more likely to be able to wield political power in the interest of the neighbourhood (for instance by pressuring local government to deliver public services) (Kearns and Mason 2007). Also, home buyers are believed to take better care of their dwelling and its direct environment because of their financial interest in its upkeep. Related to these arguments is the idea that social mixing will boost a neighbourhood’s reputation, which can relieve neighbourhood based negative stereotyping for poor residents (Hastings and Dean 2003).

The empirical basis for these arguments is mixed. Primary studies on the effects of social mixing interventions for residents living in specific neighbourhoods that have been restructured, point in many different directions. Many researches on social contacts or networks between higher and lower income groups in socially mixed neighbourhoods conclude that these are scarce or absent, (see for instance (Brophy and Smith 1997; Atkinson and Kintrea 2000; Blokland-Potters 2003; Allen, Camina et al. 2005; van Eijk 2010) which makes the social capital argument weak, and to some extent also the role model argument. But it should be noted that other researchers find that the physical distance between zones of more expensive and cheaper dwellings plays a role here, a finding that supports a plea for street level mixing instead of zoning (Jupp 1999; Knox, Alcock et
Furthermore, the distance in socio-economic and ethnic terms seems to be of influence on inter-group social network formation (Monk, Clarke et al. 2011) as well as the amount of time that has passed since the mixed community was realized and the social mix of the local school (Allen, Camina et al. 2005). With regards to liveability issues, some studies yield positive results (Wittebrood and van Dijk 2007; Fordham and Cole 2009; Wittebrood and Permentier 2011). Wittebrood and Permentier for instance showed that in Dutch urban neighbourhoods that had been restructured 4 to 10 years ago, neighbourhood satisfaction rates had gone up more than in ‘control’ neighbourhoods, whereas crime rates and feelings of unsafety had decreased more. Primary studies show mixed outcomes regarding the effect of social mixing interventions on neighbourhood stigma (Cole and Goodchild 2001; Hastings and Dean 2003; Ouwehand and Davis 2004).

Overall, it seems that the effects of social mixing are influenced by many place specific factors—notably spatial scale and spatial form of the new and old residential developments, ethnic and socio-economic composition of new and existing residents, social climate in the neighbourhood, neighbourhood stigma, whether the intervention was recent or longer ago, whether residents of new developments already have roots or networks in the area, the facilities and schools in the neighbourhood, the position of the neighbourhood on the local housing market, the residential stability of the neighbourhood—factors that in different configurations may reinforce or abate effects in different cases of social mixing. In fact, since neighbourhoods undergoing social mix are characterized by different arrangements of these factors it may be considered impossible to draw conclusions about the effects of social mixing in general, irrespective of a specific place. It is therefore maybe not surprising that review articles summarizing the outcomes of several primary studies draw quite divergent conclusions on the overall outcomes of social mixing strategies (Bond, Sautkina et al. 2010). Nevertheless, some scholars of social mixing or gentrification (being a more common term for social mixing on this side of the debate) do make general conclusions about its the effects and state that gentrification generally detrimental to the wellbeing and chances of poorer residents. From analysing practices of social mix in the USA, UK and the Netherlands Lees concludes that ‘social mixing is being promoted through gentrification in the face of evidence that gentrification leads to social segregation, social polarisation and displacement’ (Lees 2008 p. 2457). She states that ‘it is not realistic to assume that people from different social class backgrounds or income bands living cheek-by-jowl will actually mix, let alone integrate, (…) quite simply, gentrification causes social segregation and polarisation’ (p. 2463). Atkinson, describing the social mixing practices in UK cities as middle-
class colonisation, finds that social mixing developments attract higher income groups wanting to enjoy the ‘buzz and liveliness of the city’ but who ‘disaffiliate’ themselves from the poor residents of the neighbourhood and displace them. As such, social mixing policies ‘preach the value of integration and mix, while they facilitate residential changes of voluntary disaffiliation that surely damage future prospects for civic vitality in British cities’ (Atkinson 2006 p. 831).

Gated communities in poor neighbourhoods

As Aalbers defines it ‘a gated community is – very easily put- a community surrounded by a fence and provided with a fence for entrance’ (2001, p.2). Gated communities in poor city neighbourhoods can be considered a special case of social mixing and one that is increasingly attractive to groups of middle and high income households, as shown by the growth of gated community developments in cities in the UK and Netherlands (Aalbers 2001; Atkinson and Flint 2004; RPB 2007; VROMRaad 2009). Blandy (2006) found that there are around 1000 gated communities in the UK. Most of these were built in the last ten years, they were for the largest part in London and almost all of them were smaller than 150 dwellings. Also in the Netherlands, in the last decade, enclosed middle and high-income housing blocks have emerged. They are built as courtyards or are separated by water features from the rest of the urban tissue, and usually have fences to close off the entrance to the dwellings during the night (Donkers 2005; Lohof and Reijndorp 2006). This trend of spatial segregation by middle and higher income groups in enclosed dwelling environments has recently been addressed in two publications issued by Dutch governmental institutions. The Dutch Spatial Planning Agency (RPB) observes a growing number of “residential complexes with a private character” (RPB, 2007: 9), and the advisory body of the Ministry of Spatial Planning (VROMRaad) stated in their 2010 advisory note that there is an increasing interest in the Netherlands in ‘living amongst like-minded neighbours’ which also takes place in ‘enclosed dwelling domains’. According to the RPB (2007), many Dutch municipalities have allowed the creation of private neighbourhoods within their premises in order to retain higher and middle class households.

The creation of physical boundaries around higher and middle class residential developments in cities is fiercely debated (see Aalbers 2001; Low 2003; Atkinson and Flint 2004; Nolden 2010). Gating is thought to allay fears of otherness and the unpredictability of the outside environment for its residents (Low, 2003) while outside ‘poverty remains coagulated in spaces where daily and repeated life-worlds restrict social horizons and life chances (Ellen and Turner (1997) in Atkinson
Atkinson describes how residents of gated community in city neighbourhoods spatially segregate themselves from the rest of the neighbourhood not only in the sphere of dwelling, but also in the sphere of transport, leisure, schooling and the workplace. Cars are used to go to schools and work spaces and leisure spaces that are socially homogeneous. Parking in private garages further minimizes contacts with ‘others’. Atkinson states that “Daily patterns of movement from and to gated communities can be understood as a time-space trajectory of segregation in which maximal separation from different and potentially intrusive or dangerous groups is maintained even beyond the boundaries of these developments” (Atkinson 2006). As Castells (1996) has argued, in the postmodern economy traditional segments of neighbourhoods, cities and states are replaced by networks of selectively connected enclaves. Graham and Marvin (2001) describe an unbundling of infrastructure to serve differentiated socio-economic groups as ‘urban splintering’. Atkinson connects the selective space-time trajectories of residents living in social mix developments to fear and speaks of ‘bubbling’, where middle and higher class households are ‘trying to achieve hyper-security’ by making ‘strategic attempts to achieve protection through residential location and patterns of transfer (…)’ This attempt to promote a sense of safety in the city is increasingly predicated on the construction of largely enclosed and enclave like developments that enables a social imaginary of urban fear and insecurity to be tempered by prospects of middle class solidarity and relative withdrawal’ (Atkinson 2006). ‘Deep inclinations towards segregation based on desires for social homogeneity and the predictability and safety that this is perceived to engender’ are central to the driving forces of middle-class settlement in poor city neighborhoods.

However, when analysing Dutch examples of gated or enclosed communities, the RPB and VROMRaad do not so much find fear of (lower-class) others as an important reason for segregated dwelling in cities. In general in the Netherlands safety issues are hardly an argument in the decision making process that precedes moving house (VROM, 2007). Both the RPB and VROMRaad state that for this reason, and in contrast to gated communities in countries like Brazil, South Africa and the US, Dutch gated communities are not completely closed off to non-residents and have no strict surveillance. Distance to the outer world is usually created through soft barriers, such as greenery and water features or ‘symbolic boundaries’ like open gates. The neighbourhoods are not surrounded by walls and if they do have a gate, it is only used during the night. Rather than fear of crime the choice to live in a gated community is influenced by social insecurity and a desire to belong. The RPB thinks that in this juncture feelings of insecurity caused by the weakening of ideologies and social frameworks (family, religion, work, class), the
partial withdrawal of the government and the increased socio-cultural pluralisation of society (RPB, 2007) lead people to seek more control over the liveability in their dwelling environment as well as to seek community among likeminded people (vanDam, Eshuis et al. 2005; Lohof and Reijndorp 2006; Lörzing, W. Klemm et al. 2006). According to the VROMRaad residents of Dutch gated communities ‘are not so much looking for a tight social community but rather for a neighbourhood in which they feel familiar. Identification with a neighbourhood increases when there are more people with a similar lifestyle (Ouwehand 2007)’ (RPB 2007, p. 44-45).

Like these sources show, the literature on gated communities in western Europe is mixed about the motivations middle-class households have for buying a dwelling in these developments. It also recognizes that there are differences in the way physical boundaries are created and surveillance is organized. Furthermore, the spatial scale of the gated community and the facilities it offers play a role in the relationship between the gated community and its surroundings. Therefore, as was argued in the case of the effects of social mixing in general, an analysis of the effects of a particular social mixing intervention in the shape of a middle-class gated community asks for a detailed investigation of its characteristics and that of its surroundings.

**Lifestyles for middle class households living in poor neighbourhoods**

As said before social mixing in poor city neighborhoods involves the risk that new dwellings will not meet high demand; a poor neighborhood is often unattractive to middle class households, because, as commentators on social mixing, gentrification and gated communities stress, people like to live in socially homogeneous environments, in terms of socio-economically status but also in terms of lifestyle. Lifestyle, a sociological concept dating back to Weber and further developed by Bourdieu, can be described as ‘the behaviour and rules used within a certain status group in those social interactions that are outside the economic sphere, which one regards in order to belong to a social group and by which one can distinguish oneself from others’ (Ouwehand e.a., 2011). Pinkster and Van Kempen (2003) define lifestyles more generally as ‘consistent sets of preferences (attitudes) and behavior in the fields of work, family, dwelling, consumption and leisure’. Here no reference is made to socio-economic position, which is in line with more recent conceptualizations of lifestyle. Whereas Weber and Bourdieu saw lifestyle as bound to or bounded by socio-economic position, later scholars have loosened this tie. According to Giddens, individuals in the western, postmodern world nowadays have to make lifestyle choices out of a great variety of possible styles, even those individuals with limited resources (Giddens 1991).
Schulze posits in ‘Die Erlebnisgesellschaft’ (1992) that because of growing wealth and opportunities in (German) society, lifestyles are no longer connected to hierarchical positions in society, but can be adopted and discarded according to preference. This unbounded lifestyle adoption enables people to find likeminded others in settings where they share their cultural consumption, like leisure or dwelling. Current research, however, does find that preferences for places of residence are bound to lifestyles which are still connected to socio-economic background (Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005).

Analysts of the relationship between lifestyle and dwelling focus on the preference to live among one’s lifestyle group (………) However, recently there is much attention for a ‘new middle class’ that, as part of their lifestyle, does not prefer social homogeneity in their residential environment but rather appreciates social diversity (Florida 2003; Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005; Blokland and van Eijk 2010). Florida states that the ‘creative class’ is attracted by ‘tolerant and diverse places’ (in Blokland and van Eijk 2010). Savage et al found that among gentrifiers of a formerly poor neighbourhood in Manchester ‘celebration of diversity of lifestyles was common, especially with respect to sexuality, occupation and leisure pursuits’. Blokland and van Eijk found a substantial group of residents in a mixed neighbourhood of Rotterdam, who stated they had chosen their place of residence (also) because of its diversity. They found that there was a statistically significant relation between education level and income and the preference to live in a socially diverse neighbourhood among their respondents, and they conclude that ‘to live in a diverse neighbourhood as a lifestyle may become part of a distinction of groups with strong cultural capital’ (Blokland and van Eijk 2010, emphasis added). Living in a diverse neighbourhood, in other words, can be a lifestyle choice.

Outside the scientific debate, commercial lifestyle consultancy firms have also distinguished a liking for diversity among certain lifestyle groups. These consultancy firms inform producers of goods and services on how to interest specific lifestyle groups for their products. Since the beginning of this century, in the Netherlands lifestyle consultancy firms are also hired in the field of housing development (Pinkster and van Kempen 2003; Heijs, Carton et al. 2009). The most well-known Dutch consultancy firm that informs housing developers about targeting and marketing of their product - SmartAgent Company - states its lifestyles are not so much types of behavior and rules, but describe the psychological motivation for one’s actions, based in one’s personality. SmartAgent Company (SAC) discerns four lifestyles which are ‘complex[es] of needs and motivations that are ultimately drivers for people’s behavior’ (Hagen 2002). One of
these lifestyles can be termed ‘diversity seekers’. SAC refers to a wide variety of psychological, sociological and philosophical sources (ranging from Bourdieu to Nietzsche) as theoretical sources for their operationalization of lifestyle. SAC’s four lifestyle profiles are positioned on three axes, derived from the social sciences of psychology, sociology and anthropology (Hagen, 2002). The first sociological axis represents a continuum for a person’s disposition regarding others’ interests. It denotes to what extent an individual minds the ego or the group. The second, psychological axis, ranges from extrovert to introvert personality, and impacts preferred sociability with others, for instance in the neighbourhood. Lastly, the cultural axis describes to what extent the individual supports and behaves along norms and values of the ‘dominant’ culture in society (meaning that through this axis behavior is part of the lifestyles after all, as marked by Ouwehand et al. (forthcoming)). After taking a survey test, every individual can be classified in one of these lifestyles (see www.smartagent.nl). For communication purposes, the cultural axis is not part of SmartAgent Company’s representation model of their lifestyle classification. To further increase simplicity, they indicate the four lifestyles with four colours.

**Fig 1: Model of the four SAC lifestyles**

![Model of the four SAC lifestyles](source)

*Source: SmartAgent Company (translation by authors)*

The ‘red’ lifestyle group named Vitality portrays the lifestyle of individuals who are interested in their own development (ego oriented) and extrovert. On the cultural axis (not shown in the model) they are open to various cultural norms and expressions, and are not bound to the ‘dominant’ culture in society. Self-fulfillment is an important goal for people who adhere to this lifestyle, a fulfillment which is reached through individual and creative ways. This does not necessarily involve a highly paid job, since social status is relatively less important to them. With
regards to their preferred dwelling environment SmartAgent Company explicitly describes this lifestyle group as diversity seekers.

‘People with a red lifestyle are people who prefer to live among people from all layers of society and between different cultures. They are relatively uninterested in meddling with other people’s business. They are free spirited people who value freedom and independence. For people with a red lifestyle life is more than just work, family or the neighbourhood’ (Vestia, 2010).

The red lifestyle group is promoted by SAC as a group that is not averse to, but rather is interested in living among different socio-economic groups. In the case study presented below, a social mixing development in a poor Rotterdam neighbourhood, it was therefore this lifestyle group that was chosen as the target group and who’s dwelling preferences were to be facilitated.

There is much discussion about the reliability and validity of the operationalization of lifestyle by consultancy firms and its application in residential development. Social scientists question whether lifestyle tests are adequate, whether lifestyle is constant through life, and whether lifestyle profiling in residential development leads to higher residential satisfaction for dwellers (Ouwehand 2001; Heijs, Carton et al. 2009). Nevertheless, in the Netherlands lifestyle profiling of dwellings and dwelling environments is becoming more popular. Pinkster and Van Kempen stated in 2003 that ‘lifestyles are considered a trend in housing development research’. Lifestyle based research moves from socio-demographic indicators of the demand side to socio-psychological and socio-cultural indicators, or from ‘hard’ indicators to ‘soft’ indicators (Nio 2000). The consultancy firms give developers advice with regards to functional and symbolical aspects of dwelling design, tailored to the preferences of a lifestyle group that is selected for the location. As described, living in a diverse neighborhood can be such a lifestyle related preference.

The development process of Le Medi

Fig 2: scale model of Le Medi
By looking at Le Medi, a housing block of 93 dwellings in Rotterdam completed in 2008, we can investigate how home is experienced in a semi-gated middle income dwelling development, targeted for ‘diversity seekers’. In this section the development process of Le Medi is described on the basis of written sources and interviews with professionals.

Le Medi is situated in the Rotterdam borough of Delfshaven (69,000 inhabitants), which was appointed one of the country’s 40 most deprived areas by the national government four years ago, and as such it is subject to many policy programs to improve it. Delfshaven consists mainly of dense urban neighbourhoods, built in the early twentieth century for workers of the nearby harbours and their families. Le Medi was built in 2008 in Bospolder-Tussendijken, one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Delfshaven (CBS 2008), situated 4 kilometres from the centre of Rotterdam. In the last 40 years native Dutch households have left the area and migrant families have come to live here, now accounting for 70 % of the neighbourhood’s population.

The development process of Le Medi started in 2000. At that moment a Rotterdam based businessman of Moroccan descent pitched the idea to build an Arabian style neighbourhood in Rotterdam, in order ‘to show the wealth and riches of Arabian culture (…) in a time when people spoke about migrants in a rather negative tone’ (Idrissi in van Dael 2008). Housing corporations that embraced the idea selected a site in the urban renewal area of Delfshaven for the plan. To get to know Arabian architecture of dwellings and to see which elements of this architecture would be applicable in a Dutch climate and urban structure, architects, representatives of the
municipality and commissioners undertook an excursion to Morocco. This resulted in a toolbox of vernacular Arabian dwelling elements that was to be applied by the project’s architect in a mix with Dutch or modernist architecture. Part of this toolbox was the idea to adapt the spatial layout of an Arabian medina, with its enclosed inner courtyard and streets.

As a next step the same parties held a so-called branding session, organized by a specialized branding firm ‘to collectively determine the identity of Le Medi’ (KEI 2010), in which they discussed their ideas, hopes and starting points for developing the block. Present at this session were the housing corporations, the architect and representatives from the local government, but also the real estate developer that was attracted to realize the plan, as well as a manager of the lifestyle consultancy firm SmartAgent Company. The report of this branding session states that Le Medi offers possibilities for ‘2nd and 3rd generation migrant families [from the neighbourhood] who can live here close to family and acquaintances’. However, Le Medi was also intended to ‘strengthen the city and Bospolder Tussiondijken by creating a highly distinct residential environment that attracts new groups of residents’. The branding report describes the target group for Le Medi as ‘a new type of urbanite’, of which the manager of SmartAgent Company gave a further description: These ‘new urbanites’ ‘who have many nationalities’ are people who ‘do not disapprove of exclusiveness, enclave and distinction’ (…) ‘These people are individualists who nevertheless do appreciate each other’s nearness’. The manager also thinks that: ‘They have a high education, they often work in public service and government. In their families they use modern male / female task divisions. (…) They drive French cars, like TMF [a pop music TV station] and Bach, fusion cooking, traveling to far off places, they are extrovert and communicative’ (Real Time Branding, 2006). The branding report states that these people have ‘a new way of dealing with diversity: hospitality, being different is cool, they enjoy diversity’.

This description of extrovert individualists and their tastes, fits the red lifestyle group that SmartAgent discerns. The developer, who had incorporated lifestyle profiling as a standard component of its concept and design processes, decided to take this lifestyle group as its target group for Le Medi. Next, the developer and SmartAgent Company held an online survey, which was advertised in a local paper, to see what income categories, household types and lifestyle groups where interested in this branded concept and this location. They found that the chosen lifestyle group was indeed interested more than average (although introvert individualists were as interested), and decided they found the right concept for the right group (interview with developer). Later on in the development process the developer decided they also needed to profile Le Medi towards ‘extrovert collectivists’ (yellow in SAC categorization). The group-orientation
of these people was thought to be necessary for the social climate in Le Medi, since the residents of Le Medi, being so socio-economically different from the surrounding neighbourhood, would have to form a little community by themselves (interview with SmartAgent Company consultant). Even though the extrovert individualists would ‘appreciate each other’s nearness’ according to the developer and lifestyle consultancy firm, they believed introducing ‘extrovert collectivists’ would be good to heighten the social cohesion in Le Medi (interview with developer).

During the design process the architect worked to implement Arabian and Mediterranean architectural principles in the ensemble of Le Medi. The expressive architecture and flexibility of the dwelling plans (extra floors and extensions were possible on demand) were thought to meet the red lifestyle group’s interest in self-expression and liking for diversity and versatility. The final design of Le Medi consists of 93 dwellings in six rows. The dwellings cost between €200,000 and 300,000 (without extensions or extra floors). The streets and rows of gardens between the dwellings do not connect to the public space of the rest of this part of Delfshaven, but are separated from it by walls and gates. This corresponds in a way to the closed medinas of Morocco. Le Medi’s streets and square are owned by the collective of residents, but are freely accessible to non-residents on workdays and Saturdays between 06:00 and 19:00. Le Medi’s outer facades are made of grey and brown stones, with small windows, whereas the facades of the dwellings on the inner side of Le Medi have Mediterranean colours (orange, red, yellow, lavender and white) resembling the more colourful inner courts of Arabian medinas. Le Medi’s central square has a large fountain. Some of the architectural details (lamps, gates, mosaics) of Le Medi are based on the geometric Islamic ornamentation of the orient, whereas other architectural aspects remind of Dutch modernism and the colours of the inner facades can be considered Mediterranean.

Fig 3: Main entrance of Le Medi
Fig. 4: Street inside Le Medi
Fig 5: Inner courtyard of Le Medi
The last step in the development process was the communication of the eventual product to potential buyers. To this end a brochure was made, containing many ‘artist’ impressions of Le Medi as well as decorative images of other Arabian and Mediterranean architecture and ornaments. The brochure also shows Le Medi’s dwelling types and the options to expand them, as well as the assets of the neighbourhood, which are portrayed in photos and text. The shown assets are the multicultural shops and restaurants nearby, the historical part of the neighbourhood that is a harbour since mediaeval times and also a soon to be constructed neighbourhood park. The brochure ends with pictures of the attractions of the central city.

Methods

We have been researching the composition of Le Medi’s residents, and their evaluation of the complex and the surrounding neighbourhood as part of a larger NICIS funded case study research into ‘branding’ and life-style profiling in dwelling development. The fieldwork and analysis of the case Le Medi is not yet finished but we present here our first findings. In Le Medi we held a survey in the winter of 2010/2011. All 89 households (4 dwellings were vacant at the time of the survey) were approached face to face and with a posted invitation to fill in the survey. 36 responded, yielding a 40% result. Of those, 8 residents have now been interviewed in depth about their experiences of searching for a house and living in Le Medi and Bospolder-Tussendijken. There are 5 ‘diversity seekers’ in the group of interviewees, the others have a blue of green lifestyle. More interviews will be done this summer. Interviews were taped, transcribed and later coded with a software package suitable for open coding (ATLAS.ti). Furthermore, some data about the characteristics of a larger set of households in Le Medi was gathered from the administration of the developer of Le Medi from 2008, when 81 dwellings were sold.

The residents of Le Medi: being and feeling at home inside and outside

The survey data and interviews give insight in why residents of Le Medi chose for this dwelling environment and how they use and experience their (wider) neighborhood. We will look at the demographical composition of the group of buyers, their reasons to buy, their sense of home, their use of the neihborhood and the relationship with residents’ lifestyle.
Population composition of Le Medi

From the survey data and the administration of the developer we can learn whether the targeted groups of Le Medi (higher educated people with a red ‘diversity-seeking’ lifestyle, being also households already living in the neighbourhood wanting to make a step in their housing career) have come to live here. First of all the developer’s administration shows that 43% of the 81 households living in Le Medi in 2008, moved in from another location in Delfshaven. As such Le Medi fulfils a role for households from this area wanting to move to a larger dwelling than is usually available in this poorer borough. It is interesting to see that only 50% of these ‘local’ respondents have attained a higher educational level (university or professional college) compared to 72% of the respondents coming from elsewhere. Furthermore, 80% of these ‘locals’ are of non-western descent (first or second generation migrants), whereas this is only 39% for the households who last lived in other parts of Rotterdam or the Netherlands. On the whole, 60% of the 81 households living in Le Medi in 2008 were of non-western descent (including some mixed couples). In Bospolder-Tussendijken the overall share of non-western migrants (1st and 2nd generation) is 70%. None of the households who bought a house in Le Medi in 2008 have moved since then, but 8 more dwellings were sold between 2008 and 2010. This may mean that the ethnical composition of Le Medi was slightly different at the time of the survey. Nevertheless, the fact that in the survey response group only 44% was non-western suggests that the survey group is not completely representative for the whole population in terms of ethnicity. Also, the response group contained comparatively few ‘locals’, namely 18%, whereas the developer’s administration had 44%. In other words, native Dutch residents from outside the borough are overrepresented in the survey.

The fact that Le Medi’s dwellings are much more expensive than rents and housing prices in the surrounding area is reflected in the income distribution inside and outside Le Medi. Survey respondents earn on average approximately 40.000 Euro after tax per household per year, while this is 17.000 in Rotterdam and 14.800 in Bospolder-Tussendijken (data of 2007, CBS), which means that Le Medi’s residents earn on average thrice as much as their neighbours outside the complex. Furthermore, 88% of the adults in the respondents’ households had work, whereas in the wider neighbourhood this is only 56% (population aged 15-65). Even though incomes are on average higher than in Bospolder – Tussendijken, also within Le Medi they are rather mixed, ranging between around 2000 Euro to more than 4500 Euro per month after tax. Household types are also diverse. 11% of the respondents are single person households, 50% couples with children, 27% couples without children, and 11% single parents. In age respondents do not differ
so much, they are all between 27 and 54 years old, with the largest share (41%) in the age of 32 to 37.

Since the SAC lifestyle test was part of the survey, the lifestyles of the 32 respondents who filled in these questions are known. It turns out that 48% of the respondents have a red ‘diversity-seeking’ lifestyle, and 19% has a yellow ‘harmony-seeking’ lifestyle -which were the targeted groups-, 13% has a green lifestyle and 19% has a blue lifestyle. This means that Le Medi has attracted quite a share of diversity seekers. Within the survey data (which are limited in number of households and ‘locals’ are underrepresented) a pattern emerges with ‘red’, ‘yellow’ and ‘blue’ households coming mostly from outside the borough, whereas locals from Delfshaven are mostly ‘green’.

**Fig 6: lifestyles and last place of residence before Le Medi**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAC lifestyle</th>
<th>Coming from Delfshaven</th>
<th>Coming from outside Delfshaven</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reasons to buy a dwelling in Le Medi**

However, is this high share of diversity seekers also reflected in the preferences residents have for a (diverse) neighbourhood? In the survey residents were asked to indicate whether or not various aspects of Le Medi and Bospolder Tussendijken were a reason for buying their house.

**Fig 7: Reasons to buy a house in Le Medi**
The figure shows that whereas the price/quality ratio of the house and its vicinity to the centre of Rotterdam were a reason to buy for most of the residents, the wider neighbourhood of Bospolder-Tussendijken was much less a pull factor at the time of buying their house. 25% of the respondents indicated that ‘the multicultural character of Bospolder-Tussendijken’ was one of their reasons for buying the house, and 31% mentioned ‘existing social contacts and / or the facilities in Bospolder-Tussendijken’ as a reason. However, these percentages are higher if we look at the respondents from Delfshaven only (namely 50% and 84%) and lower if we take only the respondents coming from other places (namely 20% and 20%). If analysed separately, ‘reds’ (who are for the largest part from outside Delfshaven) did not mention ‘neighbourhood reasons’ more than the other lifestyle groups. In other words, the neighbourhood was mainly a pull factor for those who already lived there and barely reason to buy for others, including ‘diversity seekers’. The social homogeneity of the dwelling complex, which according to gated community literature would be an important reason to buy, was not a strong reason either. Only 16% mentioned ‘the possibility to dwell among likeminded’ as a reason. But the multicultural population of the dwelling complex, its ethnic diversity, was more interesting to the buyers, especially among ‘diversity seekers’. 60% of the ‘reds’ chose this reason, versus 33% of the ‘yellows’ and ‘blue’s and 0% of the ‘greens’. This means that for the largest part of the diversity seekers the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood is not such a strong pull factor that it influences their decision to buy, whereas that of the complex is. In this respect we have asked residents whether they would like Le Medi to be completely homogeneous or completely diverse in terms of the population’s income levels, cultural background, lifestyle, ethnicity, life phase and education level, and indicate this on a scale of 0 (completely homogeneous) to 10 (completely mixed). Results show that residents like their streets to be generally mixed, and that ‘reds’ indeed
are most interested in a diverse composition of their street when it comes to ethnicity, income and cultural background.

**Fig 7: ‘How mixed would you like your street to be?’**

In interviews residents compare the group of residents of Le Medi and the residents in the surrounding streets and feel that there is an income difference. They acknowledge that Le Medi’s residents are different since they are ‘not rich, not poor, but at least we all have a job’. This is not seen as a lack of diversity in Le Medi.

Since the survey only had one question about the neighbourhood as a reason to buy (e.g. whether its ethnic diversity was a pull factor), we asked the interviewees to talk a bit more about their choice for a (new) neighbourhood. All but one respondent said they had wanted to live in a diverse and lively place, and many compared Bospolder-Tussendijken with Rotterdam suburbs which they found too boring and anonymous. Most enjoyed the liveliness of the nearby neighbourhood shopping streets. Especially the local residents say they were attached to Delfshaven through memories and social contacts. A Turkish resident, who was born and raised in Delfshaven but moved to a suburb before returning to Le Medi, explains what he feels for the borough:

I was doubting between Rotterdam North and Delfshaven when we moved back to Rotterdam, because I find those areas are representative of life, in the sense that they are old and young, ugly and beautiful, with regard to buildings as well as to people. Old and rich, everything is mixed. In the Vinex [suburb] area where we used to live before, everything is a bit monotonous and I mean... that is not what life is like. Also when you
look at yourself there are bound to be things you like about yourself and things you like less. So I think the diversity, the heterogeneity if you can call it that, that’s what appeals to me. And Rotterdam North appeals to me very much, but after all my heart is with Delfshaven.

Whereas residents who had already lived in Delfshaven, growing up or raising a family, expressed place attachment to Delfshaven, newcomers to the area had more hesitations. They say that at the time of buying they liked the liveliness of the nearby neighbourhood shopping street but also thought the neighbourhood was unclean and / or unsafe. The prospect of a clean and safe inner courtyard helped them, to decide buy a house in Le Medi, especially for households with small children. In the survey we asked whether ‘the fact that Le Medi can be closed to its surroundings’ was a reason to buy. This was indeed the case for 34 % of the households, and especially for ‘yellow’ and ‘blue’ households (50% of them indicated this as a reason to buy) whereas for ‘red’ and ‘green’ households it was less important (26% and 25%).

Experiences: feeling home

When looking at socio-economic indicators differences between residents of Le Medi and residents of the rest of Bospolder Tussendijken are hard to miss. To what extent do Le Medi’s residents feel at home in such a differentiated environment, and how is this influenced by lifestyle and social and spatial factors? To investigate this, respondents were asked to score six items on a Likert scale. Items were:

*I feel at home in Le Medi;*

*People deal with one another in a pleasant way in Le Medi;*

*I feel proud to live in Le Medi;*

*I feel responsible for the liveability in Le Medi;*

*Le Medi has a nice, relaxed atmosphere;*

*Living in Le Medi fits me.*

The same items were also asked with the words ‘Le Medi’ replaced by ‘Bospolder-Tussendijken’. Two scales were constructed; one for feeling home in Le Medi (Cronbach’s alpha is 0.825) and one for feeling home in Bospolder-Tussendijken (Cronbach’s alpha is 0.913). In this way we found that respondents felt less at home in the neighbourhood than in Le Medi, by 1.5 on a 5
point scale. However, as the next graph shows, there are differences between lifestyle groups. ‘Red’ respondents feel rather at home in the wider neighbourhood (like ‘green’ respondents, but this can be explained by the fact that almost all of the four ‘green’ respondents are from the neighbourhood). Their mean score is between neutral and largely positive. Blue and green respondents have a mean score between largely negative and neutral. Also, the difference between the sense of home in Le Medi and the wider neighbourhood is smaller for ‘reds’ and ‘greens’ than for the other groups.

Fig 8: Feeling at home in Le Medi and Bospolder Tussendijken on a 5-point scale

1 = absolutely negative, 2 = largely negative, 3 = neutral, 4 = largely positive, 5 = absolutely positive

In accordance with a higher sense of home in Bospolder-Tussendijken, people with a red lifestyle feel safer at night in the neighbourhood than respondents with a blue and yellow lifestyle. The survey shows that 20% of them feels unsafe at night in the neighborhood, whereas this is 50% for the ‘blues’ and 85% for the ‘yellows’. ‘Greens’ who are mostly locals, respond like the ‘reds’. ‘Reds’ are also less aware of vandalism in the neighbourhood. Whereas in the other groups 50% of the respondents feel Bospolder-Tussendijken has a lot of vandalism, only 33% of the red respondents agree.

As we have seen that residents are mostly neutral about feeling home in Bospolder, in interviews people told that they experience some nuisance in Bospolder-Tussendijken, when they see drug dealing, urinating in public and dirty streets. They think the fact that Le Medi is rather closed
keeps this nuisance at bay. This may explain why 76% of the survey respondents say they are happy with gate closing times as they are now (vs. 10% who would like to see them closed more often, and 13% for more open). Although most interviewees say they feel at ease in the neighbourhood, some indicate that they are happy they don’t have to see ‘the problems of the street’ or ‘the misery’ while instead they see the many coloured streets of Le Medi. Many of them also look forward to new urban renewal in the neighbourhood, so that Bospolder-Tussendijken will become more socio-economically mixed. They feel that this will bring facilities and shops to the neighbourhood that are more attractive for them, and think that streets with owner-occupied will look better then social rent streets.

From the interviews we learned that for some households the enclosed courtyard was especially important because their children can play there in a car free environment ‘without the chance of getting run over by a tram, like in many other parts of Delfshaven’. Others saw in it a space that creates community. They feel that being able to sit in front of the house in a pleasant environment and the shared responsibility for the cleanliness and maintenance of the area creates social contacts and community. A Turkish resident who has lived in Bospolder all his life says he bought the house partly because he saw in Le Medi’s spatial lay-out a basis for community. To him, normal row housing is much more anonymous, and he prefers to have a semi-public space where people can meet, like he knows from his visits to his mother’s family in central Turkey. In practice the inner courtyard is indeed a space for gathering. In interviews people say they feel that they as residents are a group when sitting outside in shared spaces, but residents also guard their privacy and do not ‘want to go over to drink coffee all the time’. Several indicate that it is the availability of shared semi-public spaces that enables them to search contact when they like, but also to withdraw from contact when they like (‘you don’t have to invite them in’).

Neighbourhood use

When we look at how residents use the wider neighbourhood, conclusions can be drawn about whether or not they ‘bubble’ (Atkinson 2006), that is, whether they isolate themselves spatially from it in transportation, leisure, schooling and shopping. Also we can get a glimpse of whether their presence can benefit their neighbourhood through spendings and maybe even other activities. Respondents were asked how often they did several activities, outside Le Medi but within Bospolder-Tussendijken. Results show that residents are using the neighbourhood through grocery shopping, shopping at the market, visiting friends and strolling. The results did not differ
much between the lifestyles (although ‘blues’ did not visit friends in the neighbourhood) or between those who lived in Delfshaven before and the newcomers.

**Fig 9: Neighbourhood use by respondents**

![Neighbourhood use by respondents](image)

Although 80% of the residents indicate they visit friends in Bospolder Tussendijken at least once a month, in interviews newcomers to the area told that they do not know any people in the neighbourhood, or these are friends they already knew through work or education before moving to Le Medi. Only a few parents who have sent their children to a local school have made contacts with other parents in the neighbourhood, but also these ties are on the whole not very intensive. Locals on the other hand, have kept their neighbourhood contacts.

Furthermore, half of the 16 families in the response group that have children aged 4 to 18, chose not to send their children to schools in Bospolder-Tussendijken, which all have a large share of ethnic minority children. Although N in this case is rather small, it is interesting to see that blue and yellow households with children did not bring their children to a school in the neighbourhood, whereas half of the red and (local) green households did, also those households who came from outside Delfshaven. Day care was in Bospolder-Tussendijken for 44% of the households who used this.

**Conclusions**
Some British scholars on social mixing and gentrification frame the residential and transport patterns and social networks of middle class households in poor city neighbourhoods as segregated and influenced by fear, especially in the discussion on gated communities. Furthermore, they believe social mixing to be detrimental to the conditions for poorer residents in these areas. An aspect that is often overlooked in discussions on gentrification is the fact that social mixing developments are not only attract newcomers but can also be an interesting option for local households who have gained some money and want to move house but not necessarily neighbourhood. In Le Medi a substantial share of the residents (43%) consists of non-western immigrants or their children, who have been living in the neighbourhood before, and have social contacts and connections to the neighbourhood. This puts the idea of gated communities as spaces of social segregation into perspective for the situation of (this) Dutch inner city development. Lees and Atkinson do not write about how gentrifyers and ‘existing population’ can be the same group, but rather differentiate between ‘cosmopolitans and locals’, ‘affluent and poor’ thereby losing sight of trajectories of social mobility within neighbourhoods.

At the same time, with regards to newcomers discussions about limited social integration of middle class households in social mixing projects are relevant in the case of Le Medi. Le Medi’s residents disaffiliate to the extent that they have few social contacts in the neighbourhood and feel more at home in their semi-gated community than in the surrounding neighbourhood, where many of them feel unsafe at night. However, residents with a diversity seeking lifestyle feel less unsafe and more at home in Bospolder Tussendijken. And although social integration in the shape of social networks between Le Medi and the surrounding neighbourhood is limited, segregation of space-time action patterns urged by fear, as Atkinson described, is uncommon in Le Medi. Almost all Le Medi residents use neighbourhood shops which are mainly attuned to the large share of poor households in Bospolder-Tussendijken, and go by foot through the neighbourhood many times per week. This also means that these middle class households may contribute in a small way to the neighbourhood’s economy. Schooling, however, is another matter. Whereas neighbourhood shopping is widespread under all lifestyle groups, only some of the residents choose a neighbourhood school for their children, and these are all people who were already living in the neighborhood or incoming ‘diversity seekers’.

Half of Le Medi’s respondents are diversity seekers, and these are mainly households who last lived outside the borough. For them and for other non-locals, Le Medi’s the neighbourhood’s (cultural) diversity was not a big pull factor in the process of buying. The diversity of Le Medi’s population, on the other hand, was quite appreciated, especially among diversity seekers. For
them, cultural diversity was very interesting. This means that middle class ‘colonization’ is not always in line with ‘deep inclinations of like-with-like associations’ and search for social homogeneity (Atkinson 2006). But it also means that this interest in social diversity in Le Medi is in practice limited in socio-enomic terms, due to the fact that other residents cannot be dependent on welfare in order to be able to buy a house here. Also, while living there, incoming residents generally like the wider neighbourhood’s liveliness, but disapprove of crime and dirt in the neighborhood. The fact that Le Medi is an enclosed space and that its gates can be shut, enable residents to enjoy a clean and crimefree residential environment, but also creates a platform for community, which is declining in many city streets today, as the RPB has noted. This community platform can be ‘escaped’ by retreating into the house if residents need privacy.

Investigating social mixing strategies with a closer look, through case study, has shown how specific spatial (type of enclosure, functional program of shared spaces) and social characteristics (residents lifestyle and their residential history) of a project influence middle class’ households sense of home and integration in a poor neighbourhood. This gives a sharper view at what social mixing can mean for a specific neighbourhood. In this case, it becomes clear that although social integration of Le Medi’s newcomer residents in Bospolder is limited, residents enjoy living and using Bospolder Tussendijken predicated on the protection and ‘loose’ community of Le Medi.

References


Bolt, G. and R. van Kempen, 2008, De Mantra van de Mix, Utrecht, Forum


Wilson, W. J. (1987). The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy.

