THE BUTTERFLY

a sense of home, community and integration for expat families in Amsterdam

REFLECTION
THE BUTTERFLY

“The butterfly is a symbol of powerful transformations. By analogy to the development of this animal, the meaning associated with the butterfly emphasizes the ability to move from one state, perspective, lifestyle to another.”

THE BUTTERFLY

a sense of home, community and integration for expat families in Amsterdam

Reflection paper

Stefan Plas
4209569

MSc4 Dwelling, Dutch Housing

Theo Kupers  Main mentor
Ferry Adema  Second mentor
Pierijn van der Putt  Third mentor
Huib Plomp  Delegate of the Board of Examiners

(http://www.spiritanimal.info/butterfly-spirit-animal/)
INTRODUCTION

Relevance
The syllabus of this graduation studio clearly states a future-driven approach. ‘What do our cities need?‘ is one of the questions the design should answer to. Our globalising world means an increasing interaction between people and their cultures, from countries all over the world. One of the driving factors behind this globalisation is the migration of knowledge workers. This draws the attention of companies, since the modern knowledge economy is strongly dependent on well-educated personnel.

When a country is able to draw in foreign knowledge workers, it’s easier to respond to possible shortages or frictions in their own labour market. So attracting foreign talents is crucial for governments and companies for a strong international competitive position.

However, the Netherlands are falling behind in attracting foreign knowledge workers, despite the fact that we are one of the top competing economies. (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2014, p. 6). So, to boost our economy, a more attractive environment for expats is valuable.

To see how we can make the Netherlands and Amsterdam in particular more attractive, we can look at surveys that have been held amongst expats in the Netherlands. One of the points of improvement is the ease of finding housing.

Expats is one of the relatively new groups of professionals that want to live in the city. These groups demand for more expensive city apartments that are bigger and are high-quality finished. However, “the emphasis on social housing in the twentieth century came at the expense of housing typologies for those of the middle class who led urban lifestyle”. So looking into the design of such city apartments could be a relevant research, to create a more attractive environment for expats. Not in the last place because “we see interesting indications for the future in projects for more expensive city apartments (van Gameren, D., van den Heuvel, D., Mool, H., van der Puit, P., Klijn, O., van Andel, F., 2009, p. 2.).

The focus on city apartments comes from the preference for an urban environment of expats. 35% of all international knowledge workers in the Netherlands works in Amsterdam, for instance. This makes Amsterdam the destination for expats in the Netherlands (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2014, p. 12).

However, in our capital it’s exceptionally hard to find housing for expats, reveals the ‘City Ranking’ in InterNations’ yearly survey called ‘Expat Insider’ (2017). Apart from the general shortage of suitable city apartments, this could be appointed to the housing market of Amsterdam being overheated as well. This is partly caused by investors buying properties to rent them out (‘buy-to-let’), targeting expats for their money (NG Economisch Bureau, 2017, p. 15). Through this, expats are competing with Amsterdam people on the same market, while in general their budgets are not.

So, in creating housing for expats, we can make a start with creating a more attractive environment for expats and thus enhancing our international economical competitive position, the housing market in Amsterdam gets more air, and expats have a more suitable living environment.

This suitable living environment is not in the last place based on the ability to create a social network. Expats are facing several problems upon arrival to a new host country, amongst others feelings of loneliness and being left out. These feelings are most common amongst for so-called ‘trailing spouses’, Flavia Cangià (2017, p. 22) states. “A focus on (...) spouses is particularly interesting, considering the more challenging relocation for partners compared to the employee, who generally continues to rely on the workplace as an anchorage in the new environment.” So creating a building complex for expats, with a sense of community, is important. On the other hand, creating an ‘expat-bubble’ in the city centre of Amsterdam, exceeds the aim.

The definition of ‘expat’ by the Central Bureau of Statistics includes the statement that there’s little socio-cultural integration (CBS, 2015, p. 7). Expats are not to blame for this alone, social interaction is two-way traffic. The ‘Expat Insider’ survey (2017) reveals that as a country we are not doing our best either. So a building complex that facilitates integration and interaction with its environment is good for both parties.

Research
To narrow the target group, this research focusses on ‘expat families’ because of the benefit this group would have from a building complex especially for them, in light of Cangià’s paper. The aim of this research is to find out what these expat families need for their dwelling and its environment to ensure a comfortable living environment: a home away from home. That’s why the main question is:

How can the dwelling and its environment facilitate a sense of home, community and integration for expat families in Amsterdam?

To find an inclusive answer to this question, the sub questions deal with the three different realms mentioned in the main research question. Therefore the sub questions are:

How can the program and configuration of the dwelling make it fit for an expat family?

How can the program of the dwelling and its environment facilitate a sense of community among the residents?

How can the program of the dwelling and its environment facilitate engagement with the neighbourhood?

Methodology
To find answers to these questions, I started with literature research into the overarching target group ‘expats’ before looking into ‘(expat) families’. From this literature research I tried to substract preferences and needs, that I ordered into three scales: public, collective and private.

Quite simultaneously I analysed the chosen location on its morphological, typological, historical and functional features.

To get a better grip on housing for expats, and in particular families, I analysed three case studies: the New Amsterdam, Detroit and the Kolenkithuis, all in Amsterdam. The analysis focusses on the three realms again: engagement with the neighbourhood, a sense of community among the residents and the fitness of the floorplan for expat families. The results of these questions are again ordered into the three scales: public, collective and private.

I then combined the preferences and needs on the different scales concluded from the literature research and the case studies, to answer the three sub questions and thereby the main question. Then, analysing if the set of preferences and needs on the public scale are met by the neighbourhood as it is (as can be concluded from the location analysis), I can define the program on all the three scales. This, together with the site analysis, is the input for the design.
The main research question for this research was:

How can the dwelling and its environment facilitate a sense of home, community and integration for expat families in Amsterdam?

To find an inclusive answer to this question, the sub questions deal with the three different realms mentioned in the main research question. Therefore the sub questions are:

How can the program and configuration of the dwelling make it fit for an expat family?

How can the program of the dwelling and its environment facilitate a sense of community among the residents?

How can the program of the dwelling and its environment facilitate engagement with the neighbourhood?

Fitness for expat family

On the public scale, four concrete criteria are set to make it fit for expat families. Those criteria being: public safety (a 'sheltered environment') and the proximity of public transport, shops (daily grocery stores), schools (daycare, elementary - and high school) and playgrounds.

On the collective scale it's more about preferred services as an extension to the dwelling itself. So the dwellings should be serviced, meaning that hotel-like services and facilities are part of the deal. This could be laundry service, the presence of a health club, etc. Somewhat belonging in this list, are the presence of a concierge in the building and rentable guestrooms for family or friends that are visiting from their home country.

The design criteria on the private scale regard the dwelling itself and so these criteria are more or less concrete. The dwellings should be of size, with private outdoor space and ample of storage space, furnished and flexible in the use of the layout. A stated preference is also an extra (bed) room in the apartment, but this criteria on the private scale is interchangeable for the rentable guestroom on the collective scale.

Sense of community

A sense of community among the residents can only be facilitated by providing enough collective space, both indoors and outdoors. Basically, spaces where social interaction can take place. The case studies have been of great use to find interpretations for these spaces. For the design I can think of communal facilities like health club with a swimming pool, saunas and a gym, a meeting centre, daycare and/or simply a community centre.

Doing the case study analysis I realised that the circulation system also can have a great effect on the sense of community. That’s why one of the design criteria is a circulation system that provides social interaction and control: wide galleries for instance and/or an entrance lobby.

Places to play for the children are also to be provided. As in the Kolenkithuis, this could be combined with the circulation system, by making galleries wider. Also playgrounds in the proximity of the building complex are fundamental.

Engagement with the neighbourhood

Like facilitating a sense of community, facilitating engagement with the neighbourhood is about creating space for social interaction. Now not only for the residents themselves, but for the whole neighbourhood. Basically, opening up parts of the design towards the city. Making the building a place to be not only for the residents. Concrete interpretations for these spaces have come from the case studies, especially the Detroit project. A plinth with a restaurant and/or café, shops or offices for instance.

Leaving space around the building for public outdoor areas are also a good way. It’s also even a stated preference of expats. So, unlike some of the case studies, don’t fill out the whole plot.

On the next page, the answers to the research questions have been translated into icons representing the design criteria on the public, collective and the private scale.
public

- public transport in proximity
- public safety > 'sheltered environment'
- shops in proximity

collective

- health club
- meeting centre
- daycare
- community centre
- wide galleries
- entrance lobby
- places to play

private

- +/- 100 M²
- large dwellings
- private outdoor space
- extra (bed)room
- furnished
- storage space
- flexibility

schools in proximity

hotel-like services: laundry, health club, concierge, etc.

shared guestrooms

playground in proximity

restaurants / cafes

shops in proximity

shops in proximity

public outdoor space

collective outdoor space

furnished

flexibility

large dwellings

extra (bed)room

private outdoor space

storage space

flexibility

private

furnished

storage space

flexibility

private

+/- 100 M²

large dwellings

private outdoor space

extra (bed)room

furnished

storage space

flexibility

private

+/- 100 M²

large dwellings

private outdoor space

extra (bed)room

furnished

storage space

flexibility

private
In the conclusion a set of icons, the design criteria based on both the literature study and the case studies, were showed. These icons are ordered in three scales: public, collective and private. Based on the location analysis we can conclude if the location is fit for the target group as it is, if design solutions for the urban layout need to contribute to this, or if the location is not fit at all.

If this location is suitable for expats is discussed first. Hereafter the relevance on the bigger scale is discussed: what would a dwelling complex (for expats) at this location give back to the city of Amsterdam?

**Fitness for expat families**

In the research into the preferences of international knowledge workers in the Netherlands by University of Amsterdam (Sleutjes et al., 2014) participants were asked to rank several aspects on the scale of the neighbourhood to importance. ‘Public safety’ is priority. Then comes ‘daily grocery stores’, followed by ‘access by public transport’ and ‘public green areas’, all above average.

The location is right next to a traffic knot, so some interventions have to be made to create a ‘sheltered’ environment. By removing the roundabout the first step towards a safer environment is taken.

‘Access by public transport’ might be one of the best characteristics of this site. It’s next to the Weteringscircuit, which is a (transfer) station for trams (stops ‘Weterings circuit’ and ‘Vijzelgracht’). Next to this, from July 2018 onwards, there will be a metro stop as well on the Vijzelgracht. The city of Amsterdam is currently working on a new metro line, the so-called ‘Noord-Zuid lijn’. As the name suggests, it will connect the south of Amsterdam with the North, going through the city centre and connected to Central Station. Meaning that the ‘Zuid-as’, the economic business district of Amsterdam, will be even better connected to the city centre. This is a huge opportunity for the site, as a it will be right between the city centre and the economic district, where a lot of expats coming to Amsterdam work. The perfect combination!

As can be seen in figure 2, there are several supermarkets in close proximity to the site, as well as other shops.

The proximity of schools is appreciated by families in general. As can be seen in figure 3, plenty of schools of all levels are around, even international. However, there’s also a (temporary) daycare on the chosen location. This should ideally be brought back in the design.

‘Public green areas’ are at hand as well. Considering the density of the city centre of Amsterdam this is quite special. The ‘Eerste Weteringsplantsoen’, on the other side of the Weteringcircuit, is a small park. Besides that you have the ‘Museumpark’ behind the Rijksmuseum, the ‘Vondelpark’ and ‘Sarphatipark’ only 10-15 minutes walking distance away. Then, by following the suggestion of members of the government to remove the roundabout in the Weteringcircuit suddenly more space for green is created on both sides of the circuit. This could benefit to more space for public green areas on the site. Part of this public green space could be the existing playground. This playground should definitely come back since it would create a great opportunity for children and their parents to meet.
Figure 2
Public amenities: commercial
(own illustration)

Supermarket
Shop

Figure 3
Public amenities: education
(own illustration)

High schools
Elementary schools
Daycares
VERSCHUUR

ASPECT 1
The relation between the research and design.

The design criteria as conclusion to the research have been ordered in three scales: public, collective and private. The relation between the research conclusions and the design will be analysed through these scales as well.

Public
As can be concluded from the previous chapter, the location itself already answers to the design criteria of the proximity of daily grocery stores, schools and good accessibility. So the design itself should create a sheltered environment and engagement with the neighbourhood by providing public indoor and outdoor spaces.

As can be seen in figure 4, there’s a public plinth with a widened sidewalk in front, to create space for terraces. These are strategically placed along the ‘red carpet’ project.

In addition to this widened sidewalk, public space is the core of the project. Between the four building blocks is a 20 meter wide ‘street’ (although only accessible for pedestrians). This is the public route through the project and is home to the new interpretation of the playground. See figure 5 and 6. The street-like space is decorated with patches of different appearances and functions.

Figure 4
Public plinth along Red Carpet (own illustration)

Figure 5
Public ‘street’ (own illustration)

The form of building blocks enclosing a collective courtyard is consciously chosen to make sure that the smaller children have a save and sheltered environment to play in. However, the four building blocks together embrace the public ‘play street’, thus creating a sheltered environment on a bigger scale as well.
Collective

On the collective scale a sense of community has to be facilitated. This can be done by creating indoor and outdoor communal spaces, of which parts should be places to play for the children. In creating a sense of community the circulation system should not be forgotten, for instance by making use of wide galleries or communal entrance lobbies social interaction can be facilitated.

In addition to a sense of community, expats expect serviced dwellings, meaning hotel-like services are part of the deal. This includes the presence of a concierge and a health club for instance. Also shared guestrooms for when family is coming over are appreciated.

Where figure 5 shows the public ‘street’, figure 8 shows the ‘collective’ street. Along this street the main entrances of the building blocks are located, as well as the communal facilities like the health club, a daycare, the community centre and the shared guestrooms.

From the street to your dwelling there’s always space for social interaction. First, one walks through the ‘collective street’ to the entrance lobby. From this lobby one goes to their floor, to continue over the wide galleries around the communal courtyard to their dwelling. The galleries are cascading to maximize the sunlight in the courtyard as well as the social interaction between floors. See figure 9.
The design criteria on the private scale are that the dwellings should be around 100 m² big, with outdoor space and storage space, furnished and flexible in use. A guestroom is also wanted, unless there are shared guestrooms.

There are two dwelling types: maisonettes and apartments. The size of the dwellings vary from 100 m² to 180 m². During the design process the fact that the dwellings have to be furnished has been very influential. I always tested the spaces with furniture to see how it would be experienced.

The wide galleries include a zone for each dwelling to have outdoor space. But because of the block-shape, some of the dwellings would have their outdoor space on the north side, meaning no sunlight. That’s why I made the block all-sided, meaning each dwelling has an outdoor space facing the courtyard and one on the outside of the building block in the shape of a balcony. See figure 10. After putting the universal blocks in the context I adapted the facades to the orientation, meaning the balconies facing north were turned into bay windows.

To ensure enough storage space, each maisonette has a large cabinet underneath the stairs, as well as at least one running meter of wardrobe per sleepingroom. In addition to this, in the parking garage each dwelling has their own storage unit of 4.5 m².

Flexibility was the hardest criterion to meet. Since the dwellings will be rented temporarily, the residents can’t make big changes to the dwelling to fit their needs in that moment. That’s why the flexibility criterion has been drawn to a bigger level by making a variety of dwellings, fitting the needs of different families. On the scale of the dwelling itself flexibility is most visible in the maisonettes on the ground floor. The wooden unit that includes the technical spaces, toilet and the kitchen hides a set of sliding doors to close off the kitchen and hallway from the livingroom if wanted or needed.
Figure 10
Private outdoor spaces
(own illustration)

Figure 11
Flexibility on the ground floor
(own illustration)
The syllabus of the Dwelling Dutch Housing graduation studio clearly states a future-driven approach. “What do our cities need?” is one of the questions the design should answer to.

Our globalising world means an increasing interaction between people and their cultures, from countries all over the world. One of the driving factors behind this globalisation is the migration of knowledge workers. This draws the attention of companies, since the modern knowledge economy is strongly dependent on well-educated personnel. When a country is able to draw in foreign knowledge workers, popularly called ‘expats’, it’s easier to respond to possible shortages or frictions in their own labour market. So attracting foreign talents is crucial for governments and companies for a strong international competitive position. However, the Netherlands are falling behind in attracting foreign knowledge workers, despite the fact that we are one of the top competing economies. (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2014, p. 6). So, to boost our economy, a more attractive environment for expats is valuable.

“Expats” is one of the relatively new groups of professionals that want to live in the city. These groups demand for more expensive city apartments that are bigger and are high-quality finished. However, “the emphasis on social housing in the twentieth century came at the expense of housing typologies for those of the middle class who led and urban lifestyle”. So looking into the design of such city apartments could be a relevant research, to create a more attractive environment for expats. Not in the least place because “we see interesting indications for the future in projects for more expensive city apartments (van Gameren, D., van den Heuvel, D., Mool, H., van der Putt, P., Kijn, O., van Andel, F., 2009, p. 2).” The mastertrack Architecture is about learning “how to develop innovative building projects that use design as a means to deal with the technical, social and spatial challenges encountered in the built environment.” (TU Delft, n.d.). My topic is very much based on the social challenges that expats encounter in the Netherlands. The design proposal is supposed to overcome these social challenges. The chosen project location for the design does give some spatial challenges. It is located on the Singel belt of Amsterdam, an inner city location. I chose for the Tweede Wateringplantsoen, the small patch of green next to the Wateringcircuit. I propose to remove the roundabout of the Wateringcircuit and just make it a cross road, since the roundabout is a highly inefficient use of space in the inner city. There are actually already plans to do this. This is partly due to the Noord-Zuid lijn project, meaning that less tram lines will be on this route.

The biggest technical challenge architects are facing is the ambition to build almost energy-neutral from 2020 on. So the future-driven approach by the studio implies that we have to take this into consideration in our designs already.

The relation between the project topic, studio topic and master topic.

The mastertrack Architecture is about learning “how to develop innovative building projects that use design as a means to deal with the technical, social and spatial challenges encountered in the built environment.” (TU Delft, n.d.). My topic is very much based on the social challenges that expats encounter in the Netherlands. The design proposal is supposed to overcome these social challenges. The chosen project location for the design does give some spatial challenges. It is located on the Singel belt of Amsterdam, an inner city location. I chose for the Tweede Wateringplantsoen, the small patch of green next to the Wateringcircuit. I propose to remove the roundabout of the Wateringcircuit and just make it a cross road, since the roundabout is a highly inefficient use of space in the inner city. There are actually already plans to do this. This is partly due to the Noord-Zuid lijn project, meaning that less tram lines will be on this route.

The biggest technical challenge architects are facing is the ambition to build almost energy-neutral from 2020 on. So the future-driven approach by the studio implies that we have to take this into consideration in our designs already.

Research before design:

I started with literature research into the targetgroup. From this literature research I tried to substract preferences and needs, that I ordered into three scales: public, collective and private.

To get a better grip on housing for expats, and in particular families, I analysed three casestudies: the New Amsterdam, Detroit and the Kolenkthuis, all in Amsterdam. The analysis focusses on the three realms mentioned in the main research question: engagement with the neighbourhood, a sense of community among the residents and the fitness of the floorplan for expat families. The results of these questions are again ordered in the three scales: public, collective and private.

I then combined the preferences and needs (basically the design criteria) on the different scales concluded from both the literature research and the casestudies, to answer the three subquestions and thereby the mainquestion.

Quite simultaneously I analysed the chosen location on its morphological, typological, historical and functional features. Then I analysed if the set of criteria on the public scale are met by the location as it is or if certain criteria need extra attention.

I found this method very helpful during the design process, because it gave me a very concrete set of design criteria to work with on all three scales. For the design of the urban layout the set of the public scale and to a lesser extent also the collective scale were of great use, on the ‘block’ scale the set of the collective scale and for the dwellings the private scale.

ASPECT 2

Elaboration on the research method.

Research during design:

While designing I mostly used 3D models in SketchUp to test massing, shadow casting, materials, colours, etc. I also looked at reference projects.

Additional research:

While already in the design process I did some additional literature research into my target group. I found that I had to little knowledge of the history of labour migration in Amsterdam and the Netherlands. I read some papers and theses about the history of worker migrants in Amsterdam and the Netherlands as well as the housing policy. I translated the history in a timeline, starting from the very origination of the city of Amsterdam.

The knowledge acquired from this additional research was not useful for the design process but did add to the relevance of my project in Amsterdam. Especially the general history that is. I found the research into the housing policy of less use, since it concerned more the low-educated worker migrants, and their weak position on the housing market.
Expats is one of the relatively new groups of professionals that want to live in the city. These groups demand for more expensive city apartments that are bigger and are high-quality finished. However, “the emphasis on social housing in the twentieth century came at the expense of housing typologies for those of the middle class who led an urban lifestyle.” So looking into the design of such city apartments could be a relevant research, to create a more attractive environment for expats. “Not in the last place because we see interesting indications for the future in projects for more expensive city apartments.” (van Gameren, D., et al., 2009, p. 2).

The lack of suitable city apartments for expats is causing for this group to look for other dwellings in the city, roaming on the same market as Amsterdam people. This causes (unnecessary) friction on the housing market for both parties.

The housing market of Amsterdam is hot business at the moment. Over the past year, housing prices have increased with 21% (Couzy, Damen, 2017), making it an interesting business for investors and that causes the housing prices to increase even more.

One way for investors to earn a lot of money on the housing market is to buy a property, divide it into smaller units (apartments or studios), and rent these out. Investors then mostly target on students and expats. This phenomenon is called “buy-to-let”. Now already 1 in 6 properties are ‘bought to let’ (ING Economisch Bureau, 2017, p. 15). This leaves less room on the overheated housing market of Amsterdam for Amsterdam people to find affordable housing.

So building especially for expats is beneficial for both the city of Amsterdam (and its people) and the expat community. At the moment expats and Amsterdam people are competing on the same market, while they have different budgets and needs. By taking expats of the general housing market of Amsterdam, it gets more breathing space and makes it a less interesting business for investors. This makes it easier for both parties to find affordable housing.

In the meantime it makes it easier for expats to find suitable housing, housing that fits their needs. I already mentioned the need for high-end city apartments for a new group of professionals that want to live in the city. But research shows that one of the biggest challenges for expats is to make friends in the new home country, resulting in feelings of loneliness and not belonging. Since this is especially hard in the Netherlands, as can be concluded from the Expat Insider survey, this is a relevant topic to deal with in the design.

By building for expats, a so-called ‘expat community’ would arise instead of expats being scattered all over the city of Amsterdam. According to Cangià this could be the first step to battle these feelings. “Meeting those people who share similar experiences with the expats (who are “on the same boat”) becomes crucial” (Cangià, 2017, p. 24). By making sure that fellow expats, that are “on the same boat”, live nearby, a sort of social safety net is created. This can develop then into friendships, since “sharing with other expat fellows who can probably understand, is described as working as a “powerful bonding tool” that helps establish and strengthen networks.” (Cangià, 2017, p. 24)

Projects like these (New Amsterdam for instance) are already existing. However, these projects are more like so-called ‘expat-bubbles’ and this exceeds the aim. The definition of ‘expat’ by the Central Bureau of Statistics includes the statement that there’s little socio-cultural integration (CBS, 2015, p. 7). Expats are not to blame for this alone, social interaction is two-way traffic. The ‘Expat Insider’ survey (2017) reveals that as a country we are not doing our best either. So a building complex that facilitates integration and interaction with its environment is good for both parties.

So with my project the ambition is to create a sense of community, as well as integration with the neighbourhood. And I think the project results for the target group in general are transferable, so more projects like this can arise in the Netherlands to create a more attractive environment for expats. In this project I focussed more on family housing, since according to Cangià (2017, p. 22), a sense of community and engagement with the neighbourhood is especially relevant for so-called ‘trailing spouses’. ‘Trailing spouses’ are the expat’s partner, coming along to the new country. A focus on (…) spouses is particularly interesting, considering the more challenging relocation for partners compared to the employee, who generally continues to rely on the workplace as an anchorage in the new environment.”

The project as housing complex in itself, with luxury city apartments, can be seen as addition to the research into this housing typology. It’s relevant to start looking into this typology again, since “we see interesting indications for the future in projects for more expensive city apartments” (van Gameren, D., et al., 2009, p. 2.). Serviced apartments, an office or practice at home, being able to take in guests temporarily or divide private from public spaces within the apartment are such indications.