

# Insight and inside into Legoland

Part 2 of the series on design and psychology of amusement parks



The first part of this series of articles looked at how stories, symbols and themes can be brought into the design of amusement parks and how these can provoke a deeper emotional impact on park visitors. For this purpose, three attractions of the Dutch theme park Efteling were analyzed as examples. Legoland Germany in Günzburg goes a completely different way. With the cube-shaped and digital Lego brick as the central point of reference and design element of the park, the focus is on color and shape, construction and snapshots.

by Harald Molina-Tillmann

## The eternal kiss

For the miniature world of Legoland Germany, the model makers also recreated the lagoon city of Venice. The impressive palace of the doge, the domes of St. Mark's Church and the world-famous Rialto Bridge can awaken holiday memories or trigger wanderlust. Anyway, in a rather quiet and dark side street we find an inconspicuous but all the more emotional picture: a couple standing on a small bridge, closely embraced, united in a kiss. Time is forgotten. Only the moment counts. While there has to be a story that led to this scene, and although there will be a future that may not be quite as romantic, Legoland only shows us this moment.

If you walk through the miniature world with open eyes, you can discover numerous such snapshots: a golf tee box on a Berlin skyscraper, a movie shooting on the Lucerne promenade, a lay-up in a

basketball game or a hidden duel scene between two heroes from Star Wars. Since the park visitors do not rush past the scenes while sitting in a roller coaster or amusement ride, they can immerse themselves in the moment for as long as they want. And if you visit the park again the next day after a night at the Legoland holiday village, the snapshots are still there. Even if a few quick glances seem to be enough for each scene for many guests of Legoland, the knowledge remains at least subconsciously that the events depicted persist, both on the day of the park visit and after returning to everyday life. In this sense, time is frozen. In the case of the kiss in Venice, it is even more than an everyday moment that is frozen. It is a moment of happiness.

The animations in the miniature world also follow the snapshot concept. Although there are motions, these do

not lead to any real progress. They are either cyclical motions like the round trip of a high-speed train, or they are motions that merely visualize a specific moment like that of the "pacing off" during a military parade in front of the German parliament building. In this way, Legoland manages the balancing act of increasing the interestingness of the miniature world and at the same time not losing any of the power of the moment. In the aquariums of the Legoland Atlantis underwater world, an attempt is even made to combine the opposites of static structure and dynamic behavior. Motionless Lego figures are surrounded by authentic live sharks.

## Star Wars

If you want to exasperate a science fiction fan, you can use the following simple question: "Star Wars and Star Trek? What's the difference?" Although



LEGO bricks symbolize their own features as parts of sculptures: as oil paint for artistic expression...



...and as gold nuggets for value and goal



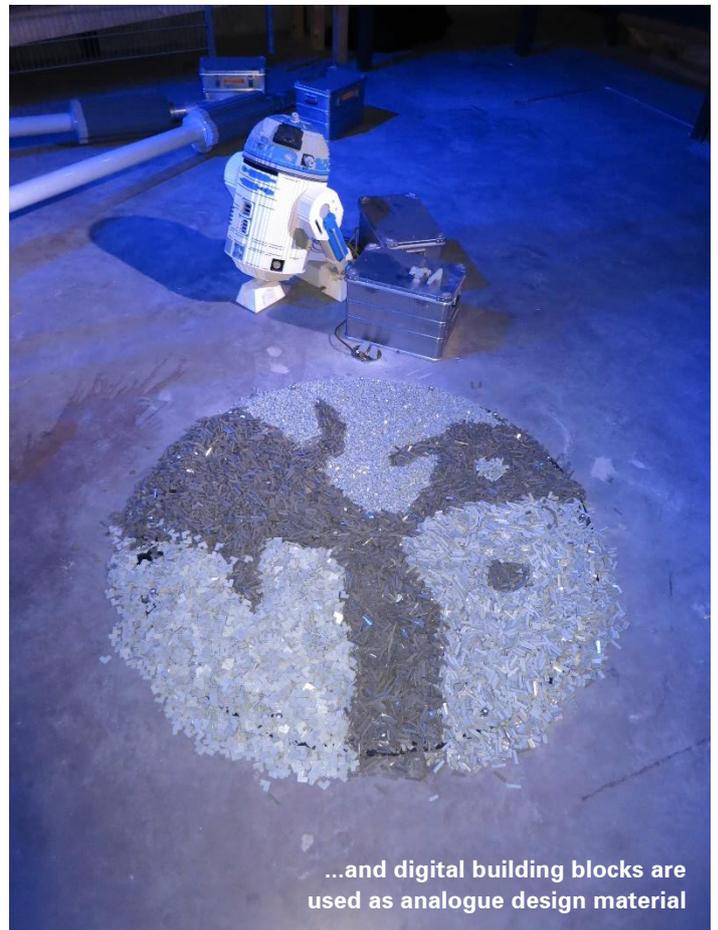
In the waiting area of the LEGO test route there is basic physics in industrial design...



...and a beautiful reflection of the union of opposites



In the Star Wars exhibition, Lego bricks are used to visualize Han Solos contours and shadows...



...and digital building blocks are used as analogue design material

the fan may love to give a long lecture that the two science fiction worlds actually have almost nothing in common, I would like to focus on one selected difference here: the Star Trek phenomenon thrives on the idea of the unknown, the discovery and integration of new cultures. Star Wars, on the other hand, lives from the archetypal concept of the eternal rivalry between "good" and "evil" or the "white" and "black" aspect of magic. Star Trek is process, vitality and development. Star Wars, on the other hand, is constancy, virtue and the world of archetypes. These aspects of Star Wars fit very well with the ideas of snapshot and timelessness introduced above. It is, therefore, not surprising that Luke Skywalker and the other heroes of Star Wars have found their way into the Lego universe. However, one will look in vain for Spock, Picard or other crew members of the Enterprise starships of Star Trek.

In fact, Lego Star Wars is LEGO's first and still most popular licensed product. In addition to several scenes in the miniature world and life-size sculptures in the other parts of the park, there is also a model of a spaceship to admire.

The description does not skimp on superlatives: the largest Lego model in the world, constructed with 5 million bricks, 20,000 kg, scale 1: 1, wingspan over 13 meters, 32 model makers, and 17,336 hours of work. In addition, the exhibition hall offers plenty of "techno-babble", real information, aesthetics and even artistry. This draws a link to the other qualities of the park.

#### Engineer's dreams

In the entrance room of Legoland Atlantis, the young visitors are greeted by a refreshingly natural and personable animator. When asked why Atlantis went under, the latter offers three possible answers: Atlantis may have been poorly constructed, someone pulled the "plug" out, or the installation was simply too heavy. Anyone who is familiar with the story of Atlantis should be surprised by this selection of explanations. In addition to scientific explanations such as earthquakes and tsunamis, one would have expected more moral or symbolic explanations. The Greek philosopher Plato reports, for example, that the reason for the fall of Atlantis was the anger of the gods on people who had

become arrogant. For those less interested in mythical stories, it may also have been a warning image of the Athenians' excessive urge to conquer. The fact that Legoland restricts itself to technical explanations is an expression of a design that is oriented on the target group. The description of the handicraft workshops in Legoland on the website brings it even more clearly to the point:

*"This is where the robot engineers of tomorrow will be discovered."*

In fact, LEGO is at its core about engineers' content and ideas. The majority of Lego kits are buildings and vehicles. The Lego brick itself is designed for mechanical construction by its rectangular form. Its concept for connections with other bricks by a small and fixed number of knobs is a digital concept (compared to analog or stepless concepts characteristic for almost all other toys). This makes it an interesting play object for the future technician. When junior boss Godtfred Kirk Christiansen developed the Lego brick in the 1950s, this was motivated by the idea of bringing "systematics" into

the world of games. This applied to both the production and the games themselves.

Engineering topics such as physics, construction and numbers are also very present in the park. The museum in Legoland has the industrial name "Factory". Many of the edutainment boards set up in the park either deal directly with physics or use the language of an engineer. On the board about the model of Hamburg we read, for example, about industries, numbers, optimal constructions and the "dreams of an electrician", which apparently must have something to do with "2000 connected wires". A quiz board in the Factory waiting area calculates that there are almost 1 billion possible combinations for 6 Lego bricks with 8 knobs. Lego models of constructing engineers are integrated into a dinosaur scene while working on the completion of exactly this scene. The "Markthalle" restaurant has an industrial character thanks to the design elements of the lifting crane, conveyor belt and bricks. The roller coaster in the "Lego X-treme" area is themed as a "test track", which refers to the engineering tasks of verification and validation.

### Cubism

If the gondolas of the "Techno Schleuder" carousel are decorated with oversized but useless gears, this is an example of the technologically motivated design that is often found in the park. It is less about aesthetics, statement or art, but about what is available or possible. This form of design should by no means be devalued. Especially in the early phase of new technologies, it is even indispensable as an incentive for further development in terms of content and technology. This may also be very inspiring for children who are primarily interested in technology. Still, it is nice that Legoland doesn't stop here. If you take some time, you can discover a wealth of artistic ideas. In the park, Lego bricks are used to create paintings, writing, individuals, symbols, self-reference, materials and different viewpoints on a topic. The lack of stories described at the beginning even helps here. It allows pure art, regardless of content and context. If the term cubism had not yet been used in



The Knight's Kingdom celebrates the Lego brick and its rectangular shape



The artwork in front of the ice station offers plenty of space for interpretation



The Lego Friends welcome us in the shop but unfortunately not at the attractions



art history, it would have to be introduced for art with Lego bricks.

### Story or moment?

After all, the water ride "Jungle X-pedition" uses a story with the hero Johnny Thunder and his hunt for a carnivorous plant. However, this story is simple and self-invented. Well-known or longer stories from legends, myths or fairy tales are used little or not at all. I was also surprised that the theme worlds and licensed themes of the Lego kits are not reproduced more strongly in the attractions and areas in the park. Except for Star Wars, the Lego worlds can only be found in shops and in the cinema.

What initially looks like a limitation can also be seen as an opportunity. The concept of snapshot offers an intense experience of the moment. It also demands imagination about the before and after. In the workshops as well as in the miniature world, you can completely immerse yourself in the moment and in the construction. And without a distracting story, you can create and experience art in its purest form. All of this generates a peaceful and dreamy atmosphere.

What could be considered more valuable from a psychological point of view, stories like in Efteling or moments like in Legoland? This question reminds me of the psychological interpretation of fairy tales, where there are also two schools. Some interpret the fairy tale as a development process, others as a snapshot. Only the fairy tale reader or park visitor can decide for themselves what appeals better in the end. From a business perspective, it is important to define a clear target group for your amusement park and then to align the park accordingly. This has definitely been achieved in Legoland.

