



SACREDNESS

in daily environments

"Exalting the Essenburgsingel"

*A contribution to the exploration of the theme of sacredness
in landscape architecture via geometry and resident participation*



Thesis Landscape Architecture
LAR-80436

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With special thanks to Ingrid Duchhart, Jusuck Koh and Peter Veer

SACREDNESS IN DAILY ENVIRONMENTS: EXALTING THE ESSENBURGSINGEL

A contribution to the exploration of the theme of *sacredness* in landscape architecture via *geometry* and *resident participation*

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Key-words:

Sacredness, daily environments, geometry, resident participation, symbolism, archetypes

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME OF SACREDNESS



Fig. 1.1



Fig. 1.2



Fig. 1.3

1.1 THE 'PROBLEM' OF THE EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENT

Does it not seem contradictory, to seek for solutions to the problem of sustainability - which is about enduring, remaining, everlasting - exactly in the *transitory* concept of technology (2)?

Technology as we know it has proven itself to be transforming, innovating, contemporary. Still, the landscapes of today reflect their dominance. As a result, the daily environments are characterised by rough geometries compared to the places we tend to visit voluntarily in our spare times.



Fig. 1.4



Fig. 1.5



Fig. 1.6



Fig. 1.7

Design examples of 'rough' geometries: the structure of the prestigious living district of Céramique in the city of Maastricht (fig 1.5), the Atlas building in Wageningen (fig 1.6), the Schouwburaplein in the city of Rotterdam (fig 1.7). What they have in common, is a certain lack of details to create place attachment, nor do they reflect virtues important for humanity. Overall, we could say: there appears to be a lack of sacredness (for a broad definition, see p. 8). Still, they are designed with sustainability intentions.

1.1 THE 'PROBLEM' OF THE EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENT

Considering sustainable design projects, the oldest creations of mankind actually did not only survive the forces of time and war because of their technological excellence.

The creations on the world heritage list survived because their symbolical meaning was universally understood. They survived because their strong geometries is still able to elevate our senses; we could assume they are the embodiment of what is considered sacred (see also Chichen Itza, Mexico, fig. 1.6. or Borobudur, Java, fig. 1.7).

Popular project examples showing today's focus on sustainability (1, 1.2): wind energy (fig 1.1), multi-functional use of space (fig 1.2), energy neutral housing (fig 1.3) reflect the objective of diminishing environmental problems. However intention is constructive, problems of humanity remain: if energy cycles cannot be closed (like in nature), waste and loss of efficiency remain.

The cause of environmental problems seems to be explained from its physical, chemical appearance - expressed in numbers of carbon emission as well as rising water levels and global temperatures (3).

The essential cause however, can also be explained from the megalomania of the human being, which does not hesitate to cross countries and even continents. The point of view that is taken is, that perhaps these 'supra-human' scale projects have resulted in a lack of consciousness, taken human beings further and further away from their spiritual nature.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES CONCERNING THE THEME OF SACREDNESS:

To contribute to the design of places meaningful for the community, as they endure by sacredness

To understand environmental issues from a non-technical point of view and so, contribute to a more complete range of possible design solutions concerning sustainability

To create awareness about this often neglected spiritual potential within landscape architecture



Fig. 1.6



Fig. 1.7

1.2 RELEVANCE: THE NEED FOR SACREDNESS

The question whether the lack of sacredness in the daily environments of its users is a problem, can best be answered by considering the following question: does this change in human consciousness, reflected in today's geometry of the environment effect the physical and/ or mental health of the users of space? Moreover, we might think of the human-environment relation - which is essential in the discipline of landscape architecture - to be mutual (4). Simplified, this holds that we shape the environment according to a certain conviction - and then, the environment shapes us. This underlines the responsibility that comes with designing the environments people move themselves in everyday.

Fig. 1.8 An example in landscape architecture referring to cases within every human life: the labyrinth (labyrinth-builders.uk) as a symbol for the struggle of finding the way in life.

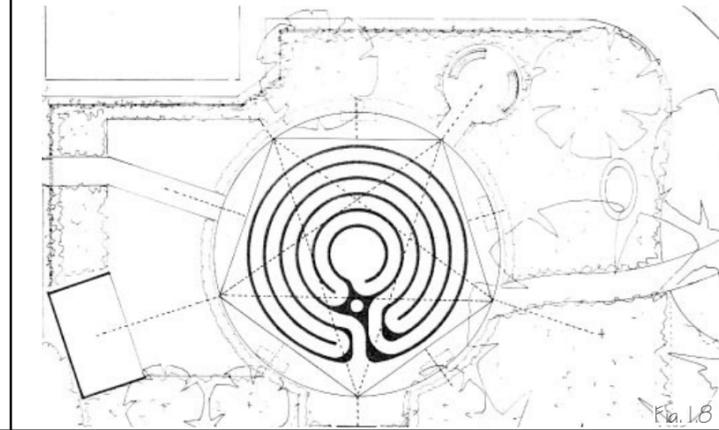


Fig. 1.8

In a publication from the Helen Dowling institute, which is committed to the support of people having cancer, 17 out of 18 researches have proved a positive relation between spiritual involvement and a higher degree of well-being (as well as a lower degree of distress, which concerns fears, tensions, negative moods and depressions) (5). In a research from the Geestoronden (an institution for mental health in the Netherlands), spirituality is described as 'a medium to cope with fears of life as well as the fulfilment of the deep human desires of harmony, unity and integration' (6).

At the same time, the relation between the well-being of people and the characteristics of their daily environment is proven to exist. In cooperation with NIVEL, The Alterra Institute has published a research showing that there is 'a positive effect on the vitamin C level of people living in areas featuring high spatial qualities' (7). In the latter, the amount and quality of green structures, the variation and quality of building structures, colours and atmosphere have been considered. The experience of safety and social coherence associated with these qualities has proven to be a significant positive influence on the physical as well as mental well-being of people.

These researches, as well as several resources from psychology pointing out the growth of depression in Western culture as a result of lifestyle, could give reason to recognise the relevance for the theme of sacredness in daily environments.

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DEFINING SACREDNESS

THE SACRED - the irrational, the extraordinary, within landscape architecture: "The manifestation of fundamental convictions requiring sacrifice, values worth defending, and virtues to be attained. These ennoble humankind and the landscapes that we create because they express our essential nature, our spirit and the animating force of our existence." (Hester, 2006 (14))

Best understood as opposed to: **THE PROFANE** - 'the routine skills of getting by, the humdrum, the non-spiritual, the desanctified and the secular'. 'The everyday is profane, as the time-spaces in which we move ourselves are dedicated to rational forces' (Holloway, 2003 (14))

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1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ON THE TOPIC OF SACREDNESS

HYPOTHESIS:

Carefully applied geometry within a participative design process can result in the experience of sacredness in a daily (profane) environment

CORE QUESTION:

How can we design sacred places in daily environments by making use of geometry in a participative process?

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SUB-QUESTIONS:

1. Can group sessions with residents result in a clear list of 'values worth defending', or 'virtues to be attained by the community'?
2. Can a designer translate 'the virtues to be attained by the community' into form? In other words, can sacredness be reflected in geometry?
3. Can geometry be a reliable tool for respecting both the existing context and what is considered sacred by the community?
 - 3.a Can the geometry of the Experiential Landscape ensure the connection between new form and the existing properties of the project location?
 - 3.b Can the archetypal geometries of nature and mandalas ensure the connection between new form and the values of the community?
 - 3.c Can these three 'layers of geometry' work together successfully in as a whole?
4. Can testing this method contribute to the range of existing design methods with sustainability aims?

RESEARCH GOALS:

The introduction of a design method which unites resident participation and meaningful geometry

The design proposal for the Essenburqsingel, Rotterdam

The outcomes of testing whether this method can be successful in existing living environments



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2. METHOD: SACREDNESS IN EVERYDAY SPACE

2.1 PROPOSING A PATH TO SACRED PLACE BY INTRODUCING THREE LAYERS OF GEOMETRY

These two types of geometry give basis to the third type of geometry, which might be most relevant for the topic of sacredness: the geometrical structures which enable the 'elevation of the consciousness'. We here consider the landscape (including urban structures) not only as a product of culture and society, but also as a product of the consciousness. The latter is studied from the discipline of philosophy and psychology. Examples of this can be found in the phenomenology of the landscape (by Merleau-Ponty (4)).

Totally recognised is the fact, that reaching this higher state of consciousness, which would inherently mean the transformation from the profane to the sacred, is not exactly goal for landscape or urban designers today. At least not consciously, though we can assume of course, that design projects striking for their beauty could have this effect of lifting the senses towards a state of contemplation. However, investigating the behaviour of people during their spare times may result in the finding, that people are still seeking for experiences which enable them to rise above the everyday. Not rarely, churches, castles, cathedrals and all other human creations of old times reflecting strong and carefully chosen geometries, are among popular destinations to be visited out of free will.

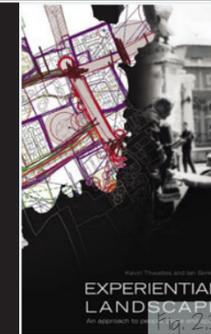
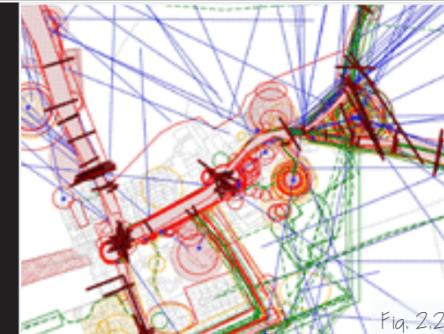
In this project, the geometries of the following three categories are studied: 1. the geometry of the Experiential Landscape, in order to understand the structures of our modern, daily environment; 2. the geometries of nature, in order to understand why certain measurements give us bodily comfort; 3. the sacred geometry of the mandala, in order to understand how to elevate the consciousness from a profane setting into a sacredness. All three together, we might have sufficient information for practising how to design a sacred place, even though located in a profane, everyday environment within modern society.

2.1.1 THE FIRST LAYER: THE EXPERIENTIAL LANDSCAPE (THWAITES AND SIMKINS, 2007)

As Thwaites and Simkins consider the landscape to be a 'series of successive experiences', they have developed a theory in order to grasp these different experiences into an applicable model. Here, a distinction is made between three characteristics of their daily environment which would be necessary for people to function in space: 1. how people orientate themselves; 2. how people get attached to places; 3. how people recognise certain spaces as a whole (for example, as a neighbourhood).

As working from the discipline of landscape architecture, the journey towards sacredness in the daily environments will inevitably to form, or geometry. Geometry may well provide us with the more insights of this "measurement of the land". Considering the environment in which we move ourselves everyday, several types of geometry can be distinguished. Three of them will be discussed here. They are chosen for the following three criteria: first of all, they give us insights about the structure of today's environment. In order to add or change anything to this setting, understanding this 'modern' geometry would be even be necessary.

Secondly, geometry give us insights about what kind of measurements are experienced as comfortable by large groups of people. This may be explained from there appearance in natural environments, as well as in the human body. In order to create the sense of place and place attachment central within landscape architecture, it would also be useful to understand which geometrical structures are experienced as 'attractive and comfortable'.



In their book 'Experiential Landscape, An approach to people, space and place', 2007 (see fig 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 for applications of their CDTA-method), Thwaites and Simkins thoroughly describe the importance of understanding space this way, for it explains how people get attached by certain spaces. Here, they refer to the holistic relationship between human beings and space as one continuum, in stead of considering them separately (as can be recognised in western dualistic thinking). This relationship manifests itself best in human beings' daily routine (8).

According to the three characteristics as mentioned at the very beginning, Thwaites and Simkins formulated four components which would describe the landscape holistically. These four components are called as follows: 1. centre; 2. direction; 3. transition; and 4. area. As they are based to the consideration of space as the continuum of a fluid succession of experiences (thus, a fluid succession of the experience of centre, direction, transition and area), they are often referred to as the CDTA unity.

CENTER

First, center can be described to be a location of meaning [8, p.46]. Locations are known for their overall sense of 'hereness' and proximity. In historical city centers for instance, not only this area itself (generally seen as the attraction point for tourism and shopping) is considered to be centre. Within the city centre, there are many places like squares, evoking the sense of 'being here' and 'staying here for a while' which are considered to be centers. Centers have the properties of keeping many details and stories, and therefore slowing down the pace when walking by. This has also to do with the effect of many functions coming together at this point. A market place for example, could be a centre for tourist enjoying historical architecture, residents of shopping fresh fruits and vegetables, meeting people for having a drink etc. It also is a place in which in most cases, many roads come together. As a result, people who are passing by can also be attracted to the market place and at the same time, people who are already there can imagine where to go next. The latter contributes to the market place evoking the sensation of location.



Fig. 2.4

DIRECTION

The continuity of 'getting there' is how Thwaites and Simkins describe the second component of direction [8, p.46]. As a result, direction is associated with the sensation of 'thereness'. Direction is the linear component which is able to connect two or more centres. An example is given by describing the Alhambra (Granada), consisting of many centers all of them bound together by experiences of (linear) direction. According to Thwaites and Simkins, direction is not only the (linear) path (road, or route) which can be taken but it could also be a line of sight. This might help to understand the idea that direction can be triggered by seeing objects which are referring to some place else. While seeing for instance, the Arc the Triomphe in Paris, the component of direction can be experienced by the linear line of sight to the Arc, as well as the path which can be taken. This path is characterised by both the road pattern and the facades of the Champs Élysées.

Fig. 2.4 and 2.5: practicing the CDTA components to the sanctuaries of Chichen Itza, Mexico and Borobudur, Java results in geometrical patterns with lots of consistency: centers within centres, directions with center qualities (as they are immensely detailed) and significant thematic continuity.



Fig. 2.5

TRANSITION

Third, the point or area of transformation in function and atmosphere between two components is then called the component of transition [8, p.47]. The importance of this component to space can best be described by comparing it to reading a book: within the almost countless amounts of words and letters, the reading signs are punctuating all symbols into smaller 'packages' which can be read and understood. Reading signs mark the beginning and ending of a new word, sentence, paragraph, chapter etc. which are making it possible for the reader to grasp the structure of the story. In space, these components are punctuating wherever two or more areas are facing each other. This field of tension, in which the observer will notice a change in environment, can then be marked by a point or area of transition. Transitions thus 'cut' an area into graspable pieces and at the same time function as an element binding these areas.

Transitions can be found in many shapes, differing in abrupt or gradual transformations in material (for instance a door or gate, versus a corridor or tunnel). They can also differ in the way they take form (for instance, by a balcony marking transition between land and water, versus the temporal form of transition of shadows or flowers in spring).

2.1.2 THE SECOND LAYER: THE GEOMETRY OF NATURE

The authors of the Experiential Landscape theory did also refer to the geometry of nature as an inspiration for giving meaningful form. Thwaites and Simkins advise the works of biologist C. Alexander and ecologist R. Foreman are advised in order to grasp nature's patterns. Those natural patterns can be considered as holistic as the CDTA unity. Reconstructions result in appealing pictures like fractals (fig. 2.6) reflecting the infinite levels of detail.

AREA

Finally, the fourth component which is described by Thwaites and Simkins is that of area [8, p.48]. This is considered to be the general background which binds all components together to an integrated whole. The observer experiences the area as a 'domain', a place having a recognisable identity and atmosphere. This can be noticed through the balance of differentiation within a unifying structure. Examples of areas are being found on different scale levels (as a matter of fact, all components are found on different scale levels): like the city of Paris is an area, as well as its distinguishable city districts etc.

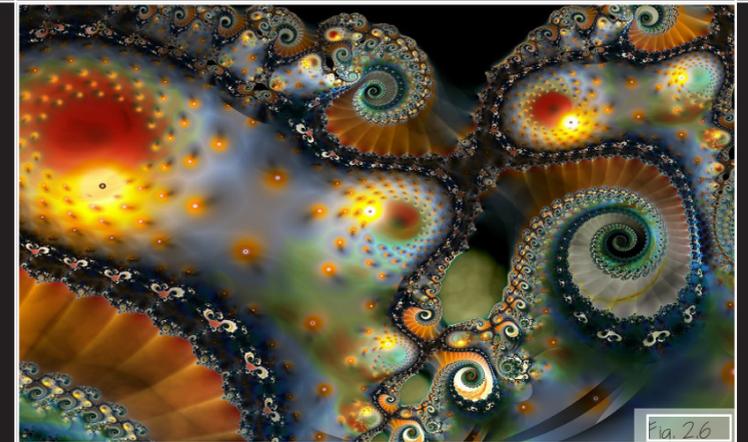


Fig. 2.6

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**2.1.3 THE THIRD LAYER:
THE GEOMETRY OF THE MANDALA**

We may now have an image of two types of geometry. The first one gives us better insight in the structure of space in the modern society. The geometries we experience everyday can be considered a mixture of styles and measurements, depending on the taste and function of contemporary forces. About the structure of nature however we could say, that it is following its formulas with greater consistence. Whereas nature in common is much more associated with chaos and the building structures of today with ratio and function, the geometry reflected in our daily environments seems to be more differentiated than that of nature.

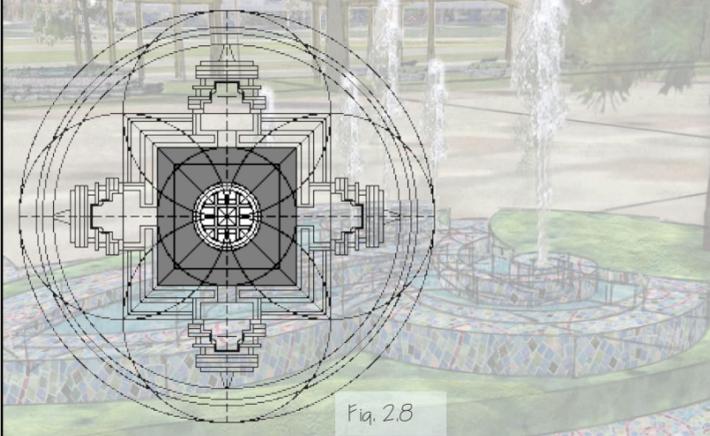


Fig. 2.8

Seeking a geometry which can bring sacredness to the daily environment should not only give to our senses the ability to orientate and attach, to feel comfortable in our bodies, but also give chance to elevate our consciousness through contemplation. In other words, a sacred place should carry the components of the Experiential Landscape (the first layer), the decisiveness of the geometry of nature (the second layer) and on top a special order which stimulates the sacred experience of completeness and meditation.

Though often associated with Eastern ritual, the symbol of the mandala is well represented in all continents and cultures. In order to understand this, we look at the special properties of the mandala. According to the book of J. and M. Arquettes (1964), a geometrical structure (whether drawn in 2D or built in 3D) represents a mandala structure if it meets the three criteria of having 1. a midpoint; 2. symmetry and 3. cardinal points. As a result, all religious art can be considered a mandala: the shaman drawings of Indians, the pyramids of Mexico as well as Egypt, the mosques and Byzantine churches, western cathedrals, labyrinths etc. Not only do they meet the three criteria of becoming a mandala; they were also built for the same reason: to be a map, or guidance, for the human consciousness. Whether we inhabit the Borobudur in Indonesia or the Chartres cathedral in France, our senses are able to experience wholeness of the place - and according to the philosophy behind the mandala, of the self.

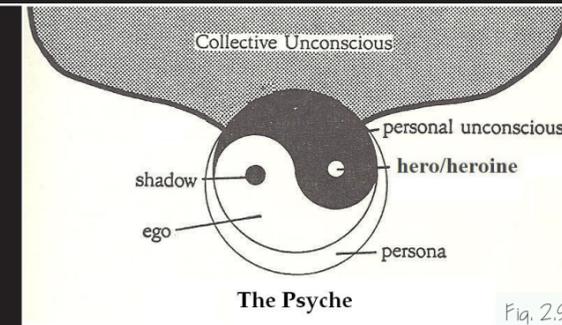


Fig. 2.9

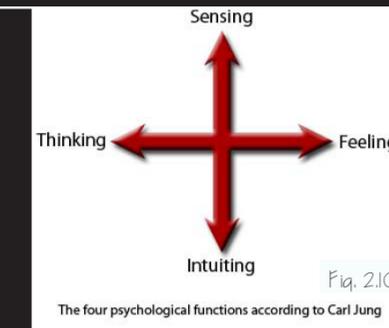


Fig. 2.10

2.1.4 SYMBOLISM AND 'ARCHETYPES'

Next to this, we could state that strong symbolic forms have always reflected virtues of humanity, though we may tend to think of them purely as cultural or religious expression.

Here, we could discuss the archetypes as described by C. Jung (1978). As a psychoanalyst, he investigated symbols all over the world, as well as those symbols appearing in the dreams of his clients (1917). Jung explains the universality of their essential meaning from a commonly shared sub-consciousness. This makes that the cross (or axis) for example, or the yinyang sign can be considered as basic, universal symbols - reflecting the integration of contradictive forces (see also fig. 2.9 and 2.10). Nevertheless, they are commonly associated with western and eastern religion. We will come back at the geometries of cross and yinyang later.

When making use of these three layers as a method to bring sacredness into the daily environment of its users, at least two important points need to be considered: the first would be the interactivity of the three layers of geometry. Their structure is in essence comparable to other layer techniques (like the landscape is often visualised as the unity of biotic, a-biotic and anthropogenic layers, for instance). The three layers are independent, but certainly not separable from each other. In fact, they work strongest and most sustainable if they cooperate altogether, as a holistic unity.

2.2 PRACTICE: LAYERED GEOMETRY AND RESIDENT PARTICIPATION APPLIED TO THE ESSENBURGSINGEL, ROTTERDAM

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Fig. 2.11

2.2.1 BACKGROUNDS OF THE ESSENBURGSINGEL

ProGroen Rotterdam
Is consisting of residents of the Essenburgsingel, Rotterdam. For a few years, they are actively concerned with the large area along which separates their living area from the railway of the NS (Nederlandse Spoorwegen). As Rotterdam is already having the tallest building of the Netherlands, a care institution is also planning to build the longest building at that specific location. At the same time, the area has shown some signs of neglect. A relatively large spot is not even assigned any function to. The residents of the Essenburgsingel- who's position in relation to the municipality of Rotterdam and others involved has grown under the name of ProGroen - have important wishes: they do not want the area to be changed into a built environment, as they recognise its green qualities. In stead of this, they wish for an alternative plan, which will prevent their location from being 'taken' by a large institution. This plan should enhance the green qualities of the area and give chances for social meeting in a positive and connecting way.



Fig. 2.12

2.2.2 THE FIRST LAYER OF GEOMETRY: CDTA ANALYSIS AT SCALE OF ROTTERDAM

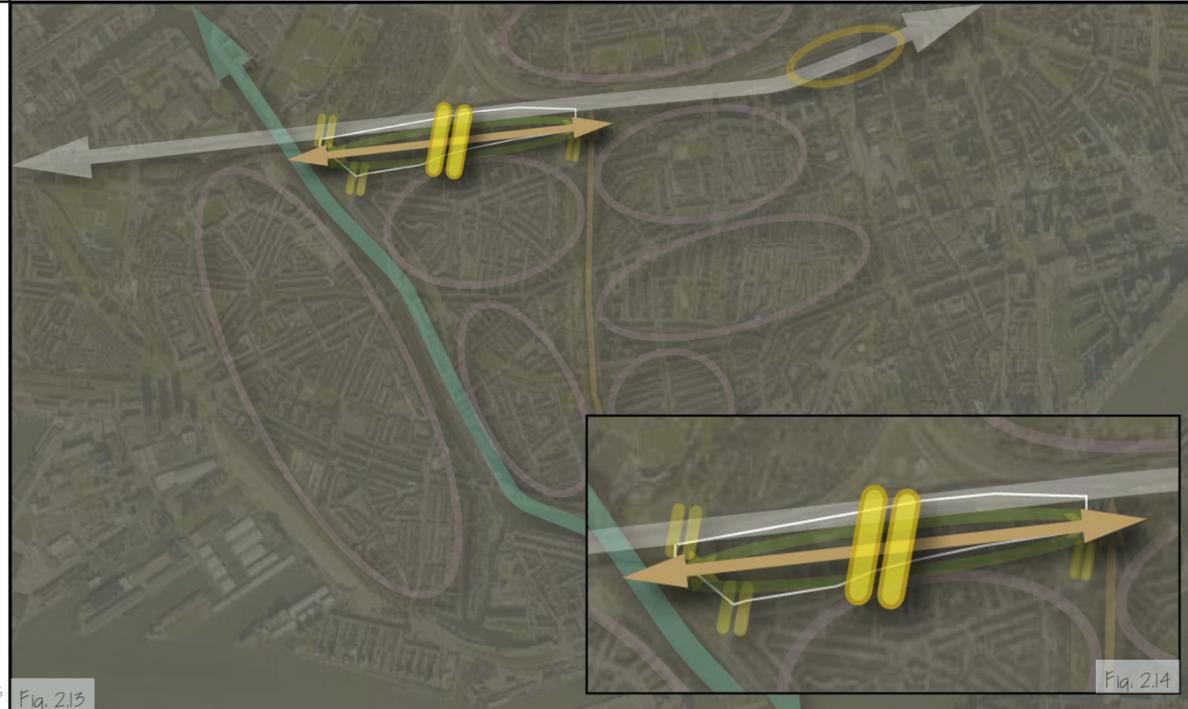
Rotterdam is not exactly known for its sacredness as the city is rather profiled by its metropolitan character. The harbour of Rotterdam was counted largest in the world, till the year of 2004. Words best describing the ambitions of this city if we consult the website of its municipality would be dynamism, economy, sustainability and international orientation. These concepts can be perceived by large scale buildings when breathing the atmosphere of the city center.

Rotterdam counts several districts for living away from the center, where lies a somewhat different scope. We here consider the living district called 'Het Nieuwe Westen'. Having a first glance at the area of the Essenburgsingel for instance, daily life is rather focused at society than economy; rather comfort than dynamism; its orientation rather local than international. Still, the presence of the metropolitan city is always felt by the large and solid structures of railway, motorway and artificial waterways along with at some points, vistas to its high rise offices.

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15 Fig. 2.13

Fig. 2.14

At scale of the city of Rotterdam, the area is rather described by the components of both transition and direction. This is due to the barriers of the living district 'Het Nieuwe Westen' facing the large infrastructural constructions (the railway and the 'singel' itself).



Fig. 2.15

As the components of both centre and area are significant for people to get attached to places and recognise them as an independent whole, new design measures should provide the area of the Essenburgsingel with both 'centre and area qualities' (for definitions, see p. 9 and 10).

2.2.3 THE FIRST LAYER OF GEOMETRY: CDTA ANALYSIS AT SCALE OF THE ESSENBURGSINGEL

Zoomed in at scale of the project area, we can now define the appearance and distribution of the CDTA components of the Essenburgsingel.



Fig. 2.16

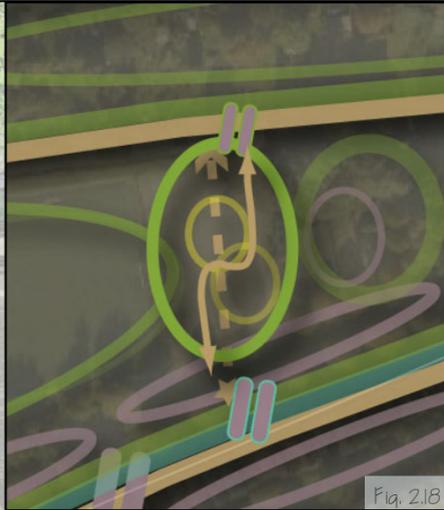
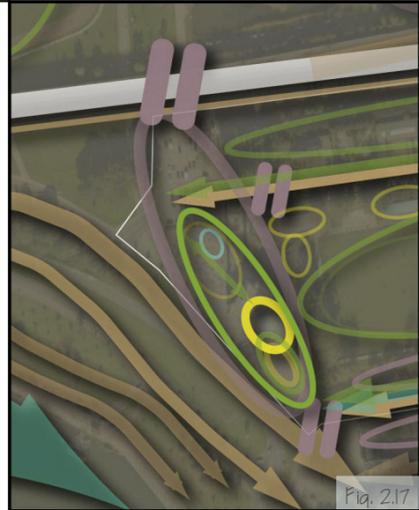


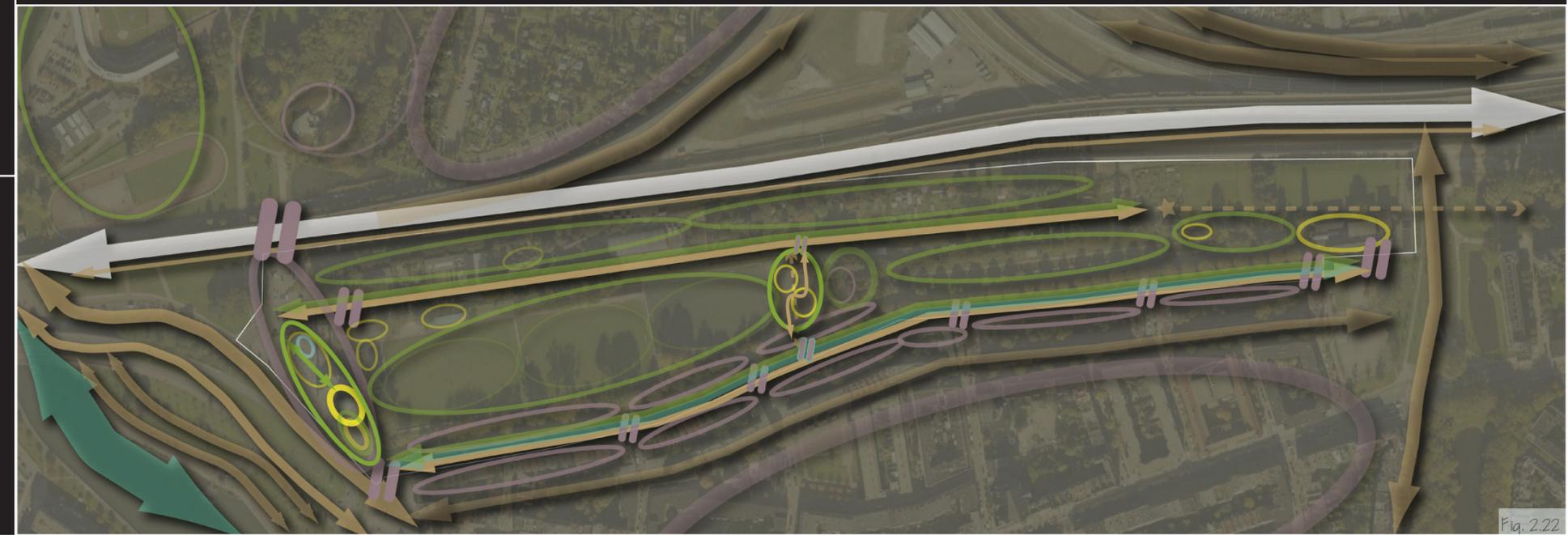
Fig. 2.17 and 2.18 show the locations which, according to the CDTA analysis would be most suitable for developing centers: the square near the Mevlana mosque (see also fig. 2.19) and the location of a desolated parking lot (fig. 2.20). The residents have communicated their wish of turning this place into a public garden for growing fruits.

If indeed both places will be further developed, the total distribution of CDTA components would be more balanced in the total area of the Essenburgsingel. This could enable the area to grow towards a more recognisable domain.



2.2.3 THE FIRST LAYER OF GEOMETRY: CDTA ANALYSIS AT SCALE OF THE ESSENBURGSINGEL

Opportunities for centres are to be found at the very west of the Essenburgsingel as well as at the neglected location in the middle: intensifying those two locations with meaningful objects (centre qualities) would lead to a more balanced experience of the total area.



**2.2.4 THE FIRST LAYER OF GEOMETRY:
CDTA ANALYSIS AT SCALE OF
'THE PLUKTUIN'**



Fig. 2.23

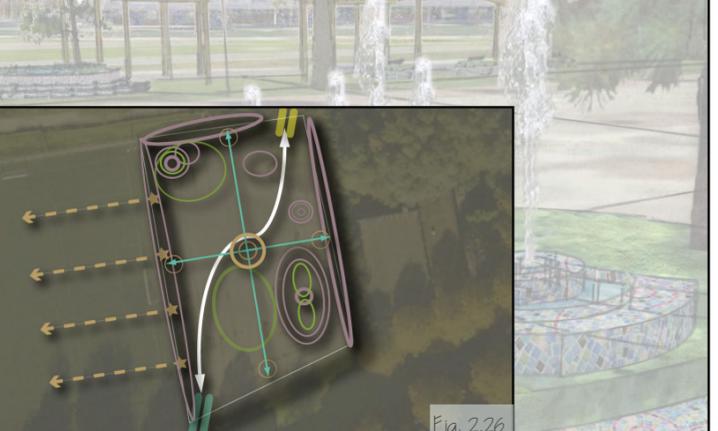


Fig. 2.24

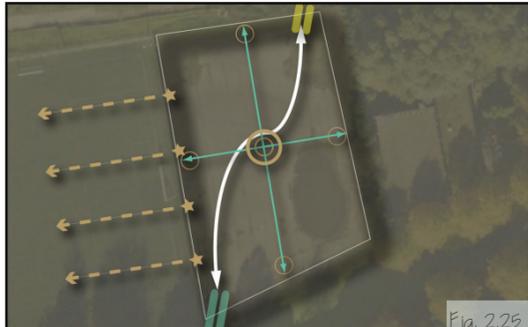


Fig. 2.25

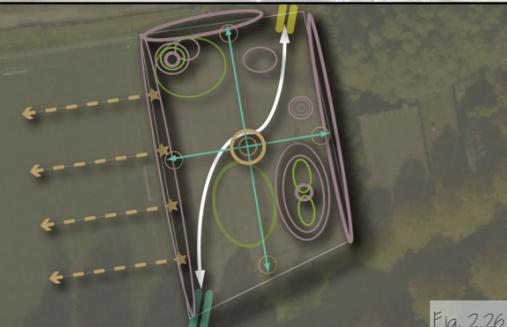


Fig. 2.26

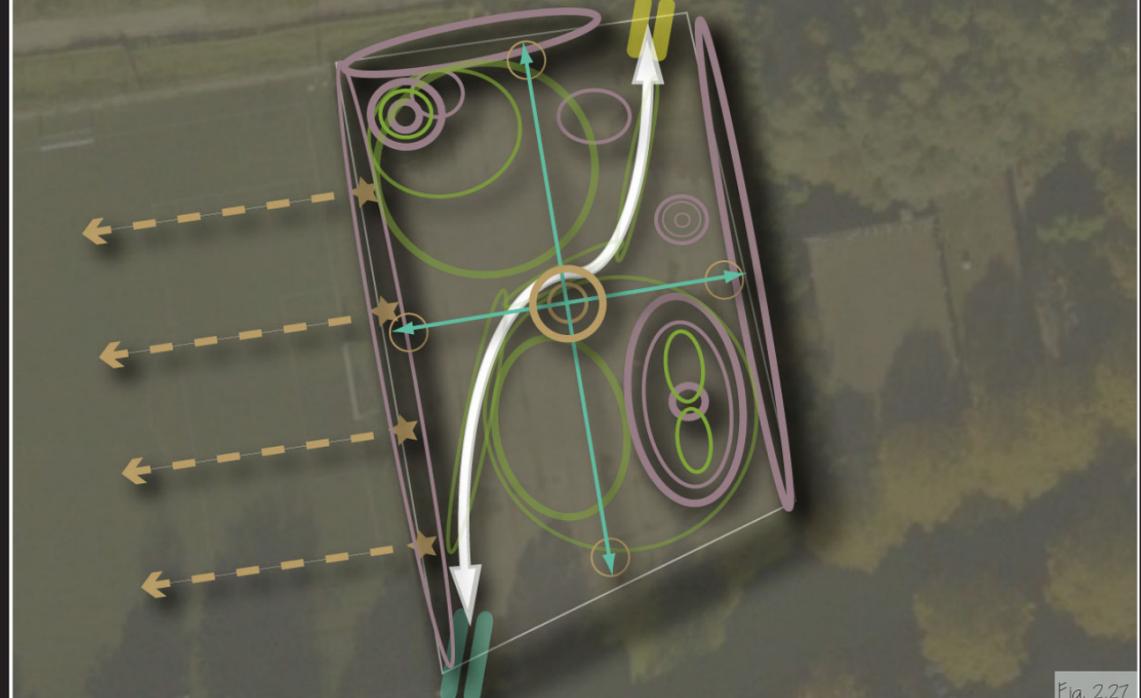


Fig. 2.27

After having a first conversation with the representative members of ProGroen Rotterdam, a workshop was organised. More residents were present, and we talked about their thoughts and wishes for the area.

"The municipality does not see the opportunities and the value of this area. Though it might be disordered, messy and at some places neglected, this green area should not lose the function it has for the residents."

"If we manage to turn this place into something meaningful for the community, it can be saved from large scale interventions which have nothing to do with the neighbourhood."

These ideas are considered leading for the design proposal for a sub-area within the Essenburqsingel. It is exactly the same location selected from the CDTA analysis for further development of center qualities. Whereas it is now experienced to be a desolated parking lot (serving the area for sports on the west side of it), the residents wish to turn this 'slice of concrete' into a meaningful place where they can grow their own fruits. The new invented name of that particular location would then become: 'De Pluktuin' (or, 'the Fruit Garden').

The first layer of geometry: a proposed composition of CDTA components (or, experiences!) at the sub-area of 'De Pluktuin'

Considering the core question of this project, which contents the search for a method to design sacred place via geometry as well as resident participation, in practice these two concepts should be integrated.

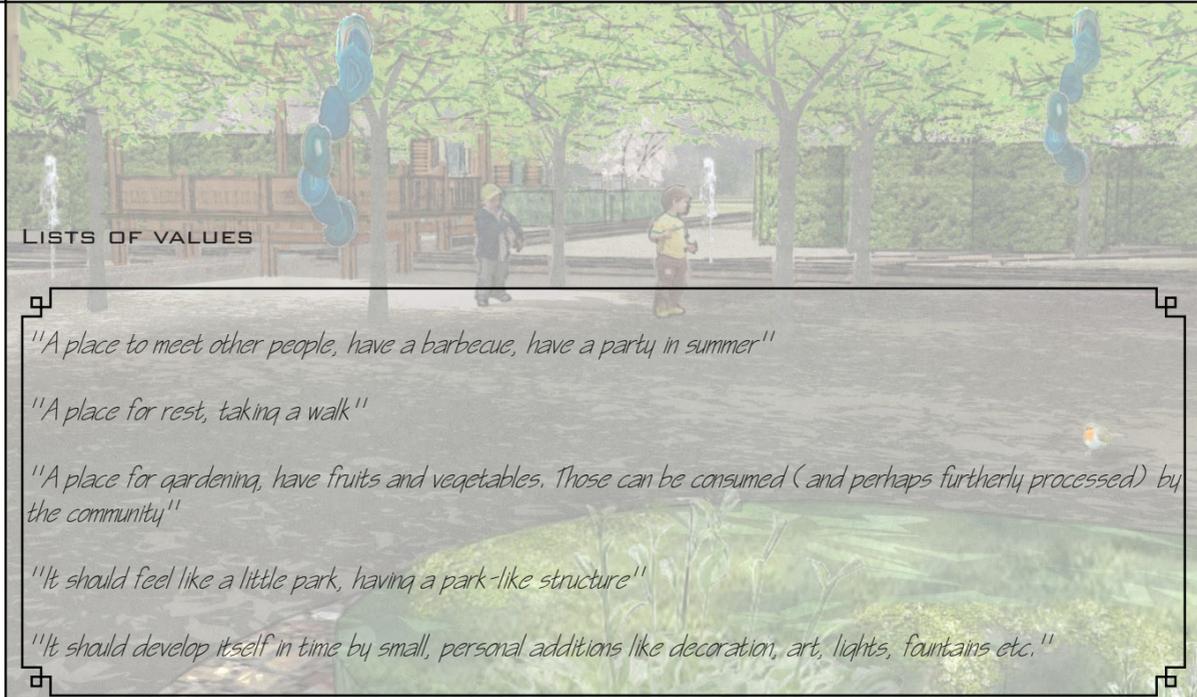
This happens as follows: the workshops with ProGroen Rotterdam and several more residents interested offer a view of what the local community finds important. As a next step, their statements can be translated into 'community values'.

These 'community values' can inform us about what the residents consider worth defending. Actually, their enthusiasm reflects that they are even willing to sacrifice their time and effort in order to make these values endure.

As derived from the Experiential Landscape theory by Thwaites and Simkins, we recognise the importance of centers (symbolised as ellipses) for creating place attachments. When starting, the slice of concrete was almost 'empty' in experience. For this reason, new centers, directions and transitions are proposed in order to make the Pluktuin a recognisable area.

Resuming the definition of sacredness by Hester at p. (5), we can thus assume that distilling these values by carefully listening gives us an overview of sacredness according to the residents of the Essenburqsingel.

When following the three layers of geometry as a proposed method, the next step is to select locations for giving form to those values.



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**2.2.5 THE SECOND LAYER OF GEOMETRY:
COMMUNITY VALUES TRANSLATED
TO NATURAL FORM**



Fig. 2.30

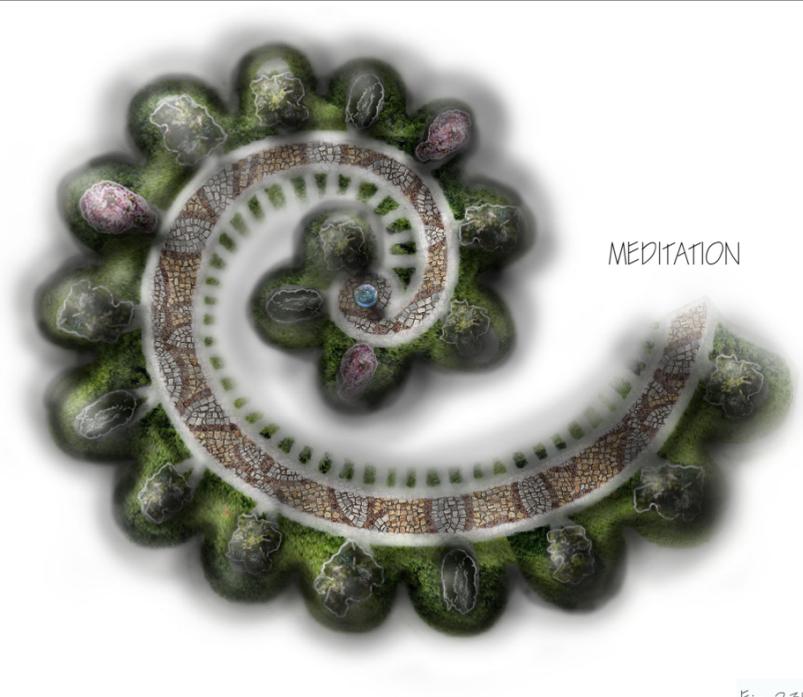
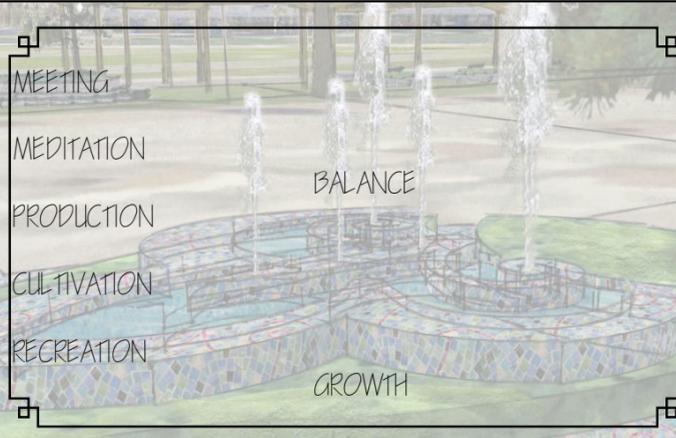
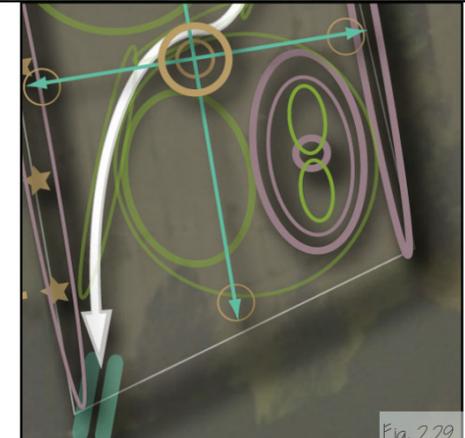
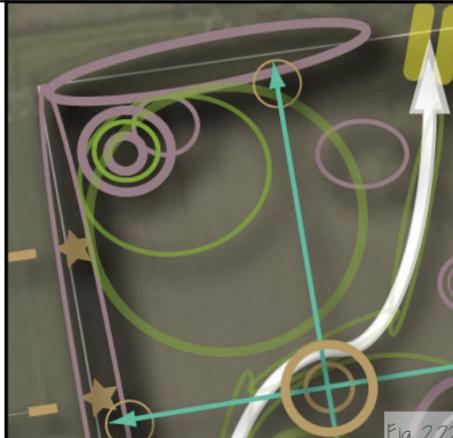


Fig. 2.31



Combined with the 'rough' structure of the Experiential Landscape, the geometry of nature is consistent enough to create powerful form, recognised by all groups of people. Golden mean proportions as well as the growth process according to Fibonacci can result in places very comfortable for the human body. Obviously, they correspond to the body itself and to the universe as it appears to us.

Moreover, spirals and flowers do have their strong symbolical meaning recognised in all cultures. We use those symbols to give form to locations which have been pointed out as opportunities for centres while mapping the Experiential Landscape.



Fig. 2.32

22

The Experiential Landscape reveals to us the locations most suitable for further detailing of space ('enfolding space'), which creates opportunities for place attachment. We selected these locations and refined them with the important values as communicated by the residents, by translating those into strong symbolic form. In order to exalt these two layers into a recognisable whole (area quality!), mandala structure are holding them together. At the same time, they give place to the walking path and the social meeting point. The residents were pleased to have their revealed 'sacred' values concretised and materialised aesthetically, because they will then be reflected in their daily landscape for many years.



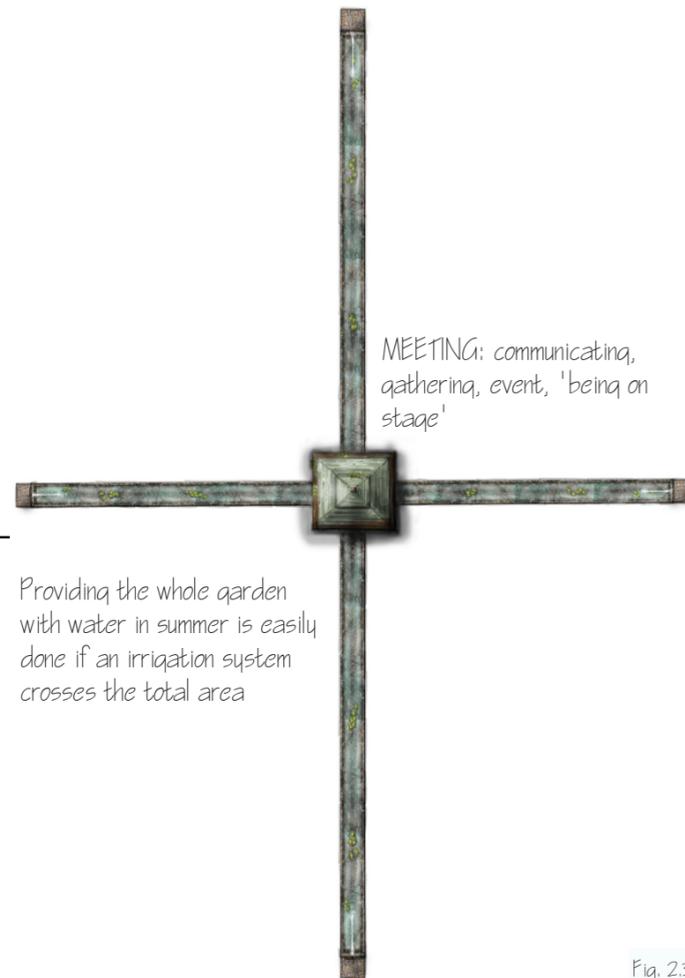
BALANCE

Two leading structures integrating contradictory forces

Fig. 2.33

Fig. 2.34

2.2.6 THE THIRD LAYER OF GEOMETRY: MANDALAS INTEGRATING CONTRA- DICTIVE VALUES



MEETING: communicating, gathering, event, 'being on stage'

Providing the whole garden with water in summer is easily done if an irrigation system crosses the total area

Fig. 2.35



Fig. 2.36

CULTIVATION

Gardening, controlling, facilitating, the 'little garden house'

'A place for gardening, have fruits and vegetables. Those can be consumed (and perhaps furtherly processed) by the community'

PRODUCTION



Fig. 2.37

"Sacredness in daily environments"

Thesis Landscape Architecture

3. DESIGN OUTCOMES

3.1 DESIGN RESULTS: 'EXALTING THE ESSENBURGSINGEL'

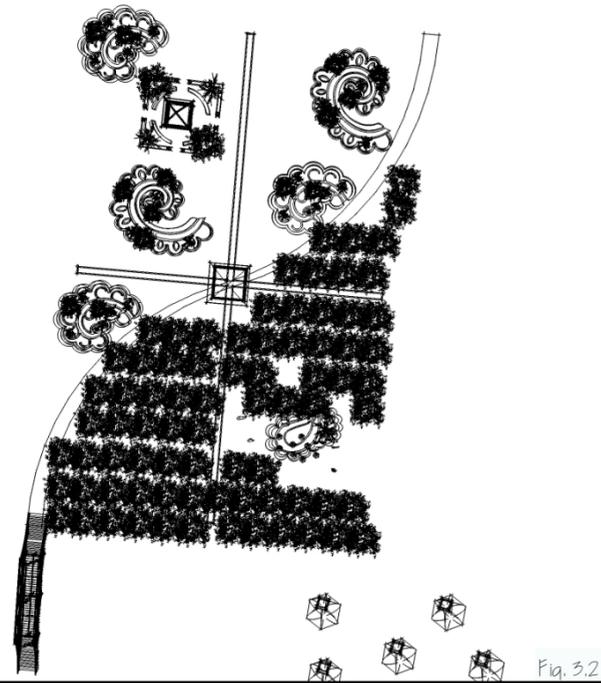


Fig. 3.2



Fig. 3.1

The spirals reflect meditation and enclosure, as well as geometric structures of nature. On the opposite of the path, the grid of apple trees reflects productive order. The centers of both sides however, do again contradict with their surroundings (the expression of the yinyang symbol). The garden house reflects concentric order within the 'chaos of the spirals'. It stands for the controlling center. The shrine in the middle of the grid of apple trees is a center for rest.

Social activities can take place exactly in the middle of the Pluktuin, where all directions come together. The stage is literary open.

DESIGN OUTCOMES: "DE PLUKTUIN" (1)



Fig. 3.3

Translation of the value of BALANCE: the winding path leads along contradictive experiences.



Fig. 3.4

"Sacredness in daily environments"

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DESIGN OUTCOMES: "DE PLUKTUIN" (II)



Fig. 3.5

Translation of the value of RECREATION: a place for rest, re-thinking, re-connecting with the materials of ground and stone. But also a place for social ritual, like these balloons for happiness. The word re-creation literary refers to renewal of the self, by letting go of daily pressure.

Translation of the value of GROWTH: personal additions, like these meditative sound-elements will enrich the place. But other additions of personal value for the residents (decoration, lights, fountains, etc.) are more than welcome.

DESIGN OUTCOMES: "DE PLUKTUIN" (III)



Fig. 3.6

DESIGN OUTCOMES: "DE PLUKTUIN" (IV)



Translation of the value of MEDITATION: a place for being alone, experiencing mystery, comfort and shelter. At the same time, as protected by direct sunlight and wind, this would be an optimal place for growing herbs and other fragile plants.



Fig. 3.8

DESIGN OUTCOMES: "DE PLUKTUIN" (V)



Fig. 3.9

DESIGN OUTCOMES: "DE PLUKTUIN" (VI)



31

DESIGN OUTCOMES: "DE PLUKTUIN" (VII)



32

Translation of the value of MEDITATION: a place for being alone, experiencing mystery, comfort and shelter. At the same time, as protected by direct sunlight and wind, this would be an optimal place for growing herbs and other fragile plants.

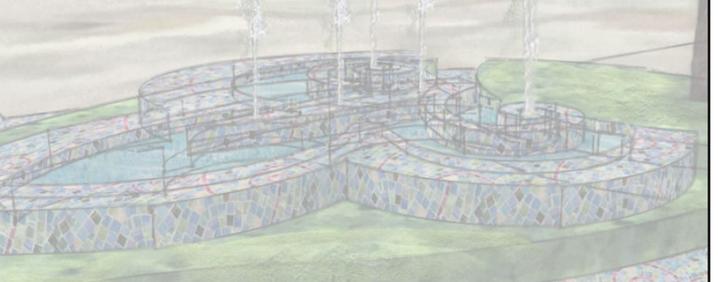


Fig. 3.10

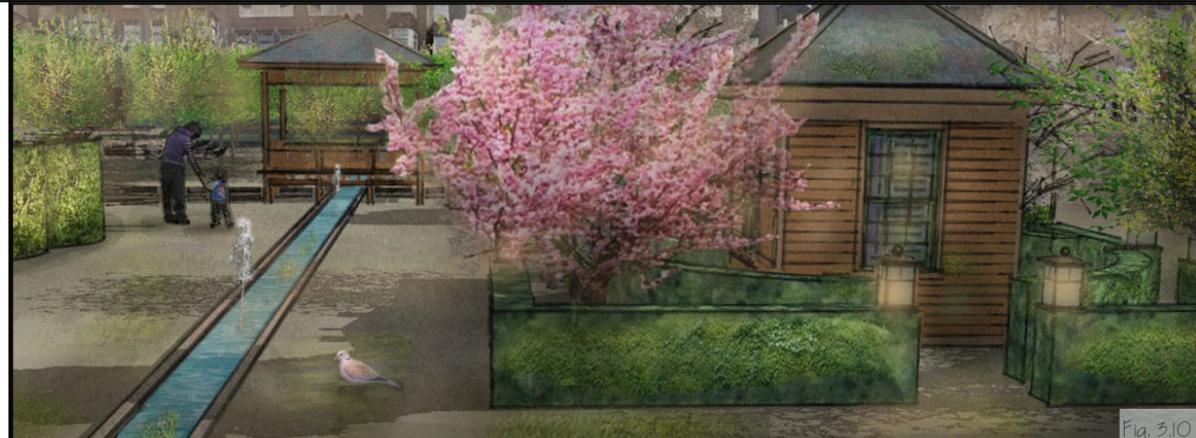
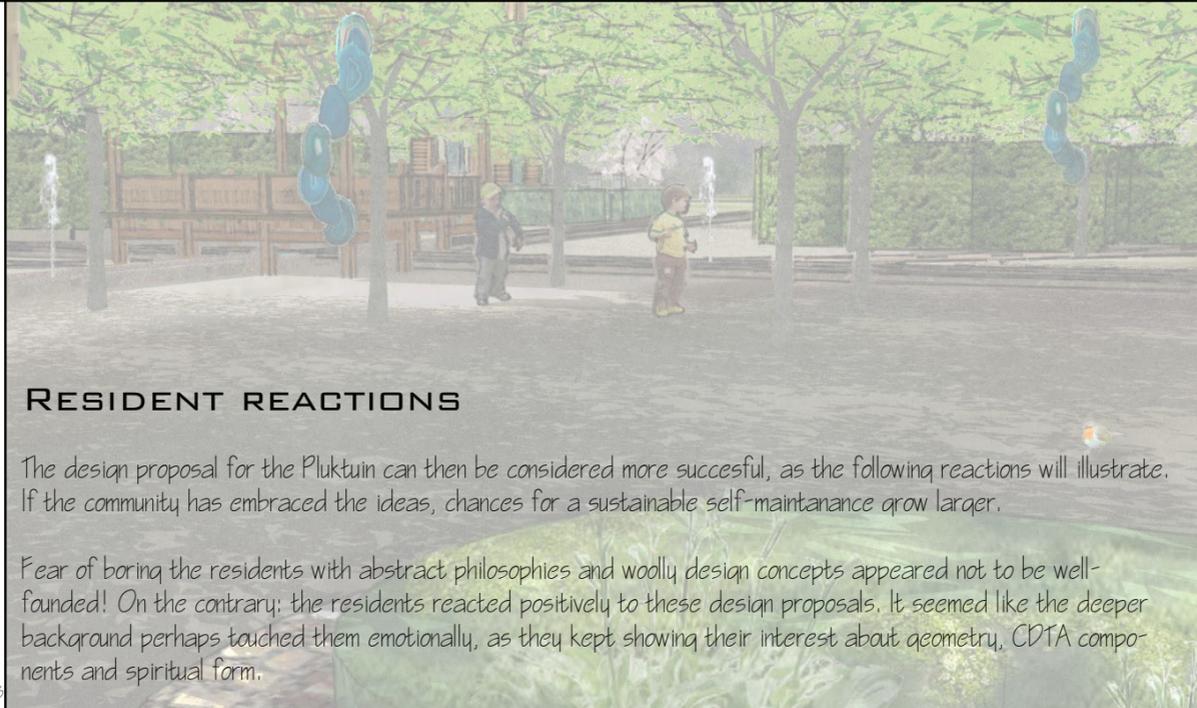


Fig. 3.11

31

32



RESIDENT REACTIONS

The design proposal for the Pluktuin can then be considered more successful, as the following reactions will illustrate. If the community has embraced the ideas, chances for a sustainable self-maintenance grow larger.

Fear of boring the residents with abstract philosophies and woolly design concepts appeared not to be well-founded! On the contrary; the residents reacted positively to these design proposals. It seemed like the deeper background perhaps touched them emotionally, as they kept showing their interest about geometry, CDTA components and spiritual form.



One of the most representative members of ProGroen appeared to be specialised in the spiritual. As a result, the yinyang geometry was well received. Others reacted on having searched for geometric proportions themselves in their spare time. They were particularly interested in sacred geometry. Next to this, residents reacted on the necessity of bringing meaningful shapes to their environment, otherwise their values would perhaps never be recognised by influential people from the outside.

The interest of the residents of the Essenburqsingel in how to design meaningful components of their living environment kept strong. Of course, we should take into account the possibility of people sceptical about the approach, but not sharing their opinion. Still, the residents of the Essenburqsingel do not appear to avoid giving criticism where if they feel so. This attitude makes their presence more than valuable.

RESUMING THE METHOD: A QUICK OVERVIEW

1.

The first layer of the Experiential Landscape gives us the 'rough' geometry of the experiences of Centre, Direction, Transition and Area which are needed for people to function in their daily routine

2.

After analysis of the present CDTA components, opportunities for new centres of meaning are revealed. In order to develop those, their center qualities should be intensified

3.

Strong geometrical (and at the same time symbolical) forms are chosen from natural patterns, depending on the value they should communicate. These values are derived from workshops with the residents

4.

Reinforcement of total structure and elevation of the whole by the mandala

Experiential Landscape

Based on present location qualities; the holistic CDTA components of the project area

Geometry of nature

Based on community values, translated into strong form and applied to locations selected by the CDTA analysis (intensifying centers)

Geometry of the mandala

Based on community values, integrating separate forms and elevating place by the three criteria

The necessity of community values may become more clear if we apply the same method to the square near the Mevlana mosque. Purely embedding geometrical form can be appealing to the eye, but still lacks connecting unity. Even if the mosque is the sacred center (and in geometrical terms, the mandala or third layer) of the square - we may assume that these implementations would be less successful as it cannot be guaranteed that this style will be appreciated and maintained. Here starts the chapter: a critical view at the method.

3.2 A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE METHOD



Mapping the existing experiences of CDTA components. The mosque as the only center. The forces of transition and direction dominate. Not attractive staying longer than necessary.



3.2 THE FIRST LAYER OF GEOMETRY: CDTA ANALYSIS AT SCALE OF THE MEVLANA SQUARE

At the new CDTA composition, centre qualities are added in order to create more comfort. These centres now have to express suitable form.



Though the Mevlana mosque is rich in colour and geometry, the square around it is not that inviting for place attachment. Nor for cycling, as the elements of wind, concrete and traffic are characterising the area at the north and west side of the mosque.



Based on the analysis of the Experiential Landscape of the total area of the Essenburqsingel, two locations turned out to be most suitable to be developed into centers of meaning. We already looked at how resident participation translated into strong geometric form resulted in the design proposal of 'the Pluktuin'. The Mevlana mosque square however, is not carried by such a community dedicated for the care of the area around the mosque. The Mevlana mosque ITSELF is the meaningful sacred center. In order to maintain our basis at the proposed composition of CDTA components - which eventually would result in a better balance in experiencing the total area of the Essenburqsingel, the square around it should contain more meaningful details. As we walk across the square, despite of the mosque, the directional forces of the roads at the west side, as well as the structures of concrete by the railroad in the north seem to dominate the experience of center qualities. Again, we use the three-layered method of geometries to enrich the Mevlana square.

Without resident participation: can the square near the mosque still be sacred?

As the core question is defined by how to design sacred places by the use of geometry out of resident participation, we may also want to test the three-layered method if the design purely leans upon geometric forces. The design proposal of the Mevlana square is therefore the result of the three layers of geometry working together, taking the Mevlana mosque as the sacred centre (considered geometrically, it could be characterised as a mandala itself).

Moreover, there were no community values translated into natural geometric form. Instead, we chose the floral spray of the paisley pattern to be a symbol of life and eternity (after its Persian meaning). The shapes of the perqolas (from a center widening to the direction of the mosque refer to growth - as in all religions, the intrinsic ideal exists to grow towards a state of divinity in the end, via the journey of life. Mevlana himself was a respected philosopher who argued for tolerance.

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Fig. 3.17

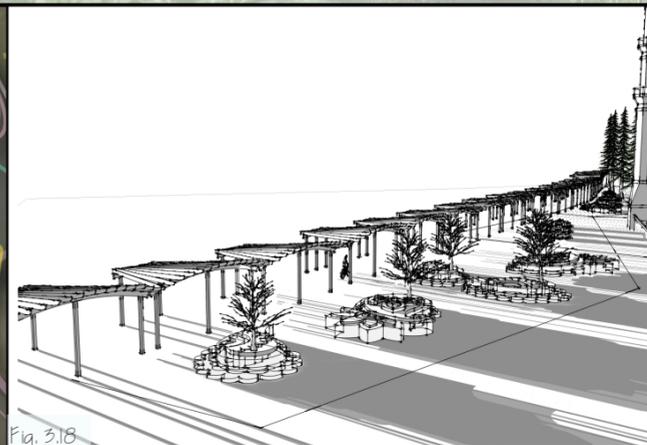
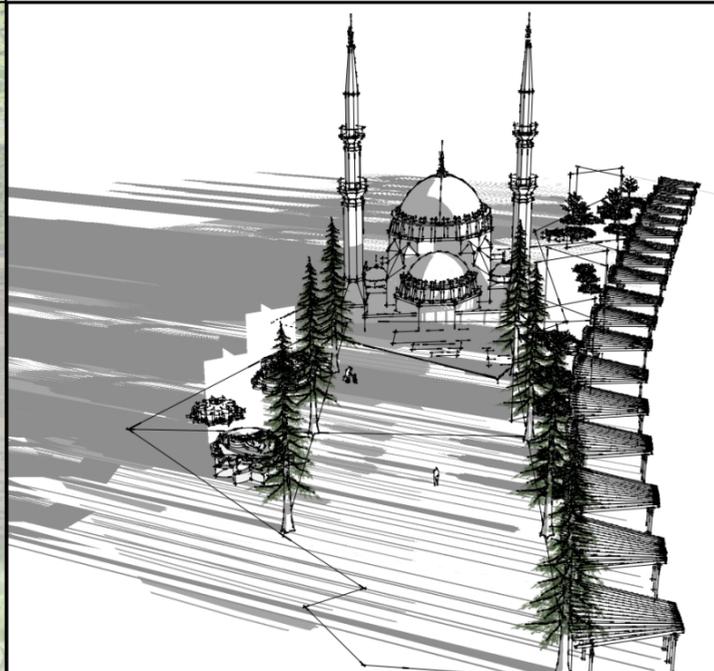
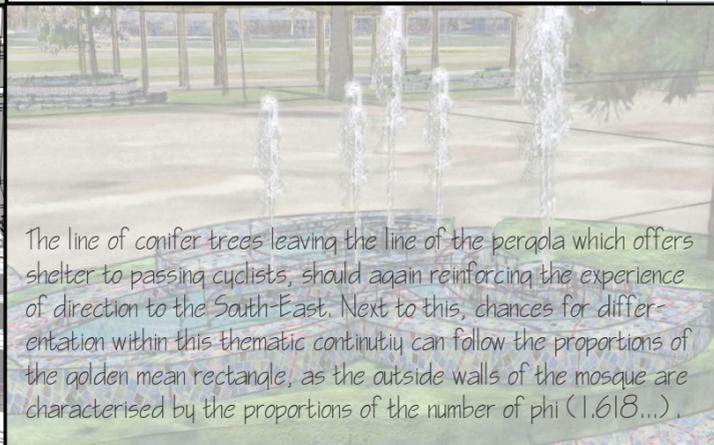


Fig. 3.18



An intensified entrance: directing straight to the mosque Fig. 3.19



The line of conifer trees leaving the line of the perqola which offers shelter to passing cyclists, should again reinforcing the experience of direction to the South-East. Next to this, chances for differentiation within this thematic continuity can follow the proportions of the golden mean rectangle, as the outside walls of the mosque are characterised by the proportions of the number of phi (1.618...).

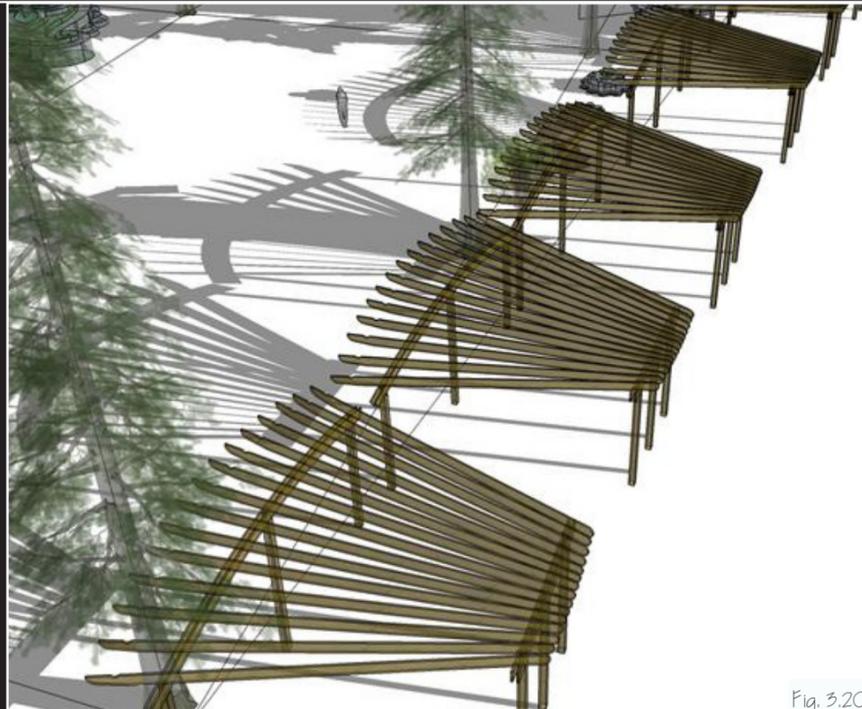


Fig. 3.20

Perqola-roof for the bicycle path: more comfort for cyclists as well as the pedestrians at the square



Fig. 3.21

"Sacredness in daily environments"

Thesis Landscape Architecture

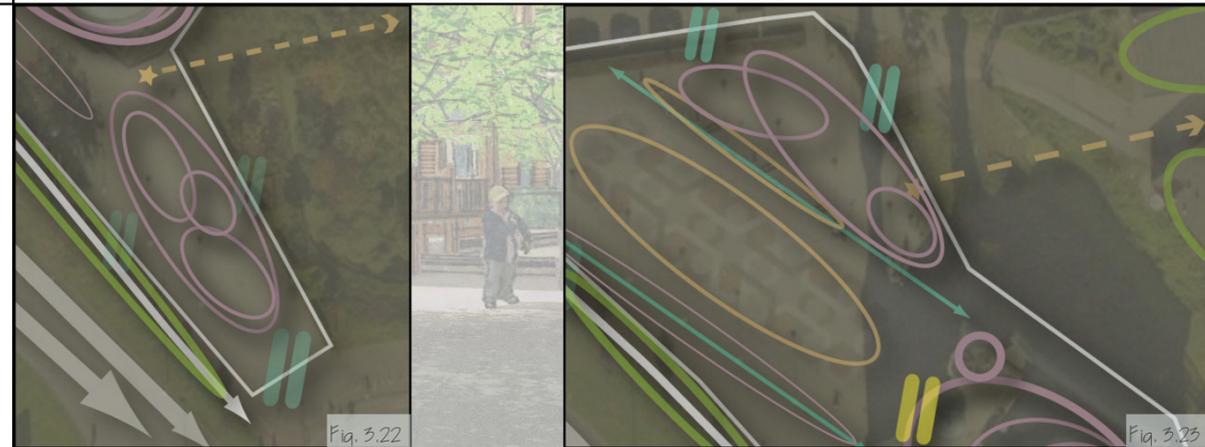


Fig. 2.22 and 2.23 show the subareas of the Mevlana square which give opportunities for creating centers: places for having a seat and slow down pace.

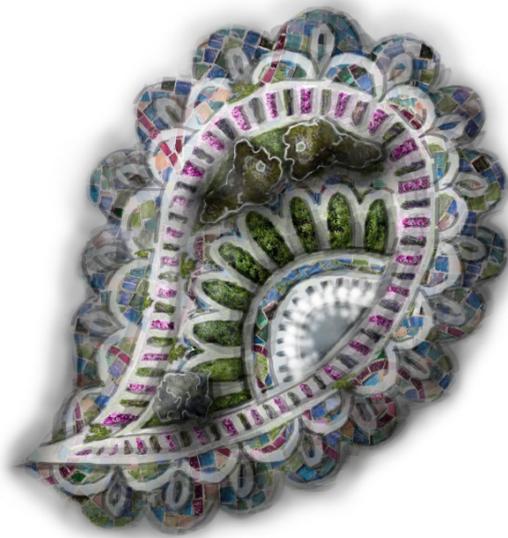


Fig. 3.24



Fig. 3.26

3.2 PROPOSING ADDITIONAL GEOMETRIES AT THE MEVLANA SQUARE

Fig. 3.26 and 3.27: Paisley patterns representing a floral spray, they can become almost endlessly detailed elements for sitting



Fig. 3.25

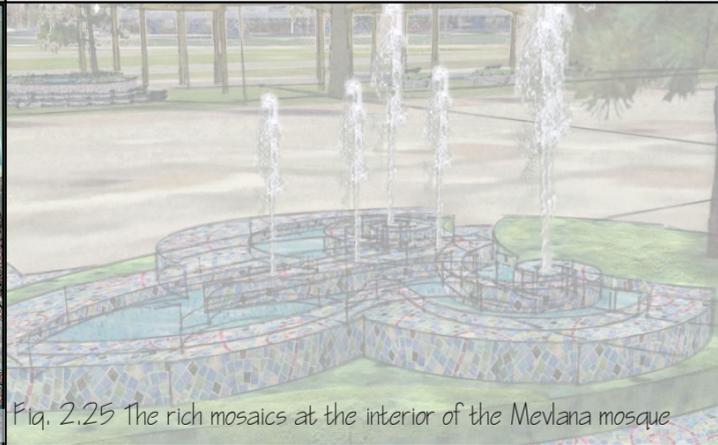


Fig. 2.25 The rich mosaics at the interior of the Mevlana mosque

As we look at both the outside and the interior of the Mevlana mosque, we find lots of colours - the inside is even more overwhelming. Mosques do not show any illustrations of persons, nor of the divine. In stead, it is immensely detailed with geometrical forms which remind us to natural patterns. In order to celebrate this, the floral spray of the paisley pattern intensifies these endlessly detailed experience. They would do well as carriers for plants and fountains, which are suitable for creating comfortable places for having a seat at the square. If one is waiting for going into the mosque or perhaps just passing by - there is always opportunity to slow down pace and relax.



Fig. 3.27

"Sacredness in daily environments"

Thesis Landscape Architecture



Fig. 3.28

Having a seat... these mosaics are nothing compared to what's inside the mosque!



Fig. 3.29

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE METHOD: THE EXAMPLE OF THE MEVLANA SQUARE (I): CAN IT BECOME SACRED SPACE?

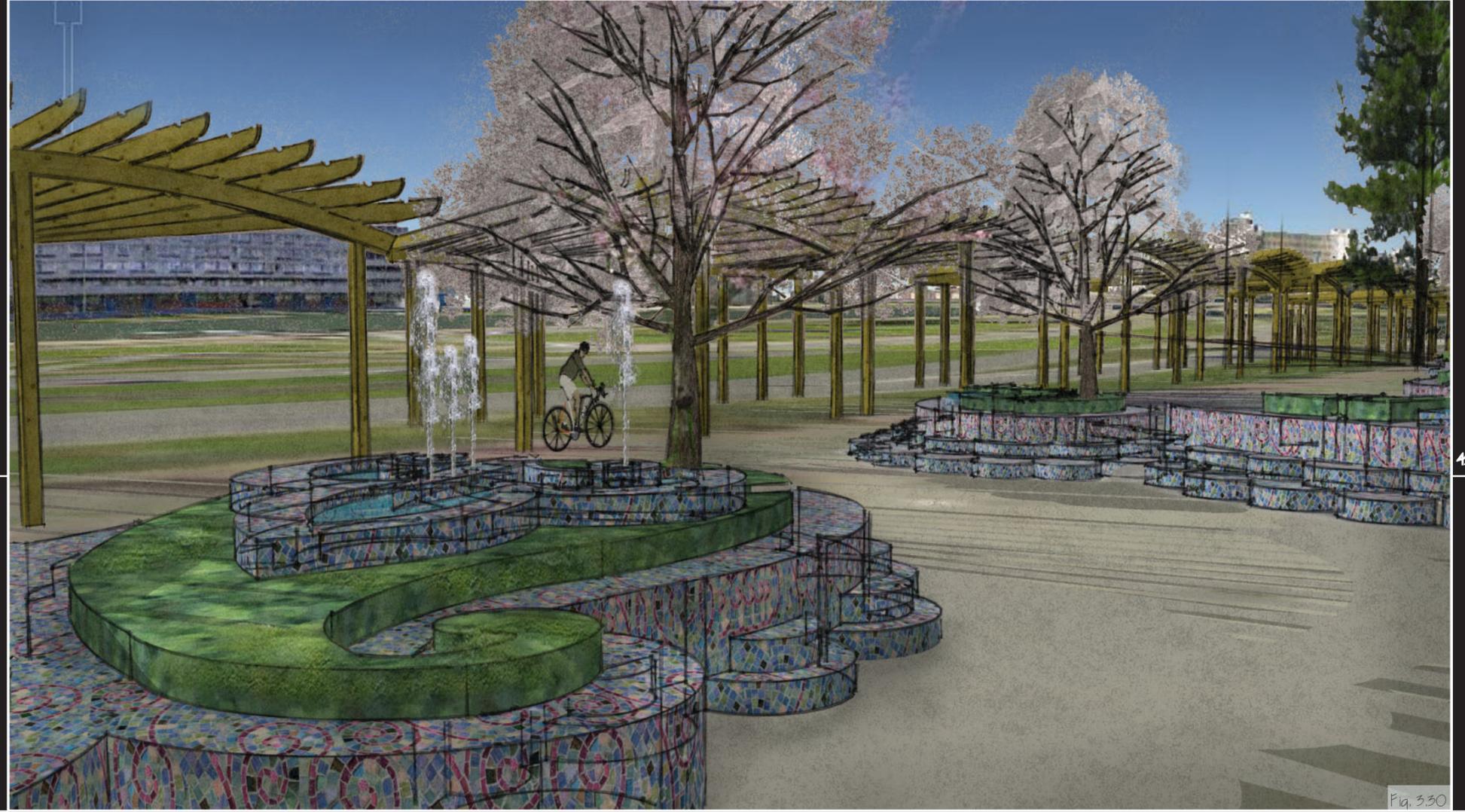
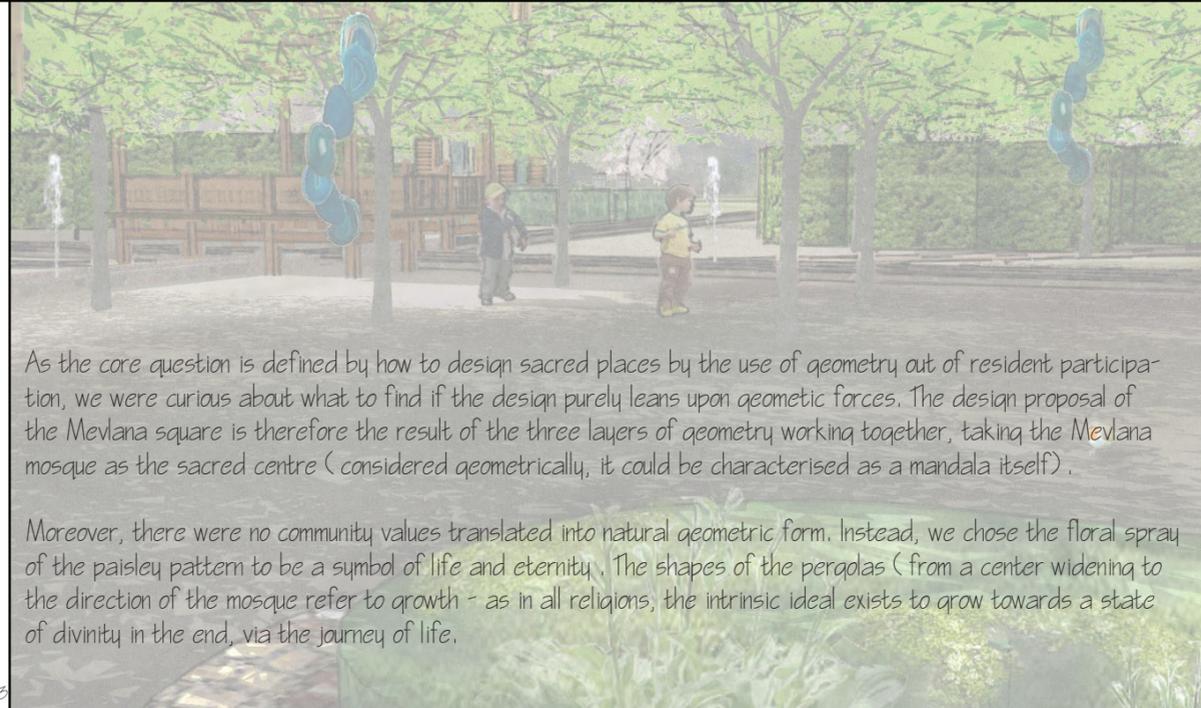


Fig. 3.30



As the core question is defined by how to design sacred places by the use of geometry out of resident participation, we were curious about what to find if the design purely leans upon geometric forces. The design proposal of the Mevlana square is therefore the result of the three layers of geometry working together, taking the Mevlana mosque as the sacred centre (considered geometrically, it could be characterised as a mandala itself).

Moreover, there were no community values translated into natural geometric form. Instead, we chose the floral spray of the paisley pattern to be a symbol of life and eternity. The shapes of the pergolas (from a center widening to the direction of the mosque) refer to growth - as in all religions, the intrinsic ideal exists to grow towards a state of divinity in the end, via the journey of life.

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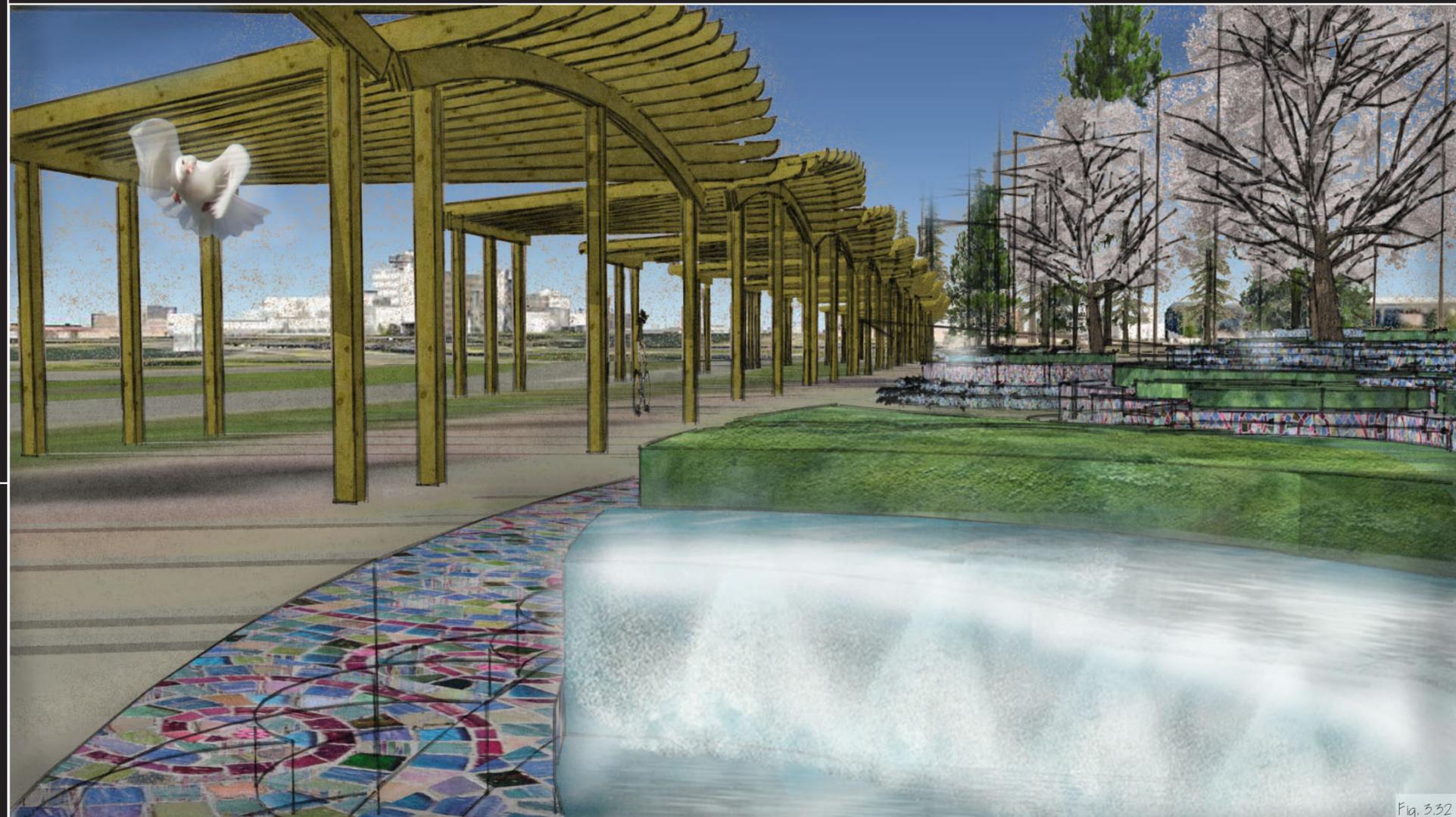
Fig. 3.31



Fig. 3.32: Seeing, hearing, touching the water!

Fig. 3.32

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE METHOD: THE EXAMPLE OF THE MEVLANA SQUARE (II): CAN IT BECOME SACRED SPACE?



44



CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

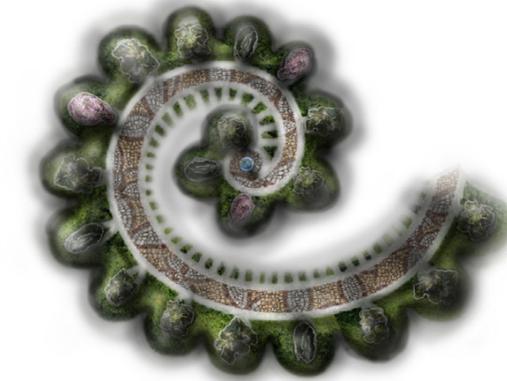
However, the method of creating sacred places from geometry cannot be considered without the help of the community. Sacredness comes into being through the values of the community, and translating these into form means that the landscape can grow towards a place reflecting these values. If not, a design can appeal to the eye, but still leaves a feeling of distance between the people and the environment. Just as people have to accept many top-down interventions in their daily environment, they might be felt forced to just accept. The design proposal of the Mevlana mosque can only work if it 'accidentally' follows the taste and values of its visitors, and it can only manage to exist if the municipalities of Rotterdam board of the mosque would be willing to maintain. Moreover, constructing the paisley-elements should be celebrated by event.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF DESIGNING

These two projects are meant to show a different vision upon designing, by introducing a method which justifies strong geometrical form. It is recognised that this conflicts with the commonly accepted way of fitting into the existing context. The three layers of geometry also reflect the presence of the body, soul and spirit, as anthroposophy and spirituality describe them as the most complete way to define the human being. If these are embedded into the landscape, consciously or unconsciously they might be experienced as a recognisable whole. This vision is therefore expected to be vulnerable for receiving lots of resistance. However, it might be important to also take a critical look at this context itself. Are existing contexts, even if they are characterised by lack of details, even if their geometries are dominated by directional forces and function, still considered that sacred by landscape architects? Are existing contexts and materials more to be respected than the strong geometrical forms which are rooted as archetypes in our common consciousness - expressing the deeper values to be attained?

Though corrections, refinements, extensions of both vision and method should always be embraced, the meaning of sacredness should perhaps not be furtherly removed from the human consciousness - nor the landscape.

The Experiential Landscape reveals can enable to a designer the locations most suitable for further detailing of space, which creates opportunities for place attachment. These locations were thus selected and refined with the important values as communicated by the residents, by translating those into strong symbolic form. In order to exalt these two layers into a recognisable whole (an area-component quality according to Thwaites and Simkins), mandala structures are proposed to hold them together. At the same time, they give place to the walking path and the social meeting point. The residents involved at the Pluktuin project were pleased to have their revealed 'sacred' values concretised and materialised aesthetically, because they would then be reflected in their daily landscape for many years. If we now take a critical look upon both projects, we might be able to discover differences, despite of the completely comparable working method of the three geometrical layers. Visually, we can argue that the layers offer to us lots of inspiration for adding strong, recognisable form and details. From the CDTA theory, we could even say that new centres of meaning could come into existence from this vision.



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