chapter 3
Young people in Nests
1. Young people in Nests: building in difficult
nowadays city life. What’s it like, as a kid or youngster, to grow up in a neighbourhood where social isolation and fear are the norm? What’s it like, when you see and experience the city as a jungle, with danger lurking behind every tree or corner? Or when you see the big city as a giant playground? As Alice in Wonderland or Harry Potter in Diagon Alley?

What’s it like, to be welcomed on the streets, to hear ‘come play with us’? How does it feel, to be blackmailed by ‘the gang’, to have to pay to be allowed to set foot on the playing field or to take the road home? What’s it like, to be born in a neighbourhood with a NEST as a symbol? And to be fed ‘the codes’ of cultural diversity? Young people learn to live and act as their environment dictates. These acts become of a repetitive ‘cultural’ nature. The neighbourhood’s response - the silence, the fear, the isolation - becomes the dominant culture. And the young people act accordingly.

In this chapter we explore how the building of a Nest changed the image of a neighbourhood and marked new perspectives in living together in intergenerational diversity.
What is the value of a socio-artistic community project in terms of social cohesion and social fabric? Can we, based on the understandings and outcome of the project, describe a new social and methodological paradigm? These are important questions that rose from our inquiry. The Nest project is our focus.

“An incredibly diverse neighbourhood, not only as far as population is concerned, but also the architecture, high-rise buildings with social housing, low-rise council housing, private property. You can be standing among the towers of council flats one minute, and then a 100 yards on, you’re almost in the country. Houses are small-ish, the streets can have a nice atmosphere, for example if people are joining in the city-wide Spring Cleaning. That gives you a warm, fuzzy feeling. But then, around the corner, you stand among the blocks and you can almost feel the social isolation.”

‘Het Kiel’ (like the ship’s ‘Keel’) is a neighbourhood in Antwerp, south of the city centre. Before the 1920 Olympics and the 1930 World Fair, it was a green area. Now, over 15,000 people live there. Het Kiel is an old neighbourhood, popular and multicultural, with a lot of social housing. Apart from an area with residential villas and 19th century town houses, the neighbourhood is characterized by the ‘blocks’, high-rise apartments designed by architect Renaat Braem. As an architect, Braem’s main inspiration was Le Corbusier. He ‘replaced’ the ground floor of the apartment buildings with large support beams. The ‘legs’ support the high blocks and give the impression of openness. In the heart of the neighbourhood lies NOVA, a Cultural Meeting Centre.

Het Kiel is cut off from the rest of the city by a tangle of ring roads, bridges and slip roads - the so-called ‘spaghetti knot’. This gives the neighbourhood a distinctive identity. The municipality is working on renovating the neighbourhood: several streets are to be renewed, a branch of the OCMW (Public Centre for Social Welfare) and the head office of VoorZorg Antwerpen (Social housing cooperation) are being built there and the shopping centre Den Tir is being developed. Young people have not been forgotten: there will be playgrounds and green areas; and on the parking lot of football club Germinal Beerschot GBA, sports- and game facilities are being planned.

1.2 Problems in Het Kiel?

The extreme right wing, populist party Vlaams Belang writes: “Het Kiel is a problem neighbourhood which requires a step-by-step approach. Law and order have to be restored. If the new plans for the neighbourhood, such as the Tir shopping centre, are to produce results, the quality
of life has to be improved. The quality of living in the housing estates has to be improved. Vacant and run-down houses have to be bought and renovated.”

 Het Kiel, together with Antwerpen Noord, Luchtbal, Europark (Left Bank) and Oud-Borgerhout, is high on the poverty index. The underprivileged are concentrated in several areas of the neighbourhood. The school achievements of pupils show a close correlation with the neighbourhood they grow up in. A lot of the children growing up in Het Kiel are already lagging in primary school. There is a lot of diversity in Het Kiel: 46% of inhabitants are of immigrant descent, 54% are Belgian. The percentage of young people is higher than the Antwerp average. Over 58% of the houses are part of a housing estate. Living together is fraught with problems. The strong segregation between the different groups, along ethnic and class lines, the exclusion of the male Moroccan community and the ensuing frustration are problematic. Some communities manage to break out of their social isolation, but for most of the inhabitants it’s ‘each man for himself’. The Moroccan community is divided and difficult to mobilize. Young people are seen as a problem by many inhabitants, especially young people of immigrant descent.

In the social sciences literature, negative characterizations of urban living in neighbourhoods such as Het Kiel dominate. Tönnies, Paddington et al speak of social disintegration and see little room for a close-knit community life in deprived areas. Putnam sees a decline of traditional social life.

Perhaps people are more impersonal and distant in their dealings with one another in cities. Yet even in the anonymous city, there are plenty of opportunities for strengthening community ties at the neighbourhood level.

1.3 For our neighbours too: free air, greenery and art! Welcome to the Middelheimmuseum

“Museums do not have the right tools to reach young people. They’re not interested in the traditional arts, but in culture, film and music, a culture which is much closer to their hearts. So we need different partners.”

The Middelheimmuseum is in the vicinity of the Het Kiel neighbourhood, in Wilrijk, one of Antwerps nine districts. A large thoroughfare divides the neighbourhood. The museum is located in the part with a lot of greenery and big houses. The popular neighbourhood Het Kiel is on the other side. As the crow flies, the museum and the neighbourhood are less than 7 kilometres apart, but all public transport goes via the city centre, so it takes close to an hour to reach the museum from Het Kiel. The open air
museum has an extensive international collection of modern and contemporary sculpture. Every year, about 200,000 people visit the public art park of 28 hectares. A survey (2004, Musis) recording the specific profiles of visitors of Antwerp city museums shows that people often visit the Middelheimmuseum as part of a group or a class. Adults, and especially young people less familiar with culture, rarely find their way to the museum. The same goes for the museum’s neighbours in Kiel. They rarely visit. The PR employees of the museum decided to seek out their neighbours. And the minister approves.

1.4 The minister of participation

“People will die of loneliness and boredom before they die of hunger” Poverty Report ‘94

“The challenge of this decree is not just to attract more people to culture, youth work and sports, but more than ever also to bring culture, youth work and sports to the people. It goes without saying that culture, youth work and sports will not simply remove the existing socio-economic and other inequalities, but a decisive policy in this regard undeniably does contribute to the fight against inequality. This new participation decree is a landmark in a consistent policy. It’s like the keystone, keeping a stone arch up by its own sheer force. This ‘keeping things together’ is a crucial challenge.” Bert Anciaux, Minister for Culture, at the launch of the decree

Barriers to participation. The high steps of the museum or the theatre. Try putting on ‘Waiting for Godot’ in a neighbourhood where Kiel rats are mainly concerned with the results of their FC Germinal Beerschot! Scientific research has shown different barriers to young people’s participation in ‘classic’ art: financial, socio-cultural, age, physical and mental possibilities etc.

In September 2007, the Flemish government gave its blessing to the ‘Participation Decree’, at the behest of the Minister for Culture, Bert Anciaux. This new legislative framework concerns a high-quality, diverse cultural offering and serves to encourage and support people and groups to ‘remove barriers’ and participate and be part of a rich and diverse youth, sports and cultural life. In this way, attention for quality and reach/participation are linked. Participation is broadened, enriched and strengthened by the incorporation of existing participation initiatives and institutions in one coherent framework, and by giving extra financial stimuli to new practices, along with special attention for disadvantaged groups (people in poverty, prisoners, families with children and the disabled, groups of a diverse ethnic-cultural nature). The extra resources can also be used for support-
Social laws prove stronger than policy

ing the social power of sports (by supporting local square stewards, pointing people towards sports clubs, etc.) or helping to set up youth clubs for disadvantaged groups. This ‘Participation Decree’ also embodies the principles and action plans of the Flemish government, like the Pact of Vilvoorde, the realisation of the Flemish Poverty Action Plan, the strategic plan for help and assistance to prisoners etc. Participation is turning in to the hallmark of this Minister for Culture.

Not everybody is altogether happy with that. According to Wim De Pauw (2008), the attempt to integrate the two movements – cultural participation and cultural production – in practice means that participation wins out. The leitmo-tiv in the minister’s policy is that the arts sector should open itself up to as large a part of the population as possible. This means that Anciaux is projecting the idea of participation on to the arts sector and the artists themselves. He is saddling them with the responsibility for the participation of groups that are difficult to reach. De Pauw thinks art should (only?) be judged on its intrinsic quality and not on its audience appeal.

Art and culture participation are apparently not determined by policy. Most surveys show social culture diffusion has been a failure. Two important reasons have been given. On the hand, social patterns, such as the role of culture as a means of distinction (see Bourdieu among others). Cultural tastes, appreciation and behaviour are apparently connected to behavioural norms and the lifestyle of certain groups, and are therefore rooted in a social structure. Social laws prove stronger than policy. Also, the degree of difficulty of art has proved to limit its appeal. The more complex the art form, the less widespread it is socially. Education turns out to be the determining factor in cultural participation.

Section 23 of the Belgian Constitution guarantees the right to a dignified life and especially the right to cultural and social development. (Koning Boudewijn-stichting, 2000) This section became the driving force for socio-artistic projects, like the ones included in the ‘arts decree’. In Flanders, socio-
artistic practice is still young, developing and finding its way. Socio-artistic projects build bridges between people, communities and the arts, in a socially congruent way. They are the embodiment of government attention for participation and disadvantaged groups. Groups and individuals, which have been excluded socially and culturally, are actively involved in culture and the arts. The approach deals with participants, artists and the audience in its own, different way. The focus is on connections, the aesthetics of accidental synchronicity. Clashing areas, poverty and beauty, or beauty and the beast. Marie Van Looveren (2006 and 2008) argues that the social factor should not be forgotten: “In this way, socio-artistic projects contribute structurally to the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the cultural domain. The current inaccessibility of the cultural field is lessened. Not by leading the poor en masse to a cultural product they cannot relate to, but by broadening the cultural field, and thus automatically incorporating more points of view and groups of society.”

Museum looking for an audience, longing for a broader audience and receiving (lots) of project money from a ‘Minister for Participation’ to achieve this! But what happens if a temple of culture goes on a blind date with the unfamiliar – and up to now unloved – football-crazy neighbour?
For the museum, it will be an exciting and unexpected meeting with a visitor who might never become part of the classic audience without losing his authenticity. Where are the limits? Can a temple of culture broaden its field without losing some of its sacredness? And if so, how? For the visitor: do I feel welcome enough to be able to enjoy myself and enter into a dialogue with image and attitude? How much can the new acquaintances take from one another?

One of my icons in the park is ‘Het Zotte Geweld’ (‘the crazy violence’). Originally, Rik Wouters called his statue ‘de dwaze maagd’ (‘the mad virgin’). It represents (the dance of) Isidora Duncan. Can a museum, along with its project partners, arouse a zest for living in a community? Is that the quest it has embarked on?
2. ‘Bijbuurten’ and Nests: socio-artistic good
the museum starts ‘Bij-buurten op Het Kiel’, its ‘inclusion initiatives’ aimed at the Het Kiel neighbours who never visit. The museum does so with a whole series of partners, including ‘De Veerman’, an organisation for arts education, community work and the neighbourhood centre NOVA.

‘Bijbuurten’ will run for 3 years and comprise several projects. In the first year (April 06 to March 07) the focus is on getting to know the neighbourhood and project partners. In the second year (April 07 – March 08), the focus is on expanding community work, school work and contemporary art in the neighbourhood. In the third and final year (April 08 – June 09), community work is expanded further and incorporated into the normal functioning of the museum.

2.2 Goal, mission, vision

“Art can be a valuable addition to our lives and it offers opportunities for self-fulfilment and self-respect. With the questions art raises, it can help people find their place in the world.” (www.middelheimmuseum.be)
The attention for a broader social role for the museum comes to the fore in ‘Bij-buurten’. Letting target groups that are difficult to reach discover culture, in their own neighbourhood and in the museum; expanding the community work of the museum; assuming the role of mediator between image and audience, across the physical and territorial borders of the museum; these are all embodiments of the concept social inclusion.

With ‘Social Inclusion’, the attention shifted to activities aimed at involving non-museum going groups in new ways, from the 80's onwards. Social Inclusion starts a thought process in the museum about its role and identity. The museum goes looking for the desired audience outside of the institution, in the audience’s own environment. That is where the museum starts working on achieving its aims. The focus is on the demand side. Activities are organised in close cooperation with the target groups. They, too, can influence the final result. Throughout the planning stage, all efforts are made to achieve a balance between active (do it yourself), receptive (looking at) en reflective (thinking about). In the long run, the museum's Social Inclusion approach should produce an audience that accurately reflects the population as a whole.

How should the museum change in order to guarantee the involvement of the target groups in the long term? This question will take up an ever larger part of the agenda of the staff meetings of the Middelheimmuseum. The museum translated this approach into a number of targets. The museum wanted:
- the visitor’s profile to accurately reflect the population in general, and that of Het Kiel in particular
- to forge an ongoing cooperation with Het Kiel, with organised residents, through socio-cultural organisations and neighbourhood schools in Het Kiel
- to tailor the museum’s work to the artistic and cultural experience of specific target groups, such as people in poverty and people of immigrant descent
- to mediate in the relationship between art and Braem architecture in Het Kiel and its inhabitants
- to lower concrete barriers to (physical and mental) accessibility in its own domain for people who are unfamiliar with museums

The museum saw benefits in several areas to the cooperation between the museum and the neighbourhood. The museum assumes that the various cultures and world views will enrich one another and the museum. More cultural diversity will exist next to (and inside) the dominant culture. This makes communication about, with and of the specific context of the target group possible and therefore enriches our shared lives.
In addition, the museum is winning local support. Involving the locals is a priority. The project will offer a diverse choice to the various target groups: new Belgians (immigrants), young people, people in poverty, socio-cultural organisations and schools. In doing so, the museum gains expert knowledge about the different target groups, which can help to further tailor their work. The target groups concerned are good ‘reference groups’ with which to test the accessibility of the current system. Initiatives to improve this accessibility will also benefit other visitors. The ‘Social Inclusion thinking’ resulted in the Bij-buurtenproject, a project spread over three years and described as ‘...an octopus branching off into subprojects, partners, locations, and a huge investment in time and manpower.’

In order to be able to build a relationship with the inhabitants of Het Kiel, the museum wants to get an idea of what the local residents think of the museum, how they see it. A focus group survey provides the necessary information. Conversations with local residents show that they do know the Antwerp museums – including the Middelheimmuseum – but only rarely visit them. They also show little affection for or attachment to the art in their own neighbourhood (mainly sculptures). A personal invitation does convince the Kielenaars to visit the Middelheimmuseum. A visit to the park, a walk around it, is found to be enjoyable. However, it is mainly a psychological barrier they experience as visitors: they are not in the habit of it (attitude, dress code): they feel like they stick out in an environment in which they are not at home. For the rest, the Kielenaars deal with the information provided to them in a rational way. They show little curiosity of their own accord. They do like to take part in an organised group visit to the museum, but they are not inclined to take the initiative themselves.

For the Kielenaars, the fact that the visual arts are not self-explanatory, the physical barrier (lack of public transport) and the (sub-) cultural barriers (dress, attitude, etc.) act as barriers to participation and stop them visiting the Middelheimmuseum. The survey led to several recommendations:

- picking up the public, welcoming them, guiding them;
- emphasising the advantages of the museum (park!)
- building a relationship with the neighbourhood and the social fabric there
- ensuring a relationship between the audience and the collection

Based on these results, a strategy is devised to improve the accessibility of the museum and the involvement of the neighbourhood.
2.3 Sub-projects

*Sub-project 1: neighbourhood walk ‘A taste of Het Kiel’*

Two neighbourhood walks are developed. Route A focuses on arts and architecture, route B on arts and sports. The walks are widely publicized through various youth and cultural organisations. But turn-out is low, even though the walks make a pleasant change for the schools. Based on the social inclusion approach, the museum also starts to look for partners and key figures, young people in the neighbourhood. De Veerman supplies the ‘knowhow on arts education’ in working with young people and adults. The contact with the local residents is initiated in cooperation with a series of organisations within the neighbourhood, such as ‘Recht-op’ (an association giving poor people a voice), Cultural Centre De Kern and neighbourhood meeting centre NOVA, KIDS (youth work for disadvantaged children and young people), the residents’ association Braemblokken, community work Antwerp, several schools, SPIA and ‘de Toverbol’, etc. They will be the steering committee for the project ‘Bij-buurten op Het Kiel’.

*Sub-project 2: school involvement*

In the second year, the focus was on extending the community work. Two neighbourhood schools were approached. The project ‘A BRIDGE (= a work of art) between SPIA and MID’ brought the young people of the SPIA (City Poly-technic Institute Antwerp) into contact with the museum. The search for ‘What do the Middelheimmuseum and the SPIA have in common?’ led to working visits being paid, and the awareness that art and technology are not mutually exclusive. Youngsters (students of the departments construction, bodywork, electrical engineering, central heating and sanitary installations), together with an artist and a technical teacher, used discarded materials to make pieces of work. The installations were a huge success and remained on show in the Middelheimmuseum for five months. This project brought about a change in thinking about art and technology: with technology, you can do more than the purely functional. Young people arrived at a less abstract dimension of art. The project served as a bridge between museum and neighbourhood.

*Sub-project 3: Beeld in de stad (BIDS, sculptures in the city)*

The ‘Het Kiel walks’ and the idea that sculptures in the neighbourhood would be closer to the people than sculptures in the museum, lead to the plan for a work of art in the neighbourhood itself. The steering group organised a meeting with the BIDS organisation. BIDS wanted to realise a work of art in the neighbourhood in 2007-2008, with the active involvement of the locals. After the project was approved, it was time for the next step: the search for an artist who could make a work of art with the residents, among the Braemblokken.
2.4 NEST in Het Kiel

The tree as a metaphor for the growth process of the art project NEST (Andreas Hetfeld)
Looking for fertile soil (Het Kiel)
Choosing a suitable tree and the right seed (NESTidea and NESTform) for the carefully chosen spot/soil
Planting the seed at the right time (NESTidea)
Taking care of the seed (NESTidea) with water and other nourishing substances
Taking good care of the budding plant, only now becoming visible (NESTform) and protect it from dehydration, storms, hail, vandalism etc.
Regular examination and maintenance of the growing tree (NEST)
And its environment (community)

Two artists, Andreas Hetfeld and Suus Baltussen, do a visual language project with the residents. ‘NEST’ is a metaphor they are comfortable with. The artists have already built two nests, on private land and in a museum. It is the first time a NEST will be built in an urban environment.

From 15 March until 27 April 2008, next to a Braemblock, on a field that is usually off-limits, the artists and residents build a giant nest: with ‘NEST 3’, they are creating a living object from willow branches, anchored to the ground in a diameter of 9 metres, 4.5 metres high. The branches are growing and have to be cared for. The inside is covered with mosses and soft, natural materials.

In December 2006, several of ‘Bijbuurten”s project partners, together with members of the residents’ association of the Braemblokken, visit the studio of artist Andreas Hetfeld. The artist is interested in building a nest in Het Kiel, together with his partner Suus Baltussen and the local residents. He understands the needs and wishes of the project, the actors involved and the residents. It quickly becomes clear that partners will need to be found who want to share in the responsibility in order to win the necessary public support for NEST 3. The plan is that the neighbourhood will help create the work of art, will ‘adopt’ it. It is of the essence that a balance is struck between the wishes and expectations of the museum, the neighbourhood and all the organisations involved. The NEST will be a place for residents to meet. The diversity in Het Kiel allows very different cultures to meet spontaneously, to ‘be connected’, and this will be an important starting point for the socio-cultural activities with the neighbourhood. After the working group Beeld in de Stad (BIDS) has given its approval, the preparations can start.

As initiator and coordinator, the Middelheimmuseum will answer for the artistic realisation of the work of art, in close cooperation with De Veerman. De Veerman will act as a liaison between the organisations, schools and the museum. The working group Beeld in de Stad (BIDS) will give
basic structure for the NEST. Representatives of schools, organisations, clubs and privileged residents (like the residents’ association) are given a special introduction by the artists. In February 09, there is a last information meeting for all local residents.

A project worker from Samenlevingsopbouw (community work) will kick-start the residents’ process, supervise it and help out with any problems. All residents are asked to help build the NEST. Not just during the building phase. Before that starts, groups are invited to do some work on the theme of ‘nests’, either by looking for abandoned nests in the outdoors or by creating nests of their own.

Through NOVA, 300 nest-boxes are distributed, at 1 Euro a piece. Clubs, schools and residents can collect the nest-boxes and decorate them. Workshops are organised to decorate the boxes creatively. Examples are set up at the different organisations. The ‘nesting’ can start.

The building takes place from 15 March to 17 April 08. For six weeks, the artists, local residents, clubs, schools, etc, work on a giant NEST. During the first two weeks, the basic structure of NEST is built. Several students from the SPIA again lend a hand, to get the NEST anchored to the ground. From the third to the sixth week, schools, organisations, clubs, families and individuals help build the NEST, amid great public interest. All kinds of activities spring up in and around the NEST, producing a wonderful dynamic.

2.5 A selection of fringe activities from the building phase

The NEST-dynamic gives rise to numerous secondary activities. A birthday party in the NEST, art schools sketching the NEST, local residents decorating their streets, schools decorating their facades - with ‘nests’ as the theme -, spring-cleaning, putting together a clubs guide.

In the Braempaviljoen (Middelheimmuseum), Andreas Hetfeld exhibits works of art which clarify the context from which he works with nature, all throughout the building phase. In the pavilion, there is a 24/7 live video link which shows what is happening in Het Kiel, around the NEST. This underlines the link between the Museum and Het Kiel. 1488 people visit the exhibition.

A motley collection of ‘odd nests’, put together by a heterogeneous group of creative residents and collectors, is on show in the central space of NOVA. All participants in activities in NOVA get a tour. School groups start their building session with a visit to the exhibition. Over 1000 visitors pass through.

All activities taking place in NOVA during that period have something to do with ‘Nests’. They appeal to different target groups, so the involvement in the project as a whole is boosted. During the peripheral activities, residents are informed and made enthusiastic about the project and the
approval to and financial support for the realisation of the NEST. The social housing cooperation, the owner of the plot on which the NEST will be built, and the tenants’ association will also be involved, since both have to give people permission to enter the fields between the Braemblokken. Neighbourhood Centre NOVA will take it upon itself to draw clubs, organisations and residents to the NEST and organise socio-cultural activities. Community work Kiel will make sure the residents are involved and keep an eye on the construction. They will supervise the process, in consultation with the residents.

The partners agreed on the following aims:
- realising a temporary work of art, NEST, together with the local residents
- fostering social cohesion in the neighbourhood. The NEST can become a meeting place for local residents
- encouraging cooperation between the local socio-cultural clubs
- promoting an active art and culture participation among the local residents
- revitalising the neighbourhood

‘Everybody’, or to be more specific: ‘the residents of Het Kiel’ are the primary target group. The residents of the Braemblokken will receive special attention. It is there that the NEST will be built. Kids and young people are mainly approached via the local schools and clubs, to ask them to help build the NEST. Young people will also be targeted through the Academie (part-time art education) and youth centre VIZIT.

A crucial step in the preparations for the NEST is the cooperation with the Huisvestingsmaatschappij (housing association) and the residents’ association. The NEST will be built on ‘their’ turf, and access to the ‘no walking on the grass’-grass is a sensitive issue. Walking on the grass is a symbol for causing trouble, for dirty doings. After intense debates with the residents’ association and passionate pleas from both the people involved and art-conscious residents, the project gets their approval too. The social impact of the project, and the delicateness of it, was clear from the start. The story of the grass is a key story in the project.

In September, artists Andreas and Suus walk around the neighbourhood. They meet and talk to the residents of Het Kiel. In the evening, they give a workshop for any teachers or residents that are interested. These people will become the ‘life and soul’ of the project. They will use their networks to ask people to participate. In November, a second meeting takes place. The museum guides are informed, from that moment on they are involved in the project too. They promise to give tours on the theme of ‘nests and architecture’. The artists visit SPIA in order to meet the pupils and teachers. They will help the artist to build the
A selection from what is on offer: a nest-music programme in the cultural cafe, a nest-box building workshop, films, creative and cookery workshops for kids, the school show ‘Mees, beer, eend en koe’ (tit, bear, duck and cow), the NOVA-brunch and neighbourhood meal, a nest quiz, a nest info stand at the reception, approaching local residents of the Braem-blokken, the nest writing project of ‘Recht-Op’, a soup action - inviting residents of the Braemblokken to come have some soup at the NEST-, a nest warmth workshop, a workshop called ‘what flies and breeds in Het Kiel’ (Natuurpunt), a workshop in and tours of in the Middelheimmuseum, the ARCHI-FUN workshop: a one-day building workshop for kids aged 8 to 12.

Together with the Flemish Architecture Institute, the Veerman designs a Nest-library: this educational suitcase is aimed at pupils in the second and third level of secondary education, containing books and assignments on the subject of architecture, living and society.

Rasa, an art education organisation for kids, makes an inspirational booklet on the theme ‘NESTs in Het Kiel’. The booklet is meant to inspire kids to think about this theme and work with it. It inspires coaches and kids to get busy. Items include: philosophising about the diversity in nests, connections to architecture, a show by the artists, tree houses and other human habitations all over the world, and Braem’s ‘Potenblokken’. Works of art from the Middelheimmuseum which have some connection with ‘nests’ (architecture/construction) are also presented.

In the course of the project, it becomes clear that a number of key figures play an important part in getting residents involved. Some are familiar with the meeting centre NOVA, others are not. Several key figures assume (adapted) tasks. Samenlevingsopbouw Kiel and NOVA support them. For example: Mohammed is an older Moroccan gentleman and an active builder. He trains the local football team. The kids trust him and he encourages them to join in the building and stops them from damaging the NEST. He is asked to be one of the ambassadors. Active residents, members of the residents’ association, members of Recht-Op and the NOVA-
platform play an important part in building social support too. The youngsters of the SPIA do not only join in the building during school hours, they also help out in the evenings, after school.

The importance of such social support and a large, communal involvement for the success of the project are becoming increasingly clearer. Not only the involvement of residents, associations and schools, but also coordinating the various interests of the different key figures keeps on requiring extra attention. Because it is precisely this joint involvement that will make the project a success. The term ‘community building’ crops up. Gradually, the NEST instils a certain strength, and as such, it becomes an opportunity to unite the different cultures in a ‘natural’ way. The NEST gives the residents a sense of pride. They helped build this NEST, it belongs to them, to the neighbourhood.

Associations do help with the construction, but only a few associations organise their own activities on the theme of nests. The time for raising awareness and providing information proved too short. But the project does give them faith and energy, since they know that something ‘is happening’ in Het Kiel.

The neighbourhood is involved and yet not. Formal activities (organised by the partners) have varying degrees of success. Some activities attract a lot of participants, others do not. Informal moments, however, certainly do. Passers-by, residents dropping in for a chat, are very enthusiastic and sometimes spontaneously join in the building. There are no negative responses.

During the building phase, the ‘godparents’ (neighbourhood monitors) are asked to ‘look after’ the NEST and keep an eye on things. After an ad in the local paper, about 15 people show up for an information meeting. They agree on certain rules. The ‘godparents’ will help maintain the NEST: trimming, watering, cleaning up. And they will make sure that the rules they have set up are being observed. This group mainly consists of involved residents, who will help watch over the NEST. Younger and older residents, natives and immigrants, the poor and the well-off; a very diverse group with regards to age, gender and background. They do their jobs with great care and dedication.

The link between the museum and the neighbourhood takes shape through several specific initiatives. There are the special tours on the theme of ‘nests and architecture’, worked out by the museum guides. There are also special tours for the residents of Het Kiel. For the opening of Andreas Hetfeld’s exhibition, buses shuttle between the museum and Het Kiel. Schools are involved through the art education programme about ‘nests’, living, architecture and odd nests. These initiatives are intentionally spread over different locations, from a joint strategy, directed by the steering committee.
Apart from an artistic event, ‘Nests on Het Kiel’ is mainly a social happening. The focus is on meeting people and cooperation. Festive activities are organised in which these two factors go hand in hand. Both the start and the completion of the building phase are moments of celebration. The neighbourhood and the people involved celebrate together: they have a NEST. And a party because they have built it together.

The building phase ends on 27 April 08. The NEST is there, the project continues, it is not finished yet. On the contrary, for some of the people involved, this is just the beginning. For how long will the NEST be there? No one knows. As long as possible, the entire neighbourhood is agreed on that much. The ‘godparents’ will (have to) ensure it, along with all the key figures. It is up to them to keep the dynamic which has sprung up around the NEST alive.

Several working groups are started. A first working group consists of the ‘godparents’. They will maintain the NEST. Another working group is responsible for the programming in and around the NEST. This working group consists mainly of professionals. Apart from that, the initiators and partners involved regularly discuss the future of the project. In May 2008, the local residents are informed about the future of the NEST.

In winter, things quiet down momentarily, but spring brings new life. Nursery classes regularly visit the NEST. In April 2009, its anniversary is celebrated. All the local residents are invited to bake cakes and bring them to the NEST. A huge cake buffet gives the project a new, festive impetus.

The NEST seems destined to have a long life. It will only be demolished once it gives rise to too many complaints, or once it is no longer safe. The organisation BIDS regularly checks the NEST. The working groups, too, will do their best to prevent any problems. A new programme of events is ready to go. Clubs, organisations and local residents can hire the NEST with a key contract. Different actors will continue to encourage the residents to take the initiative and hire the NEST.

But will the link between the museum and the neighbourhood also be preserved? Only time will tell. This difficult exercise demands a lot of ‘pulling and dragging’, on both sides. Both parties will have to want it, to organise activities together, to go on meeting, to go on together. This again means that the mutual expectations are clear. And remain clear. It is, and will be, a permanent work in progress, even when the Bij-buurtenproject is finished. And there’s the rub. How do policymakers respond to such initiatives? Is there room, in the running of the museum, for a neighbourhood and target group-oriented approach? Is it possible, and is it necessary, to structurally include not only the artistic aspect, but also the social aspect in the running of a museum?
Let’s start with an obvious question: have the stated targets been achieved?

The steering committee met to discuss this, and the project partners were questioned. We will include their findings and also the interviews we conducted with these people and the conversations Ghislain Verstraeten (2009) had with the residents involved.

**Target 1: ‘Realising a temporary work of art, NEST’**
The NEST has been built; the artists have built it, together with the local residents, organisations and clubs.

**Target 2: ‘Fostering social cohesion in the neighbourhood’**
Is the social cohesion of a neighbourhood measurable? Does measuring have to be done in figures, or are there other grounds on which to determine its success? It is clear that NEST symbolised a place where local residents, in all their diversity, could meet (Van Der Velpen, 2008). After the project finished, employees received mostly positive feedback from the residents of the Braemblokken, the primary target group. Someone said the field had undergone a transformation. A lot of residents are ‘proud’ of the NEST and feel there is a positive atmosphere there. The social and open attitude of the artists and the various activities have ensured that the NEST has the support of many residents. Working together on one theme unites people. Initially, this primary target group did not ask for a work of art on their ‘grass’.

**The godparents**
Annie is the president of the residents’ association, which played a key part in the ‘grass story’. She says only a few residents were actively involved. Interest was limited; if anything, people were afraid of problems. The employees of Community Work Kiel discovered this too. Despite all their efforts to get people involved, only a few residents showed up. During the residents’ meetings, too, the NEST was rarely discussed. Opportunities to meet failed to materialise.

Soon, the critics fell silent: the NEST did not lead to the expected nuisances. The NEST was accepted. People often complained that ‘there is nothing to do in the neighbourhood’. The NEST has changed all that. People did talk about the opening and closing celebrations. Lots of residents attended, the crowd was a good reflection of the neighbourhood. Annie clearly played a key part in getting the residents involved. She is the spokeswoman for the residents’ association. She says what others are afraid to say, and negotiates between the organisations involved. She was, and is, an important link in the chain.
Mohammed, godfather of the project, local football trainer of 42, was one of the first ‘builders’. The entire neighbourhood knows him, not just the Moroccan community. He says that people were shocked that he participated, they had not expected him to. He got young and old involved, and through his network also his Moroccan friends. He made an effort to involve people from different cultures. According to him, especially the schools did good work in getting young people involved.

Why was there no vandalism? Mohammed is one of the people who played an important part in that respect. He knows some of the young people that sometimes cause a nuisance and is a mediator at the Alfons De Cockplein, which is infamous for all the nuisances caused there. He approached these youngsters and asked them to make a positive contribution to the NEST. “Try to do right, don’t cause a nuisance, don’t touch it. The NEST belongs to us, we’re helping to build it, so don’t climb on top of it, don’t play football there.” “At first, there was some trouble, and not just caused by the Moroccan kids either. But that didn’t last long.” At the final party, Mohammed told several youngsters to “clear away their cups and keep quiet”. He helped make sure, just like many other participants, that the party was a real party.
The “talking about”, the curiosity factor and the fact that the entire project is spread around the neighbourhood, gets people enthusiastic. It did the neighbourhood good; it inspired a certain zeal, and boosted people’s attachment to the neighbourhood.

Target 3: encouraging cooperation between the local socio-cultural clubs
Early on, the artists and actors involved announced they wanted the NEST to be a meeting place. This positive attitude helped realise this goal. People met during the building. Sometimes, several clubs were helping out at the same time, together with individual residents. At the fringe activities too, people and groups met. And the NEST will remain a meeting place, as ‘hired space’, where people can watch cultural performances. Outsiders or passers-by can continue to visit the NEST.

Target 4: promoting an active art and culture participation among the local residents
The link with the museum is clear to the residents, because at the start of every new exhibition, buses are chartered. About 50 people go on them: many underprivileged residents and also people of immigrant origins, and the number is growing steadily. The first group is targeted by the efforts of the organisation Recht-Op, the second by Mohammed.
Is NEST really art? Opinions are divided on this. But it is clear that the NEST, as a concept, appeals to people.

**Target 5: revitalising the neighbourhood**

“A number of people now consider the work of art as part of their front yard. They keep a close eye on the surroundings and regularly check their windows to see whether everything is okay. On Thursday, we will see how we can exercise more social control. It’s not just the recent incident. Sometimes there are also problems with littering and dog owners who ignore the rules.” (Bart Vandormael, community worker, 17/05/2009)

In the short term, it is difficult to say. Certainly the political interest in NEST was relatively extensive, and the policy makers who usually see the neighbourhood as a problem area, were now able to see it as a neighbourhood full of opportunities. The residents themselves are now assuming more responsibility. Significantly more individuals and groups took part in the annual spring cleaning!

And the individual resident of Het Kiel? They did not join in the building very often, which is perhaps a pity. But the question is whether this was really necessary. Was that really a goal of the project? The neighbourhood definitely got involved. Very much so. All parties involved, with all their different expectations and perspectives, said it was ‘a great success’. The area of tension of which the NEST is an expression, is that within a project a lot is planned and determined in advance. But the NEST project also leaves people a lot of room to do their own thing.
Young people that did not belong to any organisation were not reached. Thanks to the schools, smaller youth networks did help build the NEST in their spare time. There was little or no vandalism, because of the godparents and the efforts of the neighbours, which strengthened social control. A week before the anniversary, on 15 April 2009, two youngsters tried to set fire to the NEST. Neighbours are surprised it did not happen sooner: “When this project was proposed, we all thought ‘it won’t be long before the vandalizing starts’. But involving the schools was a good move. Since they helped build it, the young people feel a certain responsibility. It’s too bad that this happened now, in the run-up to the celebrations. But the fact that the neighbourhood is so involved in the NEST, helped ensure that the damage was limited. Someone saw the whole thing happen from their window in one of the blocks and immediately called the fire brigade.” (Frans Broers, resident, 15/4/2009).

It proved very difficult to reach the large group of Moroccan residents. First contacts were made through the local imam. When he fell ill, there was no more contact. Only in a later phase, through their kids’ involvement at school and ‘ambassador’ Mohammed, did they join in the inauguration celebrations.

On the one hand, the partners achieved their goals. The cooperation between the different partners, no matter how different their targets and expectations, was felt to be ‘good’ and ‘unique’. Many participants were reached and there are new social actors – key figures – in the neighbourhood now. There was a lot of media attention. The atmosphere was positive and there was a good energy.

So by and large, the project was a success. Organisations, clubs and organized groups all got involved. About a thousand people helped build the NEST, usually as part of a larger group. The fringe activities also drew in a lot of people, though it is difficult to put an exact figure on that. 1200 people showed up for the closing festivities.

On the other hand, the following questions remain:
- is this a sustainable project?
- has the social fabric of the community of Het Kiel changed fundamentally?
- have young people and residents really become more involved in the social aspects of and cultural opportunities in their neighbourhood?

Let’s go beyond the ‘first level evaluation’ and look at the underlying characteristics of the NEST. In order to do this, we have no choice but to first question the images we have of people and society. It is this image which forces us into the illusion of short-term thinking and measurability.
3. The disrupted system: from alienation to
humanity is not the will of the bad persons. It is the passivity of the good ones.”  Martin Luther King

3.1 Alienation

Eggs come in boxes (of six). Does every chicken need a rooster and a NEST to lay an egg? You buy steak and milk in the supermarket. The cow no longer has anything to do with it. Alienation, both in the Hegelian and the Marxist sense of the word15 is part and parcel of this world.

Alienation caused by fragmentation is a handy tool for the industrial and financial powers. If you do not know the people who are defaulting on their mortgage, there is no real connection, no empathy, and only a ‘ruthless’ response for purely financial reasons’.
We do not see or understand the systems in which we live because we strip the constituent parts of their connections. Because of that, the systems control us; we do not experience them at a conscious level, nor direct them. Whether we want to or not, we are a part of those systems. Together with our ‘fellow sufferers’ we create systems,
often without being aware of it, and then submit to their determining force. We submit to society as a collection of meanings, solidarity, competence and the hidden ‘systemic’ reproduction mechanisms (Habermas 1987). However, we can influence these ‘determining’ systems, the future, and can co-create the world if we start seeing and feeling the connections. This means we have to stop blaming others for our ‘living conditions and lack of freedom’, in order to gain ‘personal mastery’ and reinforce connections by learning to apply systems thinking. The question is whether we will be able to meet the huge ecological challenges we are faced with without questioning ourselves and the way in which we organise ourselves.

We can only become a ‘learning community’ if we transcend our compulsive tendencies, open up our ego’s and question our organisational systems based on the cooperation and experience of the diversity of individuals, mental models and cultures, in order to arrive at a shared identity, mission and perspective.

### 3.2 Dealing with (creative) tensions and power

Donzelot (1994) points out that social life is increasingly becoming organised as a permanent negotiation aimed at a future which really can not be specified anymore, but can only be summed up as ‘change’. A change which is seen both as an essential means and the ultimate goal at the same time, from which any question as to the ‘why’ threatens to disappear.
Social structures are usually presented as a given. Success in life depends on a good education and especially a good job. ‘Entrepreneurship’ is the new buzz word. Employability takes precedence over emancipation and happiness. The new European qualification framework speaks of ‘improving employability on the labour market’. You take courses and gain extra competences to be ‘more employable on the labour market’. Even though the current financial crisis is making this tacit, conservative view somewhat controversial, there are few opportunities to think outside of the framework of the current social order. Young people were (are) told that there is money in shares and poker. Older people that they have to be employable, because soon there will be a ‘labour shortage’. Meanwhile, in Belgium 19%, and in Brussels 34.5% of young people under 24 are unemployed. The socio-economic emphasis is on competition, efficiency and effectiveness. The majority of semi-skilled, unemployed young people are being ignored. Media-‘temptations’ encourage navel-gazing and plastic surgery as a matter of course for anyone making easy money. Everybody else then becomes an ‘other’, which only increases social alienation and frustration. This affects the participation debate. If we restrict democratisation to a media (elections) show with arm-wrestling teletubbies, and if we narrow community life and active citizenship down to ‘employability’ on the labour market, we are also reducing living organisms to their usefulness value. Trees to their timber yield, pigs and chickens to their meat production. The extra ‘emergent’ value of a community is ignored. The current social order is seen as an ‘economic environment’ that may present us with opportunities, but which is not or barely susceptible to change.

People, young people especially, behave according to other people’s perceptions of them. People, young people especially, get frustrated if they have no prospects. The feeling of not having any influence, leads to powerlessness. People keep quiet about their dreams. Conversation remains superficial. We talk, but we do not connect. Social isolation both behind and in front of closed doors. In the silence and the bland conversations. Young people get frustrated too. They
are the future, but are not challenged to think about the future or ways in which they can influence it. Young people want to connect. They are searching for their identity. Because adults do not speak, or at least - from a young person’s point of view – do not say anything interesting or do nothing but preach, they can only talk to their peers, with whom they will be spending most of their future as well. But even there, there is little real conversation.

3.3 Focusing on who does not want to join in, or the hypochondria of the social body

In our organistic tradition, we focus excessively on the social body, according to Schinkel (2007). The goal of us living together has been blurred. The French postmodernist Lyotard talks about ‘the end of the big stories’. There are no inspiring stories anymore, no important metaphors to provide our co-existence with direction, inspiration or plausibility.

The lack of a shared vision for the future leads to social hypochondria, with an extreme focus on the possible diseases of the social body. The fear that the social body is dying, that civilisation is ending, is channelled into a preoccupation with the disease, a focus on that which is ‘different’ in the social body, that which does not conform to the identity or the self-image that society would like! In that case, emphasizing the need for integration, the focus on lack of opportunity and ‘exclusion’ as social diseases that need to be dealt with urgently, is a socio-hypochondriacal reflex of that body. The paradox is that the division into a ‘healthy – normal’ part of our social body and a ‘sick – abnormal – unintegrated’ part is in itself sickening. This excessive concern for the social body ‘society’ leads to the exclusion of those parts that do not belong to the body, those parts of the body with a different culture: Muslims, young people, or even worse: Muslim young people. The symptoms - the headscarf of the Muslim woman, loitering kids - are manifestations of the disease of our social body. They are seen as being symptomatic of the disease. If we look at it like that, we would only be treating the symptoms with a target group policy. We, the healthy part, will deal with them, the sick part, and change them until we are once more part of a healthy social body. Social workers too tend to mainly focus on the problems, target groups as ‘those who are not joining in or those who are ill.’

In that spirit, we have some critical remarks about the project as well, and about the money given to the project. The money goes to a neighbourhood which requires attention or which is ill, as Schinkel calls it. In other words, NEST is a ‘tolerated project’.
Though the project has brought fundamental change to the
neighbourhood, the larger system continues to cause pow-
erlessness and isolation. Dissatisfaction, fear and frustration
cannot be solved simply by bringing some calm and a sense
of connection and shared perspective to a neighbourhood.
Can we describe the contours of a larger fabric, a ‘commu-
nity nest’, and would this be a step forward for our think-
ing about the sense and nonsense of projects such as NEST?
Let us try to untangle the willow branches without losing
the NEST. Let us look at the relationship of the parts with-
out losing sight of the whole.
4. Weaving willow branches or building sus-
4.1 Sustainable community life

Andreas Hetfeld: “Creating a living work of art of high artistic quality – with the support of the community!” “Their work of art (of the residents)”.

“NEST is a socio-artistic project which wants to actively interact with the local neighbourhood and affect the way people live together and build networks. (...) Andreas and Suus were the perfect choice, at home in the socio-artistic field!”

Calling projects a ‘success’ and proclaiming them to be good practice is a delicate thing. Of course we cannot know what the long-term effects of a project will be on a neighbourhood or community. Furthermore, a project such as NEST is only one of the moments on a timeline on which and one of many factors in the complex environment in which a community chooses to live together.

In our quest for legitimacy, we tend to try and measure complex systems by simple means. Criteria such as ‘how many people participated?’ do not tell us anything about the enjoyment, the intent, the motivations, the relation-
ships formed or the subjective experience of the participants in the neighbourhood.
Cultural traditions and education have conditioned us to focus on the parts, rather than the whole. Just try investigating a (natural) sponge for half an hour, while wearing a blindfold. Fascinating, is it not? Disconcerting, how after 5 seconds already you have to suppress a desire to put it away while simply saying: ‘a sponge’.
We also have a tendency to see a ‘continuously changing’ object, which is being reinvented time and again by countless ‘participants’ – like a community – as a fixed (static) concept. In other words, we are unable to see the building of a community as a never-ending, dynamic process.

4.2 Of alarm clocks, hands and time

“As a child, I liked to take things apart. I would open up the alarm clock and take out the cogs one by one. I wanted to know how things worked. I was never able to put the alarm clock back together again, so I never learnt to understand the mechanics of time. Later, I caught my daughter taking the tape out of the VCR to look for the pictures of mommy, daddy and herself. ”

Apparently, dividing things like tasks or subjects up into smaller parts, analysing a thing or an event by breaking it up into smaller parts, is the way in which we try to understand the world from a very early age.
Demystifying the world at large is one of the implicit aims of parenting and education. We learn by dividing, by breaking up, but we forget to put things together again. In the aftermath of our Newtonian, mechanical view of others and the world, we became fixated on the things, on the parts. Psychologists, sociologists, physicists – they all have their disciplines, which they defend. What we loose in looking at things in this way (and learning to look at things in this way) is now becoming clear. It is an illusion to think that the world is built up out of separate forces. We are inextricably tied to one another, or ‘condemned’ to one another, as Sartre put it. We have always been dependent on one another, but because of globalisation, the world has now become a global village and the interdependencies are greater than ever.

4.3 The growing divide between interdependency and seeing and understanding the whole

Our world is getting ever smaller; distances and also dependencies are become ever greater. The divide between mutual dependence and being able to see and understand the whole, is growing.
Systems thinking deals with relationships with others and with ourselves, and is therefore similar to our ‘natural’ state of being. We are products of nature, and in nature everything is linked to everything else, in an organic interplay of mutual dependency.

4.4 The community as an open living system

A system is “anything which owes its completeness and shape to the continuous interaction between its constituent parts. Companies, nations, families, biological niches, bodies, television sets, characters, atoms: they are all systems. Systems are characterized by the fact that their elements share a common purpose and act as parts of a whole, because they are collectively pursuing a goal.” From The Dance of Change - P Senge et al – p. 125

One of the founders of the ‘open’ systems theory was the Viennese biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy. To Von Bertalanffy (1968), human organisations are not machines, but life forms, like any living organism or cell. All input - like oxygen, liquids, food, warmth, sensations and all perceptions – into the organisation will be absorbed and then transformed, just as in an organic form, and it will transform the organism. The organism will employ (subconscious) strategies to achieve growth. Helping to change the system means influencing the input, the relationship of the organism with its environment and the strategies with which it is working towards completeness. In that case, planning, executing and evaluating change in a community like a living organism, means looking at the entire social system;19 mapping the input, strategies, obstacles and especially the connections.

At the MIT,20 Jay Forrester developed ‘system dynamics’ based on the idea that many ecological21 and social problems are caused by measures intended to reduce those problems. He calls the problems ‘systems’, which beguile policy makers into taking measures aimed at the symptoms and not at the underlying causes. Those measures may have a positive effect in the short term, but they will be detrimental in the long term, meaning they will require new, additional ‘symptomatic’ measures.

System dynamics is a method to study the world around us and to understand how complex systems change over time. After all, the internal feedback loops in the structure of a system will affect the (behaviour of the) entire system. To Forrester, parenting, education and training are fundamental areas of application for system dynamics. A ‘student-oriented’ approach forces the learner to insight and an active involvement with regards to sustainability.
The dynamics of recognizing systems and awareness of ‘patterns’ neutralize the alienation of fragmentary, linear thinking and give us the tools to anticipate the depth structure of our co-existence.

The third generation of system thinkers has built on the complex system theories and added the adaptive and ‘multi-agent’ perspective. Developments in computer science made it possible for simulations with different actors to be combined. Increased computer power makes it possible to simulate ‘worlds’ in which hundreds or even thousands of distinct individuals interact. So researchers can create artificial communities and virtual environments with ‘agents’ with different characteristics and test different kinds of communication. In this way, we can study a complex system at the macro-level. In programs such as ‘Second Life’, virtual worlds are created as well. As in any community, every actor influences what happens in that virtual world. As in any community, there are rules and patterns. The ‘multi-agent’ system does justice to the interdependence of the various individuals and groups.

The sophistication of human symbolic interaction and language, and the phenomena of synergy and emergence remain a challenge. For the time being, this complexity cannot yet be captured in computer models.

4.5 Synergy and emergence: fascinating and elusive

Synergy is a well-known concept. If the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, we call that synergy. The effects of cooperation are greater than the cooperating parties could achieve on their own. More can be done with the same resources: the same output with fewer resources (saving synergy) or a stronger output with the same resources (additive synergy).

In the realisation of joint projects, synergy occurs when expertise and specialisation in complementary areas of competence are shared and exchanged. It is a self-reinforcing mechanism. On the one hand, a good and reliable cooperation and relationship is necessary for synergy to occur; on the other hand, the feeling of synergy fosters a good cooperation.

In NEST, different project partners enter into a partnership, each contributing their own competency. From such a collaboration, a positive and inspiring synergy can grow. When we talk about complex, organised – living – systems, emergence also plays a part.

Emergence occurs when the behaviour of the system does not depend on the actions of the different actors, but is
caused by the interplay of the actions and the interaction of the different actors. Often systems develop new qualities which cannot simply be assigned to the actions of one or more actors. Life, in a biological sense, can be seen as an emergent quality. The individual biomolecules in a cell are not alive, but the complex interactions between biomolecules enable the cell to go on living. The whole of ‘life’ is more than the sum of its biological molecules. A house is more than a collection of bricks, man is more than a collection of atoms, a community is more than a collection of individuals. In a community, emergence grows from the interplay of the actions and interactions of the multiple ‘agents’ in the system. We are talking about a higher order of qualities within a system (see iceberg). Emergence means that small changes in a system can lead to huge evolutions in a later stage of that system. The V-formation of ducks, the build-up of traffic, the revolt of a group of young people, our continually changing language - all are examples of emergent processes.

For the mutual relationship and dependencies of the different system actors (like the different project partners, a minister fighting for participation, the local social life, the ‘accidental’ volunteers like the godparents of the project, etc.), the attention for symptoms of synergy and emergence are an important stimulus.

4.6 Systems thinking: mapping out the dependencies

With systems thinking, we describe the mutual relationships between the parts and outline the mutual ‘systemic’ dependencies and underlying dynamics. By making the understanding of the relationships and dynamics of the system more explicit, the larger fabric becomes clearer, more visible, and more communicable. Possible actions are examined for their ‘systemic’ value and sustainability.

Systems thinking helps us recognize and chart patterns, and recognize what the real problem is that needs to be dealt with. This is the only way to bring about sustainable systemic change.

Systems thinking invokes constructivism. We create meaning and construct our (view of the) world through our interactions. Constructivism does not focus on facts or knowledge, but on the development of knowing. A meaningful and coherent knowing which leads to further insight and which helps you to (re)construct your reality and your world time and again.

For children, this is natural and self-evident, but not so for grown-ups. Perhaps because we have adopted a very linear way of thinking at school. Perhaps because our mental models are not as adaptable as those of our children. Perhaps because we have started to take the ‘patterns’
with which and in which we live, more and more for granted. Perhaps because the language we use encourages linear thinking. When we communicate, the sentences and words we use evoke the old linear (mechanical) patterns. Words are put one after the other and form a ‘sentence’. So we build sentences. But in our thoughts, different streams run parallel to each other. We cannot pronounce all those different sentences and connections at the same time. If we try, we fumble our words and cannot make ourselves understood. So we will have to learn to listen ‘better’ to the connections behind the words and develop a new language.

Learning is the ability to adapt behaviour to changed circumstances and perspectives, so to recognize and acknowledge (one’s own) patterns and change them. To that end, feedback is one of the most important elements. Each action has a consequence, each cause has an effect, but each effect also influences the cause. In systems thinking, learning is affected by feedback loops or circularity. The feedback from effect to cause. A second important component is time delay. A significant time-delay between action and consequence seems to disconnect our actions from their long-term consequences.

So systems thinking is a method for thinking logically about change. It provides us with a language to systemically chart the whole and describe it. In many cases, archetypical patterns and possible consequences become clear and we can make sure we are not just fighting the symptoms. The systems language helps us escape our linear language pattern and thinking, and our tendency to let ourselves be directed by events that occur.

Systems thinking provides us with new tools and an opportunity to start thinking in new ways, by seeing the whole and the relations between the parts. We can learn to see patterns of change in stead of static situations at a given point in time. We seem to be faced constantly with systems going awry, threatening to choke us on our own filth. Sustainability is a long way off. The systems we live in and with, lead to nuclear waste, greenhouse gases, growing inequality, trade in drugs and weapons...

The world has never been this complex before. Never before has humanity had so much information and so many means for global communication at its disposal. To some, our world seems like an indestructible spaceship in the cosmos.

We all know the story of the Titanic. It is high time to take a closer look at the icebergs and look beyond the visible layer of symptoms to the underlying patterns and ‘invisible’ structures.
4.7 Seeing the entire iceberg

We still tend to concentrate too much on the events. A mentally unstable young man terrorizes a day-care centre. So we equip every day-care centre with extra security systems. Sometimes we also try to get some insight into trends or patterns. Is juvenile delinquency on the increase? Events and patterns are caused by underlying structures. A good systemic functioning requires insight into the underlying structures of an event or a problem.

Going along in the whirlwind of events will usually cause us to re-act based on known habits, routines, procedures, within a familiar frame of reference. Primary responses are ignoring events, flight or fight. In the neighbourhood, these responses may result in a bigger police presence in case of unrest, repressive measures (zero tolerance) if it recurs, etc.

If you take the time to contemplate successive events, you will often notice they occur in trends and patterns. You can then plan a response and anticipate how events will play out. Anticipating means recognizing patterns and trends as they occur and extrapolating from them for the future, because without any action they may repeat themselves. Patterns and trends reveal underlying structures. Some structures are obvious: policy intentions and procedures, relationships between people and groups, existing organisational and knowledge systems... Other underlying structures lie deeper and are less visible. Often, they are (implicit) beliefs and mental models, cultural elements, the relationships between people, unwritten rules and hierarchies.

By re-framing we can work on our mental models. Methods and habits are based on subconscious (obsolete) realities. Re-framing means investigating whether the assumptions on which certain methods have been based, are still valid. In order to do that, we need to look at reality with a different ‘mental model’, or through different ‘glasses’.
If we can recognize the basis or origins of trends and patterns and understand the underlying structures, we can take systemic action. Interventions in the underlying levels of the structure (see figure) have a much more ‘robust’ effect and certainly offer more opportunities for learning than responses at the event level. Re-designing structures and procedures means dealing with the question or cause which is at the root of the problem, and looking at what effect certain systemic interventions may have.

With re-generation, we consider the mental structure at the root of the organisation or the system itself. With a re-framing on that level, the organisational concept itself is questioned. The organisation or community examines the mental models which are the foundation for their social function. This can lead to new concepts, a renewed social role or mission for the organisation. The socio-cultural sector in Flanders faced that challenge after the 2003 decree. In some cases, they met the challenge head-on. Other organisations remained stuck at the level of re-acting.

The deeper the level of the structure you work at, the more powerful the intervention. But the same goes for the delay and response time. If you want to work deep within the structure, you need to create calm. Furthermore, the (immediate) external observability decreases. So a government wanting to force a quick change is presenting a sector with impossible challenges and creating a non-sustainable and unpredictable situation.

With systems thinking, we examine the interrelation and correlation of events, trends and patterns and map out the forces at work in the system. This allows us to reach a deeper understanding of the in-depth structures and to include them in a process of ‘re-thinking’. Systems thinking means supporting learning on the deeper structural levels or re-framing, re-designing and re-generating. This means the focus shifts:

- From part to whole
- From short-term to long-term thinking
- From fighting symptoms to structure
- From individuals to relationships
- From knowing to learning and developing
- From re-action to co-creation

NEST meets the ‘shift of focus’ criterion – from project to systemic intervention with a certain sustainability – in several ways. The NEST is not seen as a work of art in and of itself, but as the product of interaction with each other, with the environment and with time. The NEST has to be looked after if it is to grow. The building phase takes six weeks, the ‘care’ for the NEST by groups of ‘godparents’ means it is not a short-term project. The project does not
end today. The NEST grows, is watered, is protected, is clipped and woven if necessary. In that sense, the focus is not on the problem or on the symptoms, but on the structure. Throughout the construction, the maintenance, the rules drawn up by the residents - the focus is on the relationship.

The NEST develops together with the neighbourhood, the residents, the SPIA-youngsters etc. The emphasis is not on knowing, but on learning and developing. In other words, the NEST is born out of a co-creative process.
5. The learning community: the branches and the
5.1 Introduction: the organics of the learning community

What constitutes a healthy and functioning community? We think of words like vital, active, dynamic, alive! If there is a lot of hustle and bustle in a community, there is a lot of action, interaction. And a lot of interaction means a lot of opportunities for learning, learning from each other, a learning community. A living community is a learning system!

A community is formed by a group of people who adjust to living together on this earth, who look for ways of dealing with the challenges of co-existence together: a ‘learning community’.

Interaction is a necessity and a duty. A neighbourhood, or even a city – and we could go on in this vein – can only live (together) and learn if there is interaction and exchange. The debate about integration or assimilation seems as fruitful to us. It is about the possibility of learning from each other through creative tensions arising from encounters between different identities and groups.
In 1990, Peter Senge’s ground-breaking management book ‘The fifth discipline, The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization’ appeared. He defines the learning organization as follows: “…Organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.” Peter Senge (1990: 3). That is a good description of the ideal community too! Senge outlines a number of fundamental disciplines for the learning organization:

- Systems thinking,
- The mental models at work in an organisation,
- Personal mastery,
- Team learning,
- The shared vision by which the organisation is guided.

We will use the disciplines of the learning organisation to set forth our own view of the ‘living / learning community’.

Senge defines a discipline as: “a doctrine, a collection of theories and techniques which need to be studied, learnt and used (…), a path which needs to be followed in order to attain certain skills and abilities.” (Senge, P., 1992).

It takes a lifetime to master a discipline. If you play a musical instrument or a sport at a high level, you will have to continue to practice. So getting into the ‘new thinking’ or ‘mindswitch’ of the Learning Organization (or community) means continuing to practice, a life-long learning process. The shared vision created within the organisation and the team-learning are group responsibilities. Personal mastery, the mental models at work in an organisation and systems thinking are individual responsibilities. Systems thinking is called the fifth discipline because it is necessary for the other disciplines to work. Senge does not only call these disciplines learning disciplines, but emphasizes that whoever applies them in his field, will acquire a natural leadership in the learning organisation.

We also refer to Ruth Cohn’s basic axiom: ‘You are your own leader!’ as a principle which we also see in the discipline of ‘personal mastery’, only in different words! Though both disciplines can be developed separately, their cohesion is crucial.
5.2 Systems thinking

With systems thinking, we look at the cohesion of a community, at the interrelationships, rather than at the components, target groups or problems. We learn to see patterns of change and evolution, instead of focussing on static moments in time. For example, systems thinking has copied its attention for feedback as a circular process from cybernetics.\(^{25}\) It helps us to enrich our linear ‘action-reaction’ thinking in which we have been so well trained (see mental models) with a creative and liberalising out-of-the-box thinking. Systems thinking allows us to see the subtle way in which everything is connected. In that sense, it is an important tool for sustainable development.

The systematic way of seeing things teaches us that in many cases there is a significant time delay between action and reaction, certainly where more complex systems such as communities are involved. Yet our normal action-reaction way of thinking (and acting) leads to a tendency to focus on an immediate or short-term response. We are prisoners of structures we are barely aware of. However, certain structural patterns seem to repeat themselves. These ‘archetypes’ of systems theory or genetic structures provide us with the key to recognize structures in our own lives or communities.

Both Senge and other systems thinkers point to the necessity of systems thinking being taught. His own book, ‘Schools that Learn’, alerts schools to the possibility of becoming ‘learning organisations’ and using systems thinking in the classroom. In his most recent work, ‘The Necessary Revolution. How Individuals and Organizations are working together to create a sustainable World’, he points out the necessity of applying systems thinking in order to achieve a sustainable world. If we want to treat our planet, our communities, our young people and our elderly differently, we will have to examine our own mental models.

5.3 Mental models

“If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.” Abraham Maslow

In everything we do, we carry with us the memories and experiences of our own experience. Sociologically, we have a tendency to reproduce. Our way of observing and organising our thoughts results in a tendency to stay within these familiar patterns of thought and to continue to view the world from our own, familiar categories. This means I really see the community in which I live through the eyes of my ‘past’. Reactive thinking and learning consists of
repeating and thus self-reinforcing behavioural patterns. If we limit our reality to a Newtonian mechanical thinking, we continue to download and play our old mental models. Communities, organisms, institutions are living systems. If we continue to ‘see’ through the eyes of the Newtonian (mechanical) principles with its metaphors of ‘control’ and ‘predictability’, there will be an ever-growing discrepancy with the world which is being shaped by the forces of globalisation, free movement of goods, people and ideas, and the latest breakthroughs in the natural sciences.

In other words: our mindsets of mental models are keeping our world and the problems we are struggling with as they are. Our mental structures need a division, so we can observe and analyse, but a mechanical view leads to mechanical and often symptomatic solutions.

“Thought creates the world and then says, I didn’t do it.”
David Bohm

Systems thinking begins with a constructivist approach. We see constructivism in philosophy (for example, the story of Plato’s cave), as social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann), in learning and knowledge acquisition (Piaget, Bruner, Dewey, Vygotsky, etc).

We build our world on the foundations of our mental models and patterns of thought. Mental models are constructed (or knowledge is acquired) via a process in which each learner tries to give meaning to their reality and experience. It is a very personal thing and it depends on the (cultural) context. So the giving of meaning is ‘indexed’ by the context of experience. The direct interaction between learners leads to understanding and the sharing of knowledge. This social dimension is important to the individual and makes it possible for the ‘viability’ to be tested against actual experience.

By nature, people - children in particular - are ‘programmed’ to come to grips with their environment and to absorb the meaning (or culture) of their living environment through communication. Or as Bruner (1996) puts it: to discover the meaning of what is going on around them and turn it into a ‘narrative’. Exploration and communication are the determining factors.
“...we live most of our lives in a world constructed according to the rules and devices of narrative.” Bruner, 1996, p.149

In the relationship and dialogue with ‘the other’, the creation of a narrative is a key element.
Mezirow calls it transformational learning if we:

1. Elaborate existing frames of reference;
2. learn new frames of reference;
3. transform points of view;
4. transform habits of mind and patterns of thoughts.

Our patterns of thought consist of a broad set of assumptions, generalisations and orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience and thus imprison us in our known (constructed) reality. Stories, metaphors or ‘works of art’ play a more important part than ‘so-called matters of fact’ (of course, in a constructivist framework this is all relative). The unfamiliar ‘language’ helps us open our minds, transcend our ‘filters’ and prevents us from falling back on our regular patterns of thought. Art, sound, movement, intuition, imagination and dreams help us assign meaning in ‘different’ ways. Using the iceberg terminology, they allow us to re-frame realities. So the creation of the metaphor of the NEST is a way to arrive at new ‘habits of mind’. The neighbourhood, the atmosphere there, is being re-framed. ‘Our neighbourhood is a NEST!’ ‘We are proud of our neighbourhood!’ The challenge of caring for the NEST is a statement. The NEST is something you can work on, it is in your own hands. The creation of nest boxes allows people to communicate in a different language. And young people participate as well. They can show off their work with pride. They can get recognition for their positive contribution, instead of having to get attention with a negative act.

“People were talking about the pride of the neighbourhood, giving something important to the neighbourhood. I hope we’ll do more things like that. They don’t always have to be huge projects, they could simply be projects we could join in or residents’ initiatives … which make them feel it’s not so bad here, make them proud, which helps people feel this is a good neighbourhood to live in!” (a NEST-helper)

The basis for getting to deeper levels of learning is the realisation that the living systems we are a part of are inherently non-static systems. In an organic developmental dynamic, a system will preserve the aspects that are essential to its continued existence and at the same time try to develop further.
When we expand our consciousness and stay in touch with ‘the whole’ at the same time, we also become aware of what could unfold. Living systems, institutions and associations can thus gain access to the larger ‘shared collective fields’, so they can include that which is healthy for the larger whole in their actions and development. Presence comes from a deep listening, keeping an open mind for whatever happens. If we realise, along with Einstein, that past, present and future are there at the same time, presence is a way to attain access to the future fields, where things are (still) taking shape. In this way, living communities get access to the organising ‘morphic’ field in which they can explore what is healthy for the larger whole.

This feeling of transcendence is usually described as ‘people getting into the spirit of things’. People feel ‘called on’ to join in and they usually describe it as such too: ‘I felt I had to join in, that this could be important. I don’t know why, but I simply had to join in!’. This might be a case of emergence. The surplus, which is produced by cooperation – the merging of different people. Emergence takes the form of enthusiasm, passion, dialogue.

What is happening in the NEST?
We turn the mirror inwards and bring our own internal views of the neighbourhood and reality to the surface. We dialogue about our views and those of others using images, words and stories, and let our thinking be influenced by the views of others and the metaphor of the NEST. The structure of the project makes all this possible. It is the artist-agogue who invites it, in the building of the NEST-metaphor with all the participants.

“Andreas is the master builder. If someone else had built it, it would have looked completely different. The builders of the NEST, the participants, have taken action with the design. Because of the artist, the work transcends its structure.”

5.4 Personal mastery: outside as inside

‘The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.’ Carl Rogers

Kegan and Lahey²⁶ presume it is virtually impossible to change an organisation, a system or a community without changing ourselves. This is what Senge means too, when he talks about the connection of systems thinking and the other disciplines, such as personal mastery.

To Senge, working on personal mastery means formulating a coherent view of the personal aspirations and desires you strive towards as an individual. This ‘personal mission’ has to be connected to the responsibility you accept in a com-
In addition, there is a consciousness and a realistic idea of the current state of your current position in life and your abilities. By carefully dealing with the tension between vision and reality, people are better able to make the right choices in order to take up the right position in the community and attain the desired personal results.

Systems thinking assumes we are part of a system, meaning we change along with the outside world. The line between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is arbitrary. This is an important realisation if we want to deal with processes of change in a systemic way.

Without personal mastery, without assuming one’s own responsibility for personal learning and change, there can be no change, no movement in a system or community. So people have to be willing to assume their own responsibility and role in the systemic process of change. Otherwise, each ‘community building’ initiative will be a wasted effort. The agogue will have to be strategically inspiring and challenging, and encourage responsibility at every process aimed at community building.

In NEST, you can see how different project partners start to play a role in the ‘transformational learning’ of the participants, based on personal mastery. The ‘godparents’, the artist-social worker, the different project partners are role models for the casual participant, or in the supporting relationship with volunteers, such as the ‘godparents’, the teachers, etc. We have noticed this allows people to transcend themselves. Giving meaning, or starting to see their presence at the NEST, in the neighbourhood as a mission. Approaching neighbours. Becoming ambassadors and as such, teachers. ‘Godfather’ Mohammed becomes the contact point for an entire cultural group, meaning he also becomes a ‘model’ for the possibility of an active kind of living together. ‘Godmother’ Wiske becomes the spokesperson for the residents’ association. The silence is broken. People are talking, discussing and dialoguing with a positive intention. People’s self-respect grows and they find the strength to let go of their mental models, their security blanket, and to think freely, to co-create new relationships.

5.5 Team learning – playing together in the groove

When musicians start jamming and unerringly supplement each other in their improvisations with their eyes closed, when they allow others to add their own sound palette and together make ‘their’ song heard, they are playing ‘in the groove’. The ensemble is more than the sum of its parts. There is emergence.
Team sportsmen experience the same thing. Team members know where the others are without looking. They know where to send their ‘crosses’. They ‘know’ where the others will be, even if it’s not a move they have practiced during training.

In improvisation theater, people have described certain important concepts necessary to get to that stage. The most important concept is ‘acceptance’. Allowing things to flow freely, without trying to control it.

Again, inside and outside go together in a wonderful synergy. If people work together, with the spontaneity and the fun which grows from mutual ‘acceptance’, emergence occurs. The whole of the collaboration is felt to be more than the sum of its parts. A prerequisite is a healthy ‘balance of power’ between the partners. In improv theatre, the words ‘status’ and status play are used. Each inflection, move, question, response or idea is a subtle status proposal. That subtle status ‘dance’ of alternately leading and following allows for an interesting project team functioning. In classic group dynamics (Schutz, 1975) these principles are called ‘acceptance’ or belonging, ‘influence’ or the confrontation about the position (of power) and ‘affection’ (or the balance between giving and receiving).

Teamwork makes team members listen to each other, use each other’s expertise. In other words, they learn from one another, they become a learning team and present this ‘model’ to any potential participants.

It may seem irreverent or amateurish, but in NEST the team ‘improvised’ the project as it went along. That does not mean there was no clear plan, schedule or target, that the future and the path towards NEST were not talked about. But it does mean that the project team remained open and present, always ready to include new ideas, make adjustments, responding to input by the project partners and participants. A casual meeting turns into a learning community. When the magic of this collaboration disappears, after the ‘closing festivities’, an important ‘drive’ for the ‘community building’ model of the learning community also disappears. If the team members succeed in bringing their experiences to the other networks in which they are active, and use their skills for new collaborations, new ‘learning’ teams will spring up (e.g. the ‘godparents’ in the project).

Team learning is a collective discipline. You cannot say: “I am practicing the discipline of becoming a top team.” The skills of team learning are worked out in the ‘dialogue’. David Bohm defines dialogue as: “a sharing of assumptions and understanding, as a means by which the individual, and society as a whole, can learn more about themselves and others, and achieve a renewed sense of purpose.” (Bohm, 1996). Dialogue is a state, or ‘presence’, in which the group is open to a broader flow of intelligence. Dialogue is built on a shared mission or view.
A shared mission evolves from personal views. Only personal views can create the necessary involvement and motivation. You join a project out of personal interest, because you feel your personal values, interests or aspirations are being appealed to. It is mainly a feeling, not always clearly expressed. That is why it is important that both the project partners and the participants join in because of their own personal views, because they feel it concerns them. The shared perspective hinges on the personal mastery. People often feel powerless and isolated within their own vision and ‘dream’. Exhaustion strikes. They remain silent and ‘forget’ their dream. Freire speaks of the culture of silence. When silence strikes and people no longer talk about the things that really matter (and take it from me, it’s not about who will win the cup), isolation starts. When community workers go door-to-door, many doors remain closed: there, social isolation has already struck.

The imperative demand to develop or adopt a vision (as in the ideological struggles of Marxism and liberalism) is a violation of individual freedom and impedes the articulation of an individual vision. The community worker has to present a positive challenge, has to encourage dialogue. In improv theatre too, it is all about developing a story. Constructivism speaks of the narrative. The metaphor (and therefore art) is a very suitable tool. The NEST as a
metaphor unites. It is not expressed in words, but in a synergic image, in a felt representation which appeals to an old archetype: the NEST in which you are at home.

No doubt this seems like a nice, but naively idealistic idea. Most people are ‘followers’. They do what is expected of them, what their parents or their ‘religion’ has taught them is important. ‘Obedience’ is the norm. It is taught at school and in many work places. In that sense, the ‘difficult behaviour’ of some young people is an expression of that demand for obedience, and for many young people, it is also a consequence of their obedience to group leaders. So joining in is not necessarily an expression of a personal view or a shared mission. But the first step towards renewed contact with that personal dream is connecting to the people around you. So participating is important, it is an opportunity to reconnect. Partners and artists too join in the construction of the NEST and the festivities.

5.7 Perspective

Building a communal vision is part of something much bigger: our views on a shared life together. A community needs a shared goal. Now too, there are shared, implicit images - of our lives together and the future - that we live by. Those subconscious mental images make us open the door when someone rings the bell or not, make us talk to our neighbour or not, make us afraid to go out at night or not. Those images make us move or protect ourselves with security systems and extra locks. What would it be like, to make the images of our commonly desired future explicit? To stop and think about the images of our lives together in the (near) future? To talk about which images of the future we dream of and what kind of life together we would like? And about what we can and should do? How should we act on the journey ahead?

So it’s about illuminating our implicit views of the present and our common future, of the possibility to come to a shared view of that desired future and to realise this view by taking action right now.

When we think back to the ‘presence’, we also find that ‘the future draws us’. The positive metaphor, the NEST as a vision of our living together in the future, is of crucial importance in this story.
5.8 What part can the agogue play in this process?

“A bad leader is someone who is despised by the people, a good leader is someone who is praised and a great leader is someone of whom the people say ‘We’ve done it ourselves!’” Lao Tse

When we consider the role of the agogue or project organisation in NEST, we have to extend our traditional social work competences. The agogue is more than the classic community worker, art educational worker, social worker, communicator or organiser, etc.

The agogic ‘support role’ shifts to a meta-level and a position between the participants, as partner in the dialogue.

**Acting as designer**
The agogue is the designer of the vehicle of the meeting and will try to get the different groups to enter into a dialogue. The most important design work is the integration of vision, values, targets, systems thinking and mental models. The design of learning processes allowing participants to achieve personal mastery and vision is a core responsibility.

**Acting as a narrator (steward/manager?)**
The agogue is also an inspiring giver of meaning. Through his narratives, he brings out the why. His story, both personal and universal, is about the greater, uniting whole. With words, he combines feeling and destination.

**Acting as a teacher**
The reality we experience - with pressures at work, poverty, demoralizing experiences of alienation, isolation, complexity and lack of cohesion - leads to frustration and increased social isolation. A truthful, insightful and ‘broadened’ view of reality, gives people the potential to change something about their reality. Returning to the iceberg, we recognize the four levels on which people can perceive their reality: events, behavioural patterns and trends, systems structures and the larger ‘why’ story. The ‘teacher’ will open people’s eyes to the entire iceberg and teach them to deal with the creative tensions arising from the confrontation of personal mastery and desired future.

5.9 In conclusion, some advice

NEST is potentially a ‘good-practice’. The project is still ongoing. The NEST is growing and flowering. The coming months and years will tell whether NEST is really a sustainable project. It is now up to the community workers, the volunteers like the godparents, the local residents, the policy makers, authorities and politicians. Will they show themselves to be sufficiently amenable to enter into a dialogue...
role of the artist-agogue is crucial for the ‘transformational learning’ through the introduction of the metaphor of the NEST built by neighbourhood participants as an image of a desired and shared future. It is crucial in the interplay of the different disciplines of the learning community. A questioning of mental models, a creative challenge to personal mastery, emergence through team learning, the project team systemically taking into account the residents’ feedback and the shared mission of the NEST.

In a social community, the ‘agogue’ works with three starting points. These are the questions we have to ask of each youth project, community building project, socio-artistic project etc:

How are social networks and groups built up? How do groups interact among themselves and with other groups and communities? What aspects are part of the genetic code of the system (organisation, information, patterns and mental models)? Who is part of it? Who has elected to (not) be a part of it? How aware are these people of being part of a living community?

What mental models, perceptions do people have of the forces determining these interactions? What roles or posi-

with people in order to adapt the neighbourhood to the residents and not the other way around? If this project produces long-term results, it will not only be due to the creative project structure, the specific competencies of the project partners or the technical or methodological input.

The collaboration between partners will be decisive for the inspirational force and sustainability. The ‘accidental’ combination which led to a stimulating, ‘learning’ project team which was on the spot as a model for the residents. The
tions, rules and hierarchies, taboos are relevant? What driving forces (power and powerlessness, frustration, security, order, fun,...) determine the dynamic? How well do the members of the living system know their context and how well are they able to adapt to changes in that environment (in living organisms the possibility for survival is directly proportional to the ability to adapt)?

*What goal does the system support and in how far is this understood, shared, explicitised, desired?* What effect does this goal have on people's desire to be a part of the system and interact? What is the living system working towards? What is its goal? What is its desired perspective? And is this goal and this future desirable for the members of the community?

“Let me live in a nest and find meaning in my habitat. I will nestle myself in the connection and enjoy myself.”
Notes


3. Kiel rats (Kielse ratten) is in fact the name of the Kiel support club of the football team Germinal Beerschot: “We are Kiel Rats, we are Rats from ‘t Kiel .We are from the purple army, we are back to win the league!”. Problem kids in that neighbourhood are often referred to by this name, which has overtones of hooliganism.

4. A decree (‘decreet’) is the name of the legislative framework issued by the authorized executive, in this case the Vlaamse Gemeenschap.

5. The Pact of Vilvoorde was made after the European summit in Lisbon of 2000, by various strategic partners. It contains 21 strategic goals for Flanders, including themes such as literacy, culture, employment etc.


8. Application for a project grant to strengthen the basic functions of the museum by a recognized museum.

9. Application for a project grant to strengthen the basic functions of the museum work by a recognized museum.


12. SPIA: Stedelijke Polytechnisch Instituut Antwerpen had been involved in the subproject ‘A BRIDGE (= a work of art) between SPIA and MID’

13. A contract is drawn up in which people agree to observe all conditions that have been set. A key contract is drawn up for every room hire at the NOVA.


15. Hegelian ‘alienation’ is typical of the struggle of man versus nature and of people among themselves, and can only be overcome once people accept the fact that they are all part of the ‘Absolute Spirit’. Man and Spirit have to rely on each other and together accomplish history. To Marx, alienation is a characteristic symptom of the capitalist mode of production, in which the worker is just a cog in the machine without any say in the production process, leading to false dependencies.

16. See project Perspectief 2015: www.co-creatie.org


18. See Jos Pauwels, 2006 among others

19. In social work, we know social systems from the work of Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt and the NTL (among others) about social psychology and group dynamics. In family therapy (Satir) and cultural anthropology (Margaret Mead) too, we see manipulation.

20. MIT of Massachusetts Institute of Technology

21. Ecological is here used in the broader sense of ‘affecting the environment’


23. National Institute for Criminalistics and Criminology (NICC) Belgium: In 2005, 39,000 minors were the subject of police reports as the suspects of a crime. That is 5.5 percent of all young people aged 12 to 18. Not significantly more than in the eighties. The fact that more facilities are needed, is due to other social factors. Other Western
European countries show the same trend.


25. Cybernetics is the study of regulatory systems or the control of and communication within biological and mechanical systems. Hence the attention for the feedback principle.

26. Kegan, R. & Lahey, L.L. (2001): 1. It is very hard to bring about significant changes in any human group without changes in individual behaviour. 2. It is very hard to sustain significant changes in behaviour without significant changes in individuals underlying meaning that may give rise to their behaviours. 3. It is very hard to lead on behalf of other people’s changes in their underlying ways of making meaning without considering the possibility that we ourselves must also change.

27. See Johnstone 1979 and others

Bibliography