



## **“Orientation strategies within public spaces as the rudiments of space usage and layout” – a workshop contribution**

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### **Research questions**

Our guiding questions in research are:

- how does one orient oneself in an unknown urban space,
- are there typical strategies in orientation, which become visible during the search process and finally:
- do men and women orientate in the same unknown urban space in the same way

or are there hints that they are following different strategies ?

Our long-term theme in research is to find out the regularity and the rules of the processes of moving and using public spaces. In the first step we are trying to find out in which way the individual perception of urban spaces in moving depends on the design of urban spaces. Therefore in our research design we try to explore the qualities of urban spaces which become visible in moving processes.

It is one of the oldest questions of urban design and – by the way – nearly every architect or planner pretends to know everything on this subject. But nobody is yet able to predict real moving or using processes while designing.

On the other side: the parameters of the material frame work are well known while moving and using processes are still nearly unknown.

### **Research design**

To get into the discussion on our thesis we presented to the conference a short video on a very small experiment on perception and orientation in urban space. It is not one of our research products but it is a report on our semester work with students in endoscopies. The aim is to introduce students in perception of space by their own

experience.

### **The configuration of the experiment**

We had taken a very reduced – but not simplistic – model of a town in the scale 1 : 250. We lighted it up in diffused light and we strictly defined speed on the low level of walking. Only ten minutes of time to reach the aim were given.

### **The task:**

“Your best friend will be married in the town hall of a town you have never visited. Your starting position is just in front of the city, the main station is in your back and you have got ten minutes to give your witness to the marriage.”

To start the search we combined twenty groups consisting out of four persons in three types: only women, only men, women and men

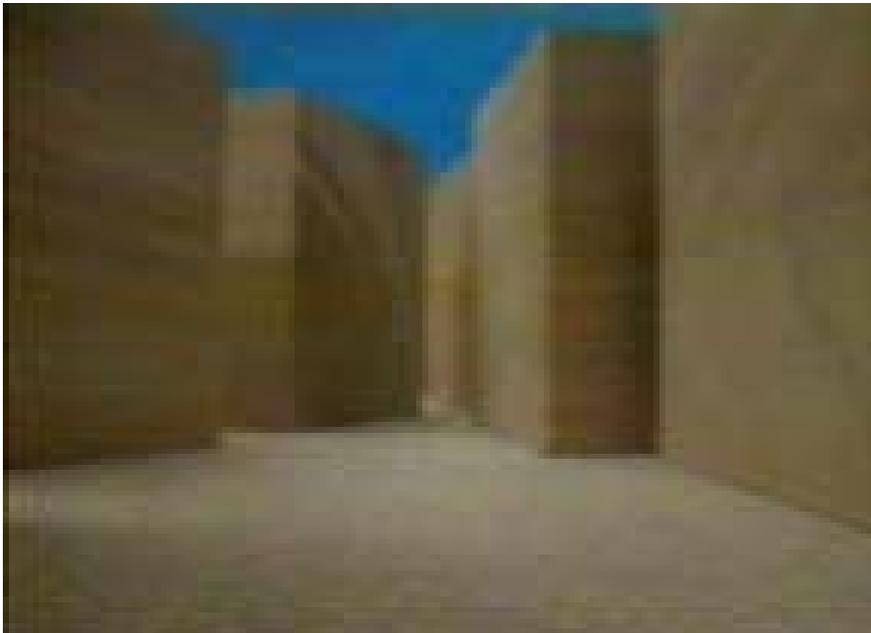


Fig 2-3: women group

mixed. Each member had to take over one of the following functions:

- guiding the group,
- trying to make a sketch of the city

and two of them had to keep an eye on the path which was chosen by the guiding person and had to realize and remark the guiding elements of the environments.

### First results

The images show the experimental design and the different search proceedings carried out by typical groups.

The following reconciliations on results can be formulated:

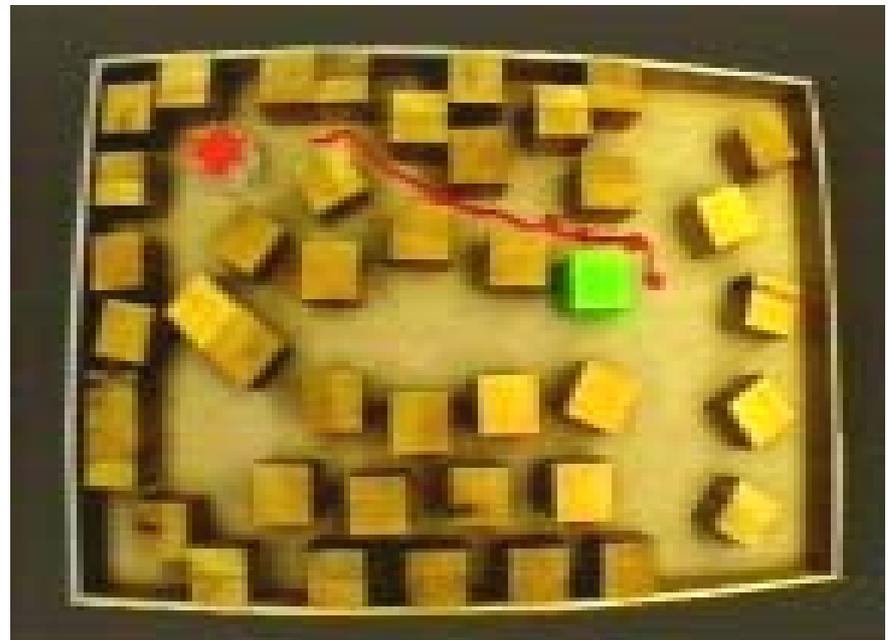
1. There are two strategies of orientation:

The first strategy is to define in the following sequence:

- going straight ahead,
- following the guiding elements of space,



Fig 4-5: men group



- reflecting the decisions of moving directions while moving.

This mostly was the male strategies.

The second strategy:

- looking around,
- deciding the direction of moving and going forward to the next point of decision,
- communicating the decision before moving.

A search sequence is developing. This mostly was the female way of searching.

2. Orientating is a learning process.

It means learning the guiding elements of orientation in a given environment. Sometimes a group has found the aim - the town hall - very fast but did not realize it. To orientate and to move in an unknown city means to learn the normality, the constructing elements of the unknown city.

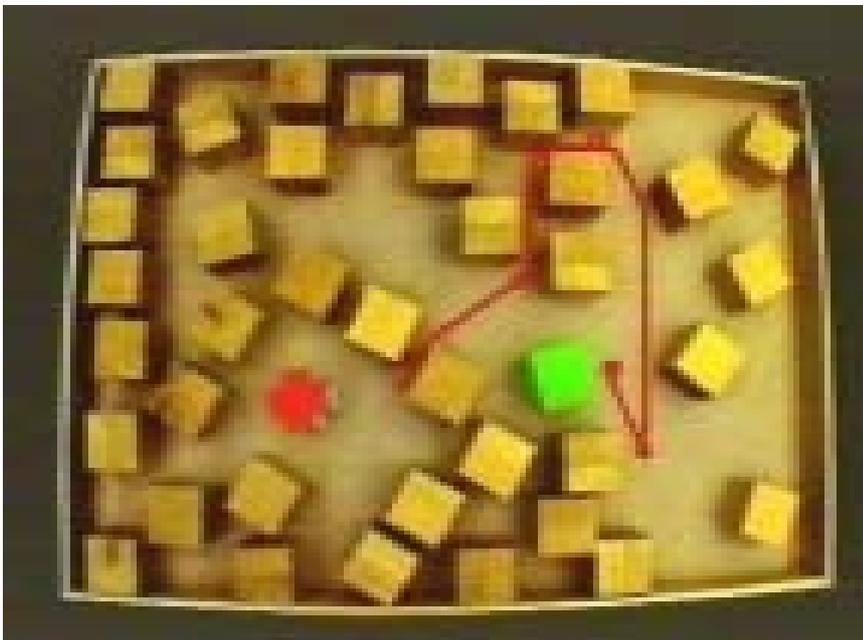


Fig 6-7: mixed group

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In practicing the search, the expected image of the material structure of town and space begins to emerge and finally this unconscious image of the city will be the matrix of the special searching process. This image we expect to be produced by cultural experience and social practice in daily life.

Although we had lots of groups and we found out typical strategies or orientation, we would not yet claim to fix the results as a statement which is statistically proofed. For the present it is a qualified identification. In this stadium we are trying to find out the criteria of decision, their personal derivation and the corresponding guiding elements in the environment of the city which are brought together in the deciding process of moving. Additional experiments will substantiate the typing of orientation before we will get out of our laboratory on to orientation processes in daily life.

#### **Next steps**

To summarize the experiences we like to point the following out: Young students become able to reflect perception on their own perception processes in urban spaces.

For our long-term research we gained some informations to the material constraints in perceiving urban spaces and the social and cultural influences in using them.

Our next step will be the design of a research program including the dimension of light and afterwards we will introduce various speeds of moving. Finally and step by step we intend to get into reality of urban space outside our laboratory.

