

A person in a dark coat and carrying a bag walks away from the camera down a wide, tree-lined path. The path is flanked by tall, bare trees. In the background, a large brick building with many windows is visible under a cloudy sky. The overall scene is a quiet, urban park setting.

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INTERVIEW

**URBAN PSYCHOLOGY
SERVES USERS AS WELL
AS INVESTORS**

URBAN PSYCHOLOGY IS GAINING GROUND

Are there building façades that are generally regarded as attractive? Which building attributes facilitate our orientation? How can the flow of pedestrians be controlled? Urban psychology addresses these issues and more. The Center for Urban & Real Estate Management (CUREM) – part of the Institute for Banking and Finance at the University of Zurich – opens the door to accessing this field of research in practice. Lecturer Alice Hollenstein explains the correlations in the following interview.

Ms Hollenstein, why are urban development and building design currently in need of psychologists as well?

Urban and building development necessitates, among other things, knowledge of the experiences and behaviours of human beings. Urban psychology describes, explains, forecasts and changes (if necessary) the experiences and behaviours of numerous individuals in the constructed environment on an empirical basis.

Does urban psychology also have economic advantages?

Yes. Urban psychology analyses the reasons for economic phenomena – for example, the positive effects of Wilhelminian-style façades on the value of a property – and provides relevant recommendations for action.

How has urban psychology emerged and what impact has it had to date?

Urban psychology as a subordinate field of environmental psychology is more than 100 years old. In the course of industrialisation, experimental analyses were conducted at that time to determine which environmental factors exerted a performance-enhancing effect on people. A research boom emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, triggered by the precipitous growth of urban districts. The first studies on topics such as building aesthetics, social and structural density, recreational space and place iden-



ALICE HOLLENSTEIN | «Urban psychology also contributes to a building's long-term functionality.»

ABOUT ALICE HOLLENSTEIN

Alice Hollenstein (1982) works as a researcher at the Center for Urban & Real Estate Management (CUREM) at the University of Zurich, where she also heads the urban psychology course, among other things. She is writing a dissertation at the Chemnitz University of Technology and holds a Master of Science in Psychology, with minors in Economics and Environmental Sciences. Previously, she completed a research internship at Hong Kong University and worked in the consumer goods industry.



Clear directions and landmarks facilitate navigation for visitors (Sihlcity Zurich).

tity were published during these years. Urban psychology paved the way for more precisely defining, measuring and influencing soft factors, for instance, like place identity.

How has urban psychology changed since its origins?

The methodological possibilities have multiplied. In the meantime, we are capable of measuring brain activities, eye movements and hormonal releases, or carrying out surveys of large numbers of people in just a brief period of time by means of online questionnaires, for example.

In which countries or cities has urban psychology been most favourably established?

I know of projects particularly in the USA, Australia, Germany and Austria. But more and more studies are currently being published from South American, Asian and Arabic countries as well.

Do psychologists have a tendency to make unrealistic demands?

The danger looms. I believe it's important for psychologists to increasingly engage in a mutual exchange with economists too, since the ideal allocation of scarce resources ultimately always plays a sig-

“ WHETHER INVESTORS AIM TO LAUNCH A PRODUCT ON THE MARKET THAT IS SUITABLE FOR THE MASSES OR SOMETHING SPECIAL IS THEIR DECISION. ”

nificant role. Psychology sometimes has a tendency to deal only with the well-being of people while neglecting the issue of scarce resources. I'm particularly interested in what priorities people set, when they face constellations with conflicting objectives and interdependencies.

Who benefits from the knowledge of urban psychology?

On the one hand, the user since they gain a better understanding; on the other, the investor since they invest in those environmental attributes that are held in high regard.

What specifically are these advantages?

I believe that urban psychology leads to a more «people-friendly» environmental

landscape. For example, you certainly know buildings in which you continually lose your way – urban psychology provides the knowledge regarding which building characteristics hamper or facilitate navigation.

What benefits do investors and homeowners have?

Investors are frequently confronted with cost-benefit considerations such as larger rooms or common spaces, hardwood flooring or high ceilings. Psychologists can provide support by means of empirical findings or through a specific user analysis.

How is urban psychology compatible with Swiss regulatory requirements?

My hypothesis is that ideal solutions are better realised through incorporating people in the design process than through increasingly tighter regulatory requirements.

Isn't there a danger that the mainstream will always prevail thanks to urban psychology, while outstanding projects are restricted or rejected?

Urban psychology is less concerned with trends and more focused on basic issues such as privacy, social exchange, orientation, stimulation, etc. These factors contribute to a building's long-term

functionality. Whether investors aim to launch a product on the market that is suitable for the masses or something special is their decision.

The very first urban psychology higher education course took place at the University of Zurich in March 2013. Who were the participants in the course?

The participants were predominantly management-level persons, including institutional investors and those from the public sector, in addition to some architects. The course evaluation revealed that the topics were very relevant, although making the connection between research and practice is not always achieved. We have been working on that aspect, and I'm eager to see the results of the second urban psychology course in 2014.

Which research topics would you delve into more intensively?

Within the scope of my dissertation, I analyse the factors to which the preferences for Wilhelminian-style façades substantiated in various studies are attributable. Relevant recommendations for the design of new buildings can be derived depending on the results. Furthermore, we are also addressing the issue of how the user's perspective can be more strongly incorporated in projects. We are currently in the process of assembling a group of investors that are interested in this topic.



«Ideal solutions emerge more easily through involving people than through imposing regulations.»

CUREM

The Center for Urban & Real Estate Management (CUREM) was founded in 2003 as a private initiative emanating from and focusing on the real estate sector. In 2009, CUREM was integrated into the University of Zurich (Institute for Banking and Finance). CUREM ranks among the leading providers of higher education in the field of real estate management.

CUREM offers the Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) in Real Estate as post-graduate course of study, in addition to various compact courses including Urban Psychology, Fundamentals of Real Estate Evaluation, Real Estate and Portfolio Management, Urban Management – Applied Economy of Space and Indirect Real Estate Investments.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES | Relevant perceptions of urban psychology



The results of various surveys reveal that relatively structurally detailed façades with decorative elements are perceived as more attractive and valuable than plain, extensive surface façades. Whether or not this preference also applies to new buildings is still insufficiently clarified. The image shows the Fraumünsterpost in Zurich built in 1901. (Vienna, Hefler, 2009)



Shopping centre visitors assess navigation-friendliness as one of the most important attributes of a shopping centre. Atriums, clear lines of sight between entrances and exits, right angles, identical layouts throughout the levels and prominent symbols facilitate navigation for visitors. Photo: Stücki shopping centre, Basel (Hölscher, et al, in press.)



The results of a representative survey in Hamburg revealed that two thirds of the test subjects preferred mullion windows. The vast majority of respondents would even be willing to pay higher rent prices for mullion windows. (Mader, 2010)