

Interview: Jan Beyer

LEGO® Community Development Manager

By Hispabrick Magazine

Pictures by Roman Gibert and lluisgib



Hispabrick Magazine: You started at LEGO® Juris. Which was your task on that department?

Jan Beyer: Yes, that is correct – I started back in 2003 as Global Lease Administrator at the LEGO Legal Department. My task was to take care of all the leases (offices, warehouses, shops...) the LEGO Company had around the world.

HM: After that, you went to the LEGO Community Development....

JB: One year later I moved partly to LEGO Brand Retail to take care of the leases they had around the globe and the other half of my time I started to work with the German LEGO Fan Club 1000steine to build a good relationship. After that I took over the contact to the Dutch Community and further on so I used less and less time on Brand Retail. Since 2005 I only work for LEGO Community Development.

HM: Did you know where you were going (regarding type of tasks, a job different than the previous one)?

JB: I had a kind of idea what was going on but was not completely sure because it was quite new for Europe and – as you write – completely different from my old job.

HM: How was introduced the fan community in the company?

JB: I was introduced the first time to the 1000steine Community on the 1000steine Land in Berlin in 2004. And then it started to get faster and faster with new contacts.

HM: What did you find there? And what did you learn?

JB: I found a lot of very nice and open people who played with LEGO bricks and built some fantastic creations and they welcomed me very warm so that

was super. I learned a lot about the German community and that you sometimes need to be very diplomatic and how to work with the very special people who form the AFOL community.

HM: You have attended to hundreds of fan events. Are there many differences between European Countries?

JB: I would not say I attended hundreds but I visit around 20 events a year so I might be close to hundred – I actually never counted ☺. I feel there are some differences between the different Events in Europe but the countries and the people are different so that is quite natural. I like to explore the different ways and styles – but at the end all is about the LEGO brick.

HM: And between Europe and America?

JB: Yes – some differences here too – in Europe we do more exhibitions with public visitors and evening fun for AFOLs and in the US it is more convention style with a lot of speeches and not always a lot of public. But there are also similar events on both sides.

HM: Community Development usually gives support to the events. Which is the main goal of this support?

JB: Yes, that is right – we try to support the events as good as we can – that can be everything from some ideas to products/bricks and even big involvement from our local sales companies. The goal is always to make the event as LEGO like and exciting as possible for the visitors but also for the participating AFOLs and to feature our products and brand to our core target groups.

HM: Do you get any kind of feedback from the events?

JB: Usually I get direct feedback from the



organizers, participants and public when I am visiting the event in person but otherwise if I cannot make it to the event (last year I supported over 45 events) I normally get feedback from the organizer like a report or at least some conclusions and pictures in a email.

HM: How do you proceed when you find a new talent in an event?

JB: Usually I speak to the person who is a really good/special builder and ask him/her to prepare a portfolio with his/her work and get it to me. Beside this I take some pictures of his/her creations. I then show the pictures to my design colleagues for the respective area. But I can never promise that somebody get a designer – that is the decision of the Design Department.

HM: Which is the motivation when TLG invites LEGO® fans to a workshop?

JB: We are interested in new ways of building and ideas and also to give our designers some very talented people to work together with to co create. Also the fan community is very important to us so we want to hear their direct voice and let them co create with our designers.

HM: Are these workshops positive for the company?

JB: Yes – they are very positive – the designers and the company always get a lot out of workshops and I think the participating fans and the whole community

too. So the money the workshops cost us is very good invested.

HM: We know the Factory sets designed by fans, but are fans involved in other projects not so viewable?

JB: We have/had fans involved in many projects like the Café Corner Design, the new Mindstorms NXT, the Power Functions system, the new PF train and several other projects I cannot speak about.

HM: Which are the typical requests you receive from fans?

JB: We would like all bricks in all colors available, make more natural/dark colors, bring back the monorail, more sets designed for Adult fans, lower prices and so on ☺

HM: Which is the rarest? And the funniest?

JB: Could you design better sets – I think most of the Fans are now very happy with the new sets and tell me the design is getting better and better so they almost need to buy all sets ;-). Lately funniest was: Could you please help me to get pictures/drawings of the Airbus A 380 in LEGOLAND Germany – I want to build it – and he did!

HM: Are always the same complaints between AFOLs from different countries?

JB: Beside that the AFOLs from countries who are

less LEGO® penetrated and perhaps have no access to LEGO S@H are complaining about how to buy LEGO sets/certain sets – most of the complaints are the same.

HM: Your task in the Community Development is not only attend events. Which are your other objectives?

JB: My main task is to organize/improve/orchestrate the communication between the LEGO Group and the 13+ community and between the different parts in the community. So that takes a lot of my time. Beside this I organize workshops and cooperations between the LEGO Group and the community, answer a million questions from AFOLs and colleagues and also watch out that both sides get something out of cooperation. So basically imagine everything you could think about that could happen/asked/done between the LEGO Group and the European/Asia Fan community and then you know what I am doing ☺

HM: Why did LCD change the method of election of the LEGO Ambassadors?

JB: Because we felt some people tried to become an Ambassador only for themselves and not necessary speak for their community and also because we felt that the community would lose interest if they not could nominate their Ambassador. It is very important for the program that the participants know they represent their community!

HM: What do you think about our community?

JB: That is a kind of strange questions – of course I like your community very much and think it is a active community – not very big – but Spain is also not a very LEGO penetrated country. You doing a very good event and you have some very good builders - not to name the Arvo Brothers who I would consider as some of the best builders in the world.

HM: Are our Community known inside the Company?

JB: I think the employees who know about the AFOL community and are dealing with Iberia are definitely aware of your community.

HM: You gave your support from the beginning of this magazine. Are you happy with the results?

JB: Yes – I think it is important for a group to have a kind of media they can have in their own languages and that is about their hobby. And it is always nice to have something beside the Internet – I am very happy with the results – all people involved in the Hispabrick magazine are doing a fantastic job – it is a beautiful magazine and now – since it also comes in English I can read the articles and not only look at the fantastic pictures – but I hope to learn Spanish at some point so I can read it in the original language.

HM: Did you play with LEGO bricks when you were a

kid?

JB: Yes – I did! And still playing ☺ . I had as a kid a decent LEGO collection and I loved playing with LEGO bricks. I got small sets in between and big ones always for birthday and Christmas.

HM: Your most-liked LEGO Theme

JB: Not sure if you consider that as a theme but I really liked/like LEGO Light and Sound.



HM: One which you don't like

JB: I must admit that I am not much into Bionicle.

HM: Your favourite set

JB: 6970 Beta 1 Command Base – I had it as a kid beautiful set and so much play value.



HM: Your favourite MOC

JB: Actually – I really love the headphones the Arvo brothers created – it looks so real that if I step 1m away I would plug them into my iPod ☺ .

HM: Do you want to say anything else?

JB: I would like to say thank you for all the work and all the enthusiasm of the members of HispaLUG and you do a great job – please continue the very good cooperation and I am very much looking forward to the next event in Madrid in December.

HM: Many thanks for giving us your point of view about the Fan Community

JB: Thank you very much. ■