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In 1978 the LEGO® universe suffered a revolution: the appearance of the minifig as we know it today. In that first year three themes were launched that contained minifigs, Castle, Space and City.

In previous editions of HispaBrick Magazine® we have talked about the story of Castle (HBM 006) and Space (HBM 008 and 011), but so far we had never dedicated an article to what is probably the theme with the most fans (children and adults) in the world. In order to address that pending matter, we will travel through time, from the distant 1978 till the present to see the evolution of this theme. This is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis, year by year, set by set. We just want to see how this theme has evolved over the years.

The beginning (1978 – 1985)

Let's go back to 1978. As mentioned before, the appearance of the LEGO 'dolls' started a revolution in the LEGO system and, of course, also meant a change in what until then were considered city sets. In 1975 a precursor to the minifig had appeared, without arms or moving legs, without hands or facial expression. They came with some vehicles and buildings, like the police station (370 - Police Headquarters in 1976)



but the vehicles were designed without room inside so the minifigs could not be introduced in the close vehicles. Some open vehicles (like the 615 - Fork Lift with Driver in 1975) did allow the minifig to be placed in the vehicle, but the play options were rather limited.



In 1978 there was a curious mix of city sets. Many of them included a minifig, but still without the possibility of introducing it in a vehicle. For example, the 606 - Ambulance, consisting in a paramedic and a vehicle. On the other hand, there were

some sets that did allow the new minifig to be completely integrated in the set, like in the case of the 640 - Fire Truck and Trailer. There were also the first minifig accessories like the axe, pick and shovel. Some designs were still evolutions of earlier sets, like the motorbikes, which were built with bricks instead of being a specific piece like the one that appeared in 1983. This mix lasted only till 1979 which still featured the 608 - Taxi, which did not have room for minifig inside.



Also in 1978, there was the first house with its little inhabitants (376 - Town House with garden). This house was quite complete and had some interesting functions, like the hinges that allowed for two different configurations of the house.

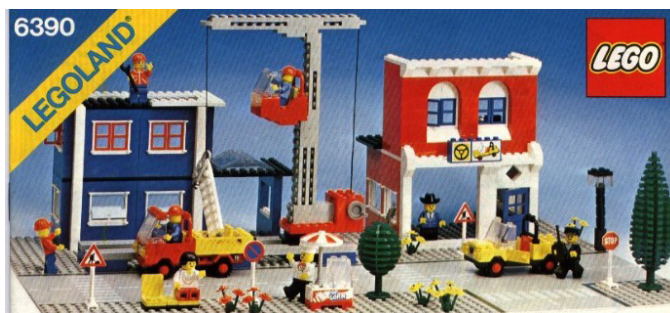


In 1979 the city started to grow, not only with additional vehicles, but with the first complements, like the 361 - Garage, the 379 - Bus Station and the 675 - Snack Bar. These sets allowed the kids of that time to start building their own town with services and props. Also during 1979 a set was launched that has been modernised more times than any other in the city theme: the police station; in this case the 381 - Police Headquarters. It was a very complete set with 4 minifigs, a car, a motor, a helicopter and a building. It was a delight for the



kids of that time since a single set provided many play option.

1980 featured the first “explosion” of creativity on the part of the designers and the market was flooded with sets and complements that indicated that



the LEGO® Town line was to be taken serious. Aside from the many civil, construction and service vehicles, a number of now legendary sets were launched, like the marvellous 6390 - Main Street (which was re-released in the Legends series) or the 6364 - paramedic. It was a small Red Cross post with an emergency vehicle. I would also like to highlight two very interesting sets with accessories, the 6305 - Trees and Flowers, a plants “battlepack” or the first set with traffic signs: 6306 - Road Signs. Another element that stood out in 1980 was the 6000 -LEGOLAND Idea Book, which became the bedside book for thousands of kids and made them dream of a city without limits.



The fact that I'm writing this article today is a result of a small set of that time that requires a small personal reference. 1981 was a special year for me. I was 6 years old (almost 7) when my parents were about to change my life forever. My father used to travel to Germany for work and there he had seen some LEGO sets so he knew the toy. He had even brought a catalogue (which I would find many years later) that I had never seen. In Spain, LEGO wasn't very well known, although some toy shops and book shops were stating to sell it. One day my parents gave me a little box. It contained a little plastic girl and two pumps for a petrol station that you had to build. It was none other than the 6610 - Gas Pumps. On that day a world opened before my eyes, and here I am, 30 (or more) years later, hooked like the first day. Set number 6610 from 1981 has the essence of a small set with few pieces that could win the heart of almost any child and it is the perfect example of the sets of the early 80s: small, no frills, but charming.



In the following years, quantity, quality, and variety in design improved. More houses, vehicles, buildings, complements... but following the same line. Simplicity in the models and all the playability you can get with a few pieces.

In 1983 the first revision of the police station was launched with number 6384 - Police Station. It was a more elaborate design than the previous one but followed the same guidelines with a car, motor, helicopter and main building. Another set that stands out in 1983 is the 6374 - Holiday home. That was the best house that has been designed in the Town theme. Besides it beautiful design and the large number of complements, there is the cypress tree that appears in this set and in very few others, like the 6390 - Main Street (but not in the LEGO Legends re-edition) and the 1592 - Town Square.



1985 saw the launch of the first model of another classic theme: the airport. With reference number 6392 - Airport, LEGO® gave us a beautiful yellow and black



building, a red and white plane, a helicopter and the necessary complements for an airport, like the cart for the suitcases and the windsock to indicate speed and direction of the wind. As a complement to this set, there was the 6368 - Jet Airliner, a somewhat smaller plane with a completely different colour scheme. Standing out among the rest of the sets from that year are the fourth house in the theme, and several vehicles, like the 6682 Cement Mixer or the exquisite 6601 - ice Cream Cart.



1988 brought another of the mythical sets. The 6394 - Metro Park & Service Tower was a set that contained a petrol station and a parking lot. It was one of those big, complete sets that allowed for hours of play, as well as incorporating new elements to the city (in this case a parking lot). The 6395 - Victory Lap Raceway was another of those rather large sets that would make the 639X references legendary. Although the best of those was still a couple of years away.



The Golden Years (1986 – 1996)

1986 brought (at least in my opinion) the most prolific stage in all the history of this theme. The continuous appearance of new parts led to less “square” designs without losing the essence of the beginning.

There were revisions of earlier sets, like the third police station (6386 - Command Base) which showed a more modern and attractive design without going too far the base upon which the earlier designs were built. There is also the first revision of the 6371 petrol station from 1983, the 6378 - Service Station. The Octan Brand, the ‘official’ LEGO petrol company had not yet made its appearance, so this particular one was a Shell station (in the USA there was an Exxon station, 6375 - Gas Station).

Other new sets appeared in the catalogue, like the 6379 - Riding Stables, the first construction crane (6361 - Mobile Crane) or as an example of complements, a small phone booth with a cyclist (6613 - Telephone Booth).

Also in 1986 a new system was implemented that would make the city more lively. The Light & Sound system brought vehicles that incorporated a 9V battery box and a number of electric plates that powered lights and sirens. The first two sets in this system were the 6450 - Mobile Police Truck and the 6480 - Hook and Ladder Truck.



In 1987 the city continued to grow. This year saw the first hospital (6380 - Emergency Treatment Center), the first race course (6381 - Motor Speedway) and the first garbage truck (6693 - Refuse Collection Truck).

Allow me to make a small aside here before I continue, to mention a side effect of so many diverse sets. The catalogues of those years showed dioramas that set off the dreams of any child. There were sets upon sets to create a city, airports or racing circuits that were at least as good as their real life counterparts. The great variety of sets of different styles allowed for this luxury that is missing today.



I will mention 1989 only in passing, simply mentioning the appearance of new Light & Sound sets and a few interesting vehicles like the 6661 - Mobile TV Studio, and I'll concentrate on 1990 which saw the appearance of a singular set that is considered by many the myth of this theme.

LEGO launched many revisions of earlier sets, like the 6389 - Fire Control Center, or a new airport (6396 - International Jetport). That airport, with a much more modern design than its predecessor, came with a big surprise that stole the hearts (and continues to do so) of thousands of children. It was the 6399 - Airport Shuttle, better known as the monorail. It was a

shuttle service that connected the city to the airport by means of a monorail. It contained not only the shuttle, but also two stations, one of them on an elevation. It was a set that in those years was not for the average Spanish family (it cost 16,000, about 100€). Today that would be cheap, but then it was a lot of money.

Personally I have an anecdote with this monorail set. In the village where we used to spend our holidays (a little place with 4800 inhabitants) there was a monorail in the shop-window of the bookshop. It was there for several years as nobody bought it due to its high price. In 1995 I asked the shop owner to set it aside for me so I could buy the set after I had saved up the necessary money. As we were by then well known in the village, I came out of the bookshop not only with the monorail, but also with the 6389 - Fire Control Center and the 6398 - Central Precinct HQ, with the promise to pay the 25,000 pesetas (150€) in "easy instalments" of 1,000 pesetas (6€) every week. Thanks to the confidence of that shop keeper I managed to get that set and I can never thank him enough.



Aside from personal anecdotes, 1990 is the perfect example of a "golden year". The sets of the previous years (1988 and 1989) together with those of that year made a perfect mix and were highly desirable.

1991 was another year to remember. The first accessories for the monorail appeared which included switch points (6347 - Monorail Accessory Track) and three(!) harbour sets. The 6540 - Pier Police, the 6541 - Intercoastal Seaport and the 6542 - Launch & Load Seaport. Quite a display of maritime power which allowed you to build a complete harbour to channel the transport of goods from the harbour to the city, with the inclusion of harbour cranes, boats and many accessories. In addition to these sets the city received more services since that year saw the first street sweeper (6645), a small but beautiful and necessary set.



In 1992, while Barcelona celebrated the Olympic Games, LEGO® surprised us with a new sub-theme that was rather... surprising. It was Paradisa, sets with colours that had never been seen before (or after) and a design that was supposedly more focussed on girls. In this first year there were some special, or at least novel sets, a horse riding club (6419 - Rolling Arches Ranch), and two very novel sets: the 6416 - Poolside Paradise which featured a swimming pool and a restaurant and the 6411 - Sand Dollar Café, a beach bar. The baseplate simulated the beach, and there was a life guard a hammock and shade and other details that were completely new elements in the LEGO city.



The appearance of Paradisa did not stop the launch of "classic" town sets and in 1992 another icon from this theme appears. In this case it is neither a set nor a piece. It was the Octan brand for LEGO petrol. Up to that moment Shell had been the reference, but (although this is just a supposition) it is possible that Shell in some way held LEGO back from evolving or from bringing out new complements. Using OCTAN, LEGO was free to include new elements in the petrol station without depending on anyone. That does not mean that Shell was completely eliminated since in later years there were still a many sets in collaboration with Shell.

The first appearance of OCTAN was in the petrol station 6397 - Gas 'N Wash Express, together with a tank truck, the 6594 - Gas Transit. In other sets like the 6648 - Mag Racer, OCTAN appeared as a sponsor of a dune buggy.

From 1993 to 1995 both Town and Paradisa sets (supposing we can consider it a separate theme) coexisted peacefully. There were very good sets, some very original, that prolonged the "golden years" for the city, like the 6552 - Rocky River Retreat from town, a riverside cabin, or the 6409 - Island Arcade, a Paradisa water park. Other stellar sets from those years are pizza place with its delivery truck (6350 - Pizza To Go), a new and bigger airport (6597 - Century Skyway) or the Paradisa lighthouse 6414 - Dolphin Point. I would also like

to highlight as a novelty in the general catalogue the Space Shuttle in the 6339 - Shuttle Launch Pad together with its complementary sets. This set was an example of realistic design and detail that any town fan just could pass up on.



1996 was the last year in which town stood out (in my opinion) above any other LEGO® theme. Another good selection of new design and themes or revisions of sets that made for a last great year with excellent sets - it was the confirmation of what I was without knowing it yet: an AFOL. Personally I would like to highlight the 6337 - Fast Track Finish, a complete race circuit that together with the 6335 - Indy Transport was a delight for any racing fan.



Decadence (1997 – 2002)

Always when someone in the company talks about this time, the general comment is that there was a change in strategy that focussed the efforts on other tasks different from model design. But there is something I don't quite understand and the main effect was on the Town theme. During these years some marvellous sets and themes were launched like Adventurers or some sub themes of Town itself like Divers (for example the 6441- Deep Reef Refuge) and at the same time the classic town was incredibly abandoned. The models were juniorised in an alarming way. There were sets with less than 30 pieces that consisted of a vehicle with complements (like the 6325 - Package Pickup that contained only 29 pieces).

Large pieces and models with only few functions. It looked like the age level, building difficulty and even the company's requirements had been lowered. As an example, if we compare the last fire brigade from 1994 (6571 - Flame Fighters) with the one launched in 1997 (6554 - Blaze Brigade). The former set contained 439 pieces, two vehicles, a helicopter and a main



building; the new one just 258 pieces (40% less) with the same elements. However, in the same year we find a marvellous 6547 - Fun Fair in the Paradisa theme that is full of details.

As the years went by, Town deteriorated and there were fewer and simpler sets. Only a few are worth mentioning. To highlight something, there was a small impulse set, 6420 - Mail Carrier in 1998 with a postman on a bike and a letter box. Looking for a larger set with some quality there is the 6456 - Mission Control from 1999. It was a space launch pad with a notable level of detail and design.

This decadence went on to such a level that in 2001 and 2002 there wasn't a single new set for the town theme, although there were some new themes that could mix with Town, like Island Xtreme or Sports.

I don't have a lot to say about those years, as I focussed on other themes and I found virtually nothing of what was launched interesting. I did get a set occasionally, but my collection of sets from those years is rather thin.

The Renaissance (2003)

2003 brought a first attempt to re-launch the theme with World City. During this year a series of sets was launched under this name that included police sets with a daring design and some train sets and complements. Maybe the most interesting set from those years, with a design that was completely different from what we had come to expect, was the 7030 - Squad Car. A small police vehicle with a very American design which, curiously, was quite OK, but that did not fit in very well with everything that had come before.

The police station from this year (7035 - Police HQ) also had a peculiar design, although it must be said that it was quite a lot better than that of the previous years as it did not use too many large pieces nor have a too simplistic design.



Although throughout this article I have refrained from going into the world of special sets, there is a World City set that would become the nexus with classic Town. It was a set that was exclusively sold by airline companies, the 4032 passenger plane. The plane had the essence of the classic sets and some building solutions of the new design (like the orientation of the wings) which made it more attractive. Using a rather romantic metaphor, I would say that 4032 took off from a more glorious past to take us to a more promising future.



Getting ready for the future (2004 – now)

In 2004 I think the faces of many of us lit up when we saw the introduction of town sets with the City theme name. The first City sets were for the fire brigade. The new 7240 - Fire Station was more elaborate and included more details than the 1997 version despite the fact that the piece count was still quite low since it had fewer vehicles. Together with this set there were some accessories, like the 7239 - Fire Truck, which in 2011 is

still in the catalogue, making it one of the longest lived sets in the history of the LEGO® city, and others like a helicopter, a boat or a speedboat..

Those sets were a breath of fresh air for city lovers and offered good perspectives for the future, perspectives that were confirmed in the following years.

2005 started with a new police station (7237), a great set with 582 pieces that featured a complete station with a large number of accessories and novelties, like a new motorbike, which would also appear by itself in the 7235 - Police Motorcycle. This police station, in its first version, came with a unique minifig. A policeman with a lantern that could light up. The next year the set was re-launched without this minifig as it didn't have the expected success (although in my opinion today it is a rarity and success because of the innovative system).



In addition to the police sets, there were new construction sets, like the 7243 - Construction Site and a new version of the street sweeper (7242).

2006 brought a new hospital (7892) with its accessory sets and a new airport (7894) also with accessory sets. The airplanes for this new airport have grown enormously in comparison with the planes that were launched up to now and they appeared to be a return to juniorisation, because of some big pieces. But in my opinion, aside from the size, these are not juniorised sets as they have a good number of details in the interior that do not in any way remind me of the sets for the end of the 90s.

So far so good. Police, fire brigade, construction, airport... but the more "civilian" sets were still missing. In 2007 this new facet began to appear with a new Garbage Truck - 7991 and the brilliant 7993 - Service Station. Finally a set that looked like a shop where our minifigs could start to buy some basic consumer goods. Also in 2007, as a novelty, the cargo harbour



(7994 - Harbor) with its complementary sets and the renovation of the fire brigade (7945 - Fire Station) with 617 pieces and all the charm of the old-time sets, but with a more modern design.

In 2008 the increase of interesting out-of-the-typical-theme sets continued. The 7731 - Mail Van, or a transport truck (7733 - Truck & Forklift) are two examples. Also a new sub-theme appeared: the coastguard. A series of vehicles and buildings that had not been seen before, like the 7726 - Coast Guard Truck & Speed Boat or the 4210 - Coast Guard Platform. They are interesting not only for their design, but also for the bright colour scheme.

As you can imagine, after the redesign of the fire station in

2007, during 2008 the police station was revised with set number 7744 - Police Station and its complementary sets.

But there was still something missing. It was impossible to build a town without certain services and characteristic elements. A city cannot be made up just of police, firemen, cargo transport and construction sites. Finally, in 2009 the catalogue announced what we had been waiting for. the 7641 - City Corner added a bicycle shop, a pizza restaurant and a bus to the city. Something that had been unheard of for many years. In addition there was a Camper (7639) and a sub-theme dedicated to farming. What a luxury for our eyes. Of course this year the construction sets were up for renovation, but there are some things that should always be present in a City catalogue and that should be renewed since children identify with certain social patterns and roles.

2010 put the icing on the cake. Finally a City House (8403) Just what was missing in our city: a house for our minifigs to live in. There was also a new Small Car (3177) and other novel sets like the 3222 - Helicopter and Limousine: For the first time a limo to transport VIP minifigs or the LEGO truck which is a must-have for any LEGO collector.

In 2011 some sets have been renewed and a new space sub theme has appeared, in collaboration with NASA. In addition there was a new bank set (3661 - Bank & Money Transfer).



By now we already know some of the new sets that will appear in 2012 which I believe will be much in the same line as these last years. Renewal and new appearances.



The City theme was and continues to be the heart of LEGO. The toy with which children start to learn the roles they can play in life and create real-life or imaginary situations that help in their development towards adulthood, and the model we adults use to satisfy our desire to build collaborate and imagine.

Bibliography: FANTASIA VERLAG, LEGO Collector book, second edition, Dreieich / Sprendlingen, 2011

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