CHILDREN SPACE/MAP

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Developing a methodology for built environment education for teenagers

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Abstract:

Built environment education develops visual, linguistic and decision-making skills and enables responsible participation in shaping our built environment. How can we foster a sensitive attitude in children towards environmental issues? What tools, methods, and institutions can propel that? The field is essentially interdisciplinary, involving teachers and architects, landscape architects and designers. My dissertation strives to answer these questions based on the educational activity of a creative architect and her experience gained in years of practising the facilitator role in such activities.

My hypothesis suggests that interest in human-made, architectural environments awakens in children, and at the same time, the passing of knowledge will be the most efficient when we concentrate their attention on experiencing the outside world in a structured way, and invite them to build and create. As part of my professional outreach to children, I aimed to expand the methodological bridges between built environmental education disciplines and artistic fields. My dissertation primarily provides a summary of methodological recommendations structured around four theses ranging from workshop facilitation in small groups to curatorship and program coordination targeting broader audiences. It also provides an insight into the role that museum education tools can play in the education of the built environment, via the medium of exhibitions.

My findings and methodological suggestions are intended as a practical guide for professionals and educators who work with children, and who are susceptible to this topic.

Thesis 1:

The everyday environment of teenagers often fails to evoke a desire for thorough exploration. Interest in the built environment can be triggered by approaching it from the perspective of age-specific interests. In order to generate perception, it is necessary to experiment with the dwelling of spaces in a new way disregarding the ordinary function, as well as situational games, shifts of perspective that come with dynamic walk-throughs, or the use of visual distortion as a focus-enhancing tool so that a fundamentally new spatial experience can unfold.

Thesis 2:

After the walk-through and discovery of real spaces, and the formation of individual space experience the subsequent creative workshop activity deepens the knowledge acquired about the spatial environment. This may involve the power of place, the structural characteristics of buildings, their construction methods, or even the deficiency of that place. Practical activities following the experience can make several previous spontaneously gained perceptions conscious, and can be integrated into the created piece without verbalisation, further inspiring the creators.

Thesis 3:

The immediate experience of the 1:1 scale, walkable, experiential spaces created by the collaborative efforts of the participants has an impact on the process of construction and design. Not only is working together a guaranteed sense of achievement, but the experience of the process of realisation, the pushing of spatial boundaries brings the youth closer to understanding the building processes of ordinary real spaces. Due to the latter, the methodology can be optimally applied in the first year of academic architect training programmes too.

Thesis 4:

During urban walks, it is worthwhile to focus on exploring and analysing the immediate surroundings of one's place of residence rather than prominent buildings, as the main goal is to understand our own living environment and uncover its new layers. The methodology of promenadology, originally developed for university students, can be effectively applied to this age group with tailored sub-tasks and certain facilitations such as free recording methods or topic selection. However, the study of the undertaken area has to be carried out consistently in order to draw conclusions.