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ON AN IMPORTANT MISSION

Developing the architecture education of children and young people is a central objective in the Finnish Government's Architectural Policy Programme. And not without reason: we are all users of the built environment. Architecture, be it in an urban milieu or a rural landscape, has such an influence on our lives that corresponds to at least a couple of mathematic formulas or Finnish language inflections, but a surprisingly small number of lessons in our comprehensive school syllabus are dedicated to understanding the environment and architecture. One would expect that the risk of being left without these skills and competence would somehow materialise in the contents of education: it is indeed important to provide everyone with at least the basic skills to evaluate his or her environment, select a place to live and know how to influence urban planning. But no such thing: quite the opposite, because art, which could perfectly well include the basics of architecture and design, is being subjected to cuts in conjunction with every lesson hour distribution reform just like every other "arts and crafts" subject. This makes no sense, if only for the simple reason that the learning process proper and creative problem solving necessitate using both halves of the brain. The Nokia success story is partly due to an interesting design concept that differentiates the company from its competitors.

Creating and maintaining international networks in this field is one of the points of departure of the activities of Alvar Aalto Academy. One way to achieve this has been the international Soundings for

10 Architecture workshops for young architects and designers organised since 1996. The theme of the first workshops was urban planning, and the two latest ones (2003 and 2004) and the upcoming sixth event of 2006 explore the architecture education of children and young people and the pedagogical issues involved. The workshops have been arranged with the financial support of the City of Jyväskylä, with children from Jyväskylä as participants.

The Soundings workshops have generated a new international network of the architectural education of children and young people based in Finland: the PLAYCE association (play+space). The members of PLAYCE are pioneers in the field of early architecture education and top professionals in the field: they meet frequently around the world, with the next event due in Poland in September 2006.

It was this network that enabled the Alvar Aalto Academy to arrange the first open event of lectures and discussions last autumn. Arranged in the facilities of the departments of education at the Universities of Helsinki and Jyväskylä, the seminars were well received and began a dialogue with teacher students and teachers. This book includes presentations from the *playce@2005* seminar and the summaries of the accompanying workshops, thus illustrating the development and future potential of the field, as well as the related ethical and moral issues.

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