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ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Architecture – art and everyday experiences

Combining the rational and the irrational, architecture is difficult to define. It is a common thought that architecture is architects' work, namely making drawings of houses, or that architecture is simply odd-looking and usually box-like modern buildings. Among professionals the definitions are often based on the basic elements of architecture. Form, space, order. Time, space, substance. Mass and surface. Light and shadow. Space and place. These concepts combined in the professional dialect might sound like a secret language. *Architecture is realising genius loci, the spirit of place, by building is a characterisation that brings us closer to architectural education. It brings together nature, man made environment and people themselves, combines the physical aspects of architecture with the experiential – everyday environment here and now, individual memories, shared meanings and lived history, expectations of the future.*

From the experiential point of view architecture is something about us humans, our physical and mental needs, all our senses, measures and activities. Its about door handles that fit perfectly into our hands and benches that feel comfortable to sit on; favourite places that correspond to our soul. It's about spaces that surround us, rooms for different purposes, open and closed, dark and light. It's about houses, apartments, homes for family life and privacy. It's about public buildings and space as meaningful meeting places, gathering us by

- 14 **art, religion, politics. It's about everyday environment: safe walking routes and quick bus connections, offices, schools and shopping centres. It's about villages and cities born of different places in different circumstances showing us the history of the community in a built form. It's about our home region, home country, national and local identity and the national landscape that makes us feel us. And it's about different cultures around the world, different ways of dwelling on earth.**

Architecture in basic education of art

The national core curriculum for teaching architecture as one of the arts (published by the Finnish National Board of Education in 1993, www.oph.fi) shares the wide definition of architecture that covers the whole range of built environment from single items and buildings to larger environmental entities. The curriculum also emphasises the understanding of interaction between people, and natural and built environment. According to this curriculum, the purpose of architecture education is to help pupils to analyse and understand the surrounding environment and the world, to support their general education and to promote their abilities to face the challenges of modern society, such as participating in discussion and making choices.

In Finland, children's architecture education as part of art education has already established its place. This *basic education in architecture* is aimed at all citizens, but mostly organised for children and young people as afterschool activities. There are three schools - Arkki -School of Architecture for Children and Youth, Lastu -School of Architecture, Environment and Culture and Jyväskylä Art School for Children - and one museum - The Alvar Aalto Museum- that have been the pioneers of giving official basic education in architecture. The number of interested parties has risen rapidly. Within the last couple of years several visual art schools all around Finland have started experimentation in architecture education following the official core curriculum.

In the core curriculum for the basic education of art, architecture is seen as one of the specialisation lines of visual arts. At visual art schools a student can usually, at some point of his or her visual art studies, choose to specialise in architecture. Architecture is then studied maybe during one term. In the specialised architecture schools Arkki and Lastu, the basic education of architecture is carried out as target-orientated and year by year, step by step continuing education.

Children under school age (3-6 year old) start with preparatory studies and move then to basic studies. After three years of basic studies they can move forward to deepening studies.

Since basic education in art and architecture doesn't reach all children and young people, it is important that architectural education is also included in pre-school as well as primary, secondary and upper secondary school curricula.

Architecture in school curricula

*Pre-school learning and teaching is based on integrated themes that are close to everyday life, all its phenomena and one's personal experiences. One of the themes, *Man and his Relationship to Environment*, ensures a natural opportunity for realising architecture education. Pre-school guides the child to observe and analyse surroundings, enjoy their versatility and beauty, and become conscious of the influence of one's own actions. The aim is that the child learns to respect both the natural and the built environment so that he or she will want to act in a way that preserves the environment and its cultural and aesthetic values.*

*Basic education at primary, secondary and upper secondary schools is based on seven different themes¹. The objectives and contents of them are connected to all school subjects and thus giving possibility for integration, looking at phenomena from various points of view, constructing integrated and meaningful wholes. From the seven themes *Responsibility for Environment, Well-being and Sustainable Future* refers most closely to architecture education. Points in common are also found with the other themes and almost every school subject, which creates a good basis for realising environmental and architectural projects. Even if architecture education integrates the objectives and contents of several subjects, the main emphasis on architecture is within the visual art curriculum. In the visual art curriculum (from 1st to 9th grade) the content of education is divided into four main themes, one of which is *Environmental Aesthetics, Architecture and Design*. In the upper secondary school (from 1st to 3rd grade) visual art curriculum, there are two obligatory courses, one of which, *Environment, Place and Space*, concentrates on architecture. At least one of the upper secondary schools, *The Lavia School*, is pioneering as a school especially emphasising architecture with its four different courses: *Architectural and Environmental Education, Time Travel in Architecture, Architectural Design for Everyday Life and Technical Drawing and Architectural Design*.*

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Architecture can be approached in many ways and architectural education offers possibilities and means to different kind of learners. One expresses himself best by words, another by drawings and a third by three dimensional constructions. One finds the inspiration through literature and another through her own experiences. In school classes and workshops I have seen pupils observing and documenting the living environment here and now, travelling in time both to the past and to the future, visiting architectural exhibitions and architects in work, telling stories and expressing amazing opinions, discussing architecture seriously, playing with space bustlingly and using their endless imagination. I have seen them planning and designing, painting, drawing and modelling interesting details and imaginary worlds, using many different materials. They have been formulating the environment for their purposes, building huts and other interesting structures at their own scale – and even taking part in real planning and designing of the environment together with architects.

The next step

Children and young people seem to enjoy their journey to the world of architecture. Teachers are enthusiastic about architectural education. Visual art schools and specialised architecture schools are preparing the path for others and developing means for realising this education. Researchers are starting to find it interesting and important. Architects are starting to get interested in teaching. The national curricula with their learning objectives and core contents that refer straight to our built environment give a very good basis for practising it. In addition to the ones mentioned already, several different kinds of organisation like *The Finnish Association of Architects, The Museum of Finnish Architecture, Annantalo Arts Center for Children, The Helsinki City Planning Office, The National Council for Architecture The Alvar Aalto Academy...* are contributing to the development of architectural education from their point of view. Is there really a problem then?

In the school curriculum the main emphasis on architecture is within the visual art curriculum. At the same time though the amount of teaching hours of visual art is being reduced. Art Education in secondary and upper secondary schools is already a voluntary subject for students in almost every case. Some students only study visual arts in the first year of the secondary school – and then nothing? While the responsibility

for art education is being left more and more to primary school teachers, art education in their teacher training is simultaneously being reduced. It was already mentioned that architectural education shares at least partly the aims and contents of most school subjects. Is there a true possibility to realise integrated architectural projects? At pre-schools and primary schools, where one teacher is responsible for the teaching of a class and where art education reaches every student, there is. At secondary and upper secondary schools the situation is more difficult. It is much harder to organise long-lasting integrated projects when the teachers of different subjects are struggling to meet the requirements of their own subject areas. It also seems that when the aim of teaching is to cover the whole range of the built environment the teachers sometimes feel that it is difficult to fulfil the aims of architectural education, let alone the aims of art education in general, with the knowledge and experience they have for the job. Inviting professional guests from the field can give added colour to the teaching and is mentioned in the curriculum, but the schools lack financial resources to put the visits into practice. How do we solve these contradictions?

Will every subject bring its own separate piece of information to architecture education in the future? Will visual art teaching at school stay alive and continue its struggle for good environments? Will architecture be a subject of its own? Do the future teenagers at secondary and upper secondary schools have a possibility to use at least one six week period for a larger scale integrated environmental and architectural project? We´ll see... We can start with appropriate and inspiring additional education and by taking architecture near to the everyday life of teachers and students. Thus we can encourage teachers to explore architecture from their own point of view, relying on their own experiences, with the help of the already existing teaching material. And one thing is for sure, that networking and sharing experiences is very important... and now there is PLAYCE for it!

¹ The integrating themes in basic education are:

(1) growing up as a human being, (2) cultural identity and internationality, (3) communication and media, (4) participating citizenship and enterprising, (5) responsibility for environment, well being and sustainable future (6) safety and traffic, and (7) man and technology.



The use of space: Johan von Bonsdorff at Daniel Buren's artwork in Paris.