

A Question of Democracy by Madelène Beckman



I believe that you are influenced by what you have around you. Today, most of us live in an environment that is manmade in one way or another. To me, it is most important that we have the tools to understand our surroundings. If you become aware of what is man-made, you also realise that you have an opportunity to change it. How? That is the process of democracy. In order to be able to change it, you also need to know why it is the way it is, i.e. in what context the built environment is created. Then it is simply a question of history.

Use your senses

I work at the Swedish Museum of Architecture. It is financed by the Swedish Government and is charged with explaining the art of building, studying social planning and conducting research on the built environment. At the museum I work with children and young people aged four to twenty. With the youngest, it is mostly about experiencing different spaces with as many senses as possible. We walk about with mirrors, explore how different spaces sound and smell. We take a tour round the exhibition to see how people build their houses and with what materials. At the end of the tour, the children become urban planners and create their own town.

Ask the children

It is important for me to take the children's questions as a starting point and to begin at their level of knowledge, to give them an opportunity to gain the tools to understand their surroundings. With older children, the education programme also contains the same three parts, an exercise to open their senses, a guided tour on a selected theme and practical work to let them share their own ideas. The older they get, the more important the discussion on how you can influence your own environment becomes. Last year 3,270 pupils were involved in our educational programmes.

Children with families

In 2004, 11% of the museum visitors were under sixteen. That makes a total of approximately 32,000 children, so most of the children come to the museum with their families. As people learn in various ways, we try to present the content of the museum in many different ways. You can borrow an audio guide, read, see pictures and models, touch materials and try out how different constructions work. One part of the museum, the Studio, is especially dedicated to younger children and they can play with architecture on their own terms there. During the holidays, the Studio is also used for educational workshops for families.



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