



get involved

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architectural & built environment education for young people
International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia

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playful architecture - SIGHTLESS COMMON GROUND



“Architecture more fully than other art forms engages the immediacy of our sensory perceptions. The passage of time, light, shadow and transparency, colour phenomena, texture, material and detail all participate in the complete experience of architecture.” (Juhani Pallasmaa, 1996: The Art of Dwelling)

As we had a pleasure last year to present a workshop at the International symposium architectural & built environment education for young people, we also felt a big challenge how to make a workshop in Venice for architects with not many materials and not exactly knowing where the workshop would actually happen. That was the reason we decided to make the workshop, where we will turn of the visual sense of the participants of the workshop and give importance to other senses. Also the title of the biennale »Common ground« seemed appropriate for this kind of workshop. The common ground should be designed well for the disabled people, old people and children, then it is well designed for everybody.

The second reason for our sensorial workshop was the Slovene translation of the Architectural toolkit from the organization Playce. With this book we started to discover interesting exercises how to experience architecture with other senses and how to promote those exercises within primary schools. It was a great opportunity in Venice to test these on the architects from the practice and from the education field. In year 2012 we were also in contact with the Slovene National organization for blind and sightless people, which helped us discovering the importance of well designed space for everybody. A blind girl Aleksandra with her dog joined us at the workshop in Venice to help us present the importance of other senses in space and to share her personal experience with everybody at the workshop. Her personal presentation was quite impressive.



After analyzing few pavilions in the Gardini, the most appropriate location for our workshop was in Polish pavilion and also the park in front of it. We needed secure area with slope, staircases, different floor materials, sounds, natural and build environment. All the participants got the black glasses and a white stick for blind people. The participants were explained how to use the stick when they walk. In two groups they walked, with the help of a guide, from the park into the pavilion and out again. At the end all the participants were interviewed about their personal experience and their feelings. Most of them expressed that the most important feeling they felt, while they were walking, was fear. All of them had a very unique and impressive experience and definitely started to think about the importance of the well designed space for everybody. They all agreed it is very important to share this experience among children in kindergarten and school, so the children get aware of all their senses and also of the importance of well designed space for everybody.



The conclusions of the workshop were that designing buildings touch occupants at all five levels of experience: physiologically, intellectually, emotionally, behaviourally, and even spiritually. Good architecture for the blind and visually impaired is just like any other great architecture, only better: it looks and works the same while offering a richer and better involvement of all senses. With this expanded understanding after practical experience we can say for sure that design is not only a visual process, but really, an intellectual process, and the visual dimension is a tool to aid in that. It's one way of getting information, but it's not the only way.



ARCHITECTURAL TOOLKIT – experience architecture with all senses

“The environment is an important part of our daily life. The natural environment – the mountains and lakes, forests and shorelines, the star-filled sky and rain and snow – creates different conditions in different places as the starting point for human existence and our way of life. We are equally affected,



however, by the man-made environment, whether we are conscious of it or not. Architecture is a matter not only of important buildings designed by well-known architects, but equally of those forms and spaces that make up our daily environment and consequently affect our well-being. Therefore, good architecture and a stimulating environment should be seen as a fundamental human right. Architecture is a matter not only of creating the physical environment but also of affecting the feelings of the people experiencing it and influencing their lives. Architecture is much more than what we see with our eyes, and it cannot be fully understood if it is reduced to only visual signs. If we concentrate on sensing not only by seeing but also by touching, hearing, smelling and even tasting, we obtain more varied and richer experiences of our daily environment – its spaces, moods, temporal layers, forms and structures, surfaces and colours, and light and shadow. Every person experiences the same place differently, depending on his or her own experiences, education, spheres of interest and mood at each moment. Also the same person experiences the same place differently on different days and in different states of mind, and thus the experience of the place is usually unique.

There is no single correct way of experiencing the environment. Each of us can learn to experience the environment in more depth, learn to understand basic architectural elements and assess the quality of the environment. The ability to interpret the environment on the basis of our senses is necessary in order to achieve an awareness that promotes our enjoyment of the environment here and now. This skill also gives us a tool with which to participate in the discussion about the quality of the environment of the future and helps us understand which issues are influential in the creation of a good environment.”