

# Why Architecture and the Built Environment Matters in Art Education

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## **Abstract**

**The proposed round table discussion focuses on the role of space in art education and the potential of collaboration among architects and pedagogues. Despite various pioneering approaches introduced in the 20th century, spatial contents could not yet become a comprehensive part of the institutional education. In recent years, the discourse around built environment education arouse as a reaction to the neglect of spatial issues and spatial theorization in education, mainly led by architects' communities. The fundamental assertion of these movements is that space - and place as the immediate environment - is pedagogical. It teaches about the world and forms our identity in a continuous Deweyian organism-environmental transaction. Built environment education fosters young people to be aware about and to sustain the cultural and ecological integrity of places, to become conscious about shaping places and being involved in the process of sociopolitical placemaking. This approach is inherently interdisciplinary and interventionist. Its grounds in the collaboration of**

**architects and teachers, in learning by interacting with space. It promotes education through art and creation, intervention and placemaking, and fosters critical thinking about the everyday environment as an integral part of the visual culture.**

**The round table aims at promoting the spatial discourse in the context of art education, bring the views of architects and pedagogues together. Finland is a leading country in this field, having a wide range of programmes, institutions and the world's foremost architecture school for children, we invite local architects engaged in education to contribute to the presentation.**

## **Keywords**

**Built Environment Education, visual competencies, architecture, construction skills, design thinking, interventions, social engaged art education, art teacher training.**

Despite various pioneering approaches introduced in the 20th century, spatial contents could not yet become a comprehensive part of the institutional education. In recent years, the discourse around built environment education arose as a reaction to the neglect of spatial issues and spatial theorization in education, mainly led by architects' communities.

Also, in the field of education through art the approaches of creation, intervention and placemaking are getting more and more relevance. Thus, critical thinking about and the engagement with the everyday environment is gradually becoming an integral part of education and the visual culture.

The round table discussion with the title 'Rediscover Space and Place for Arts Education' in Helsinki/Espoo 2018, organized by Gabriella Pataky and Eszter Tóth focused on the role

of space in art education and the potential of collaboration among architects and pedagogues. The aim was to interconnect the discourses of architects' and pedagogues' communities and different approaches and perspectives on learning about space and place in order to start creating a common ground for built environment education. Professionals with different backgrounds, experiences and visions were invited to share their insights, motivations and ideas.

The round table fostered a spatial discourse in the context of art education along following questions:

- Where is space in education? How could be an interdisciplinary approach to space be fostered in the educational context?
- Where do built environment education and art education / education through art overlap?
- How can architects and pedagogues collaborate? Which examples exist in different geographical contexts?

Following experts participated in the round table discussion and summarized their perspectives on built environment education:

**Eszter Tóth, PhD candidate, Department of Urban Planning at the HafenCity University Hamburg, Chair and Co-founder of kultúrAktív Association** has a double perspective on this field at the intersection of education and urban planning. As a researcher and practitioner in the field of built environment education she believes that space - and place as the immediate environment - is pedagogical. It teaches about the world and forms our identity. But in a continuous Deweyian organism-environmental transaction we also continuously shape our environment and (co-)create space. Built environment education, thus, aims at developing young peoples' understanding for the built environment, fostering young people to be aware about and to sustain the cultural and ecological integrity of places, and supporting them to consciously

shape places themselves. This approach is inherently interdisciplinary and interventionist and it grounds in the collaboration of architects and teachers, and in learning by interacting with space.

**Pihla Meskanen, CEO of Arkki International and Co-founder of Arkki School of Architecture for Children and Youth**, introduced her perspective on built environment education as an architect, on the bases of the concept of her institution. Arkki is leading in architecture education for children and youth in the world and its mission is to provide young people the most essential 21st century skills through architecture and design. Being a form of art bridging humanities and sciences, being interdisciplinary and involving creative action, architecture is appropriate for supporting the development of key competences such as complex problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. It also has great possibilities for STEAM education, fosters hands-on building and construction, and develops an understanding for (co-creating) the built environment. Arkki education is given by teachers who have a degree in architecture, in order to build on their expertise for mediating architectural understanding and design thinking.

**Gabriella Pataky PhD, director of the Art Teacher Master's Program at Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education, Department of Visual Education and lecturer at Moholy-Nagy University of Arts and Design in Budapest:** She focuses on art teacher and early childhood educator training and educational spaces. According to her latest diagnostic studies, children's visual skills are less developed today than they were 40 years ago, which indicates an alarming tendency. One of the reasons for this is rooted in the inconvenient design of educational spaces. Pataky calls for creating educational spaces for the changing challenges of the 21st century art education. It is not enough to deal with the questions "WHAT competencies we are developing" and "HOW to improve those competencies". The question we also have to ask is: "WHERE to improve these competencies". Educational

and environmental psychological research shows the significance of both the physical environment and institutional infrastructure have on children's development. From the perspective of art education, well-designed creative spaces are crucial, but it is also important to implement complex and transdisciplinary approaches to learning in order to support children to deal with their own (physical) environment. Contemporary art issues and technics are able to effectively support this learning process.

**Helene Illeris** PhD, Professor of Art Education at the University of Agder, introduced her situationist approach to learning and its spatial aspects: "Inspired by contemporary art practices, I believe built environment has potentials not only for the shaping of social relations, but to become an active part in social relations. In other words built environment relates to processes of subjectivation, which are by nature educational. In this sense I do not see built constructions as 'environment' but as active participants in ongoing exchanges with humans (and even with animals, plants, things.). When we shape and build our environment, we even shape ourselves."

**Teresa Eca, president of InSEA**, summarized the developments in education through art in relation to the built environment: "InSEA is interested in promoting the discussion of topics related to natural and built environment, and challenges members to make visible their projects and publications so other educators can learn from the experiences. As art educators; artists working in education; and researchers in art education we believe that the arts in education can contribute to:

- Awareness and sensitivity to the environment and environmental challenges
- Knowledge and understanding of the environment and environmental challenges
- Foster attitudes of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality
- Develop skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges

- Increase participation in activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges”

**Glen Coutts, secretary of InSEA**, stressed the importance and value of built environment education and the initiative of discussing this issue within the InSEA community: “The session brought together a number of key researchers and authors with a shared interest in this timely and important topic. I say this because our built (and natural) environments are often underestimated as a learning and teaching resource by educators at all levels. The authors to be applauded for their signal contribution to built environment education, their work is very important and chimes perfectly with the aims of the international Society for Education through Art. I fully support the idea of extending the work for international participations and I believe that Dr. Pataky and Tóth are already working on that; it deserves support from decision makers and funders.”

The relevance of this topic is shown by the number of contributions at the InSEA congress in 2018 in Espoo, which were dealing with the role of space and place in education through art from different perspectives. These perspectives covered a wide range of thematic issues, from environmental awareness and sustainability (Ernst Wagner) to cultural identity (Timo Jokela), from placemaking and community building (NYU Art Education) to educational space and architecture (Skaliczki, Pataky).

Teresa Eca, and Glenn Coutts supported to co-found a working group within the InSEA community, which aims at mapping and further developing art education projects with a spatial focus. The working group<sup>1</sup> 3612+ Early Childhood & Built Environment in Art Education was finally created during the InSEA congress in 2018 in Espoo and introduced during the InSEA Seminar 2018 in Thessaloniki, Greece. The working group strives for raising the awareness for the built environment and architecture among art educators, to incite and encourage research and publications connected to built environment education within the InSEA community, and

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://insea.org/Built-Environment-Education-InSEA>

to develop a network of experts within InSEA who are interested and experienced in this field.