

DIALOGUES BETWEEN BODY AND SPACES

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A PRACTICE-ORIENTED APPROACH

Over the years we have observed and registered the behaviour of kids between 0 - 7 years old within domestic, public and school environments.

We have filtered our look by active education, Seitai activity and “awareness through the body” study and practice.

After these first experiences as “passive” observers, we started to test space interaction and exploration guided processes. We have been working with 3 - 12 years old kids, playing within enclosed spaces and also open air spaces. We have registered a wide range of body expressions and gestures related to the structure and the qualities of the explored space.

Through guided activities we tried to understand the relationship between these different qualities and structures and how the body responds to, for example, playing in a park, or in a congested street rather than in a noisy square.

The following considerations come from the gathered experiences, know-hows and all the accumulated information:

– Since the womb, a human being evolves interacting with the



Early interaction with the surrounding environment



Feeling embraced



Projecting forward or backward

- surrounding environment by means of movement and sense stimulation.
- Our physical, mental and emotional well-being is influenced by the quality of this interaction.
 - Every place with its dimensional, material and sensorial qualities is therefore crucial for our well-being.
 - Through our body, we are able to identify the feelings and the small physical, mental and emotional changes that a specific environment produces in ourselves.

FOUR ESSENTIAL IMPULSES

We have identified four essential impulses that reflect a child’s interaction with a place: feeling embraced, watching carefully, projecting forward or backward, being permeable. We arranged these four impulses together with senses, movements and spatiality, showcasing a matrix that allows us to investigate and to transform every place by means of our body. The following table shows a summary of the matrix:

IMPULSE	QUALITY	ELEMENT	FEELING	MOVEMENT	ARCHITYPE
Feeling embraced	Fluidity	Water	Relax	Rotation/Spiral	Cave/Nest
Watching carefully	Firmness	Earth	Upright tension	Vertical	Watching tower
Projecting FW or BW	Dynamism	Fire	Oriented tension	Frontal	Boat
Being permeable	Permeability	Air	Tension/Loosening	Centripetal/Centrifugal	Threshold

TOWARDS HETEROGENEOUS URBAN SPACES

If we look at our cities through a child’s eyes, we realise that urban spaces activate mostly the sympathetic nervous system (“fight or flight” response, physical and mental activity) to the detriment of the parasympathetic nervous system (“rest and digest” function, recovery, contemplation).

The main reason is a redundancy of vertical lines and corners, a redundancy of noise, density, hard materials and a hopeless lack of green areas. There is a general deficiency of complexity that affects kid’s health (hyperactivity, sleep disorders, stress). The best thing would be to have diversified urban spaces to satisfy the four impulses with respect for everyone’s peculiarities and transitory needs also. We can take advantage of our matrix to activate a participative process within public urban spaces craving heterogeneity and multiplicity.

KID-DRIVEN DESIGN

Children are the key players of this investigation and transformation process. It’s a five steps process. Adults support kids as observers and facilitators. All the five steps are open to contributors and advices:

- 1. Analysis.** The process starts with awareness through the body exercises to activate kids sensorial perception. They can experience spaces through play, allowing peculiarities, criticalities and potentialities to emerge.
- 2. Mapping.** Gathering the information coming from kids' observations, the adults make a map that shows tension spots, opening areas and place vocations according to the different impulses.
- 3. Vision.** Helping themselves with drawings, collages and temporary set-ups, kids build visions and images. They offer a way to transform the spaces, to adapt the place to their needs and wishes.
- 4. Design and construction.** A team of designers-craftsmen manages and supervises the vision conversion into physical interventions to be built inside the place. It will be a design-by-doing flowing process to ease the involvement of the different players. It is also a tailor-made design and building process. The final shape is driven by body needs, wishes and imagination.
- 5. Test.** Finally, kids put to test what has been built through free play.



Watching carefully

A CITY FOR ALL

An inclusive design and building process helps to strengthen reciprocal bondings, sense of community and sense of place.

From a kid's point of view, the activation of the awareness through the body lets them realise their usually underestimated or ignored capabilities. They can evaluate their well-being within a place or a specific circumstance, they become key players in transformation processes. A kid, like an adult, is capable of criticizing, visioning, designing, building.

A child-sized city is a city for everyone.

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