

THE MOBILE ARCHITECTURE WORKSPACE

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WORKING WITH ARCHITECTURE IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

ARCHITECTURE ON THE MOVE

In the years leading up to 2017 and the celebration of the European Capital of Culture in Aarhus, the Children's Cultural Centre in Aarhus hosted an international conference about children, young people and architecture and established a Nordic network based on the same focus. Taking these experiences as our point of departure, a number of different projects were presented during the European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017. One of these was the project »The Mobile

Architecture Workspace«, which visited six council areas across the central region in Denmark. From March to October 2017, more than 5000 children and young people throughout the region engaged in architectural investigations and took part in the construction of large-scale houses and developed local designs for urban spaces.

HANDS ON, HEADS ON, HEARTS ON

The Mobile Architecture Workspace is a creative space for families with children and for pupils in the primary and lower secondary school. The workspace is set up in a 22-foot freight container which was redesigned with help from architects and art workers. It is loaded with different

materials involved in developing architecture and construction work in general, and tools. With these materials DIY activities as well as activities led by a professional architect were established. In collaboration with the architect involved in The Mobile Architecture Workspace and with the help from students at local technical colleges, children and young people gained practical experience in designing architecture. This included sawing, carpentry and hammering and the many work processes were performed in order to give the buildings shape and to build models for new urban spaces.

In The Mobile Architecture Workspace, children and young people relate to the city and experience it from their own perspectives. Collaborating with a professional architect, they gain knowledge about architecture as well as insight into local cultural history and architectural resources. They use their imagination and creativity to improve their understanding of the city and urban development. Furthermore, they are given a chance to express their thoughts through small models of city elements which they want to add to, alter or transform. In this way, they experience how architecture and urban spaces contribute to establish cohesion in society and, simultaneously, they discover that they have their own voice in shaping future development.

Regardless of their skills and backgrounds, the activities in The Mobile Architecture Workspace enable children and young people to put their thoughts and ideas into action, while at the same time gaining understanding of and reflecting on local cultural heritage and processes and crafts related to architecture. They gain an awareness of the need to conserve resources and an understanding of the teamwork that is necessary when you work in the field of architecture. The interdisciplinary focus was aimed at creating an interaction between creativity, movement and learning and, at the same time, establishing sensory experiences through culture and technology. Teachers have confirmed that the project strengthens the sense of



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citizenship experienced by the involved children and young people. Likewise, it enhances their creativity and their sense of democratic principles.

Building their own constructions and houses, the children demonstrated a very high level of creativity and responsibility. They engaged in discussions on aesthetics, sustainability and usability and took immense pride in conveying their thoughts about the process and the final products to their friends, teachers and parents. »If only every school day was like this, I would never go home«, one of the boys promised. And indeed, the level of enthusiasm was very high in both boys and girls as new ideas on how to improve their local environments developed and took form. It seems obvious that children learn more when they are enjoying their lessons. If the level of energy used on a task is indicative of openness for learning, the learning curve was steep. At any rate, it was a pleasure to listen to the children reflect on their creations, while describing in detail how they will change the everyday life in their local area and contribute to a better environment. Furthermore, it is our experience that when children and young people engage in arts and cultural education, their capacity for reflection is strengthened. Through the different activities in The Mobile Architecture Workspace, children and young people learn to reflect upon their own culture, the culture of others and culture in general. Hopefully,

it helps them to find ways in which they can function in a modern culture characterized by unclear cultural boundaries calling for negotiations of identity.

The Children's Cultural Centre in Aarhus develops a wide range of arts and cultural education programs in the belief that arts – including architecture – matters. It matters for our creativity as individuals and as a society, for our health and wellbeing, and it is essential to the future of our children. Through experiencing, participating in and creating arts and culture, they come to understand and express themselves, and when used in an educational context, arts and culture enhance their learning skills.

INCREASED INTEREST IN ARCHITECTURE

The Mobile Architecture Workspace is one of the many different projects within the overall frame of The Experimentarium of Architecture which focuses on communicating architecture to children and young people in the city of Aarhus and in the central region in Denmark with inspiration from Danish and international partners.

All of the topics are related to architecture and include cultural heritage and urban planning as well as new digitalisation and sustainability. The projects have different target groups, ranging from the youngest nursery school children, through young people to lifelong learning for adults and they include individual courses as well as larger urban

district projects in the city of Aarhus and the central region of Denmark.

Traditionally, very few projects of this kind have been launched in Denmark, but in recent years the projects developed in Aarhus have inspired architectural activities in many other places throughout the country. The concepts have gained new life and been adapted to suit local communities. At a European level, the projects have resulted in Nordic and European enquiries and collaborations. In 2018, The Mobile Architecture Workspace is presented again in various towns and cities in the central region of Denmark.

The Experimentarium of Architecture was a strategic ReThink-project under the European Capital of Culture 2017 and was developed in collaboration with the Competence Centre for Children, Young People and Visual Arts.

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