

Built Environment Education is directly related with the urban culture and the city which is the collective production of the urban dwellers. According to Harvey (2012), the right to the city is the urban dweller's right to reinvent and reshape the city according to his/her needs and wishes. But this right is a collective right, not an individual one. The urban dweller should be aware of the fact that the city does not belong to an individual, but to the whole society.

Awakening urban consciousness is only possible by promoting the values of the built environment at the early stages of human life. Rather than injecting special precisions to a grown-up's life, helping a child grow up with these values is a more secure way of creating public consciousness. But there is a general tendency to exclude children from built environment decisions, even though their lives are directly affected by them. Like many other fields, adults are making decisions about the built environment on behalf of children. But having a voice in the shaping process of his/her own built environment independently from the individual's age, gender, race is an issue that should be evaluated in the frame of civic rights (Hart, 1997). From this perspective, children should be included in the urban design process as active participants.

It is a public responsibility to set the necessary platforms for child participation. According to Knowles-Yanez (2005), including children in the social decision-making process should be considered with youth activism, public participation, children's rights, experimental education and sustainability. Including children in urban planning processes would also benefit their individual and intellectual development. From the educational point of view, child participation in urban planning enriches the present curriculum with new cognition and experience.

There are many programs all over the world which come out with the assertion of being a children participation project. But the important thing is to create a meaningful participation which means the interactive participation of the children on the subjects affecting their individual and social lives. This participation process should be structured by the pursuits, aims and competencies of the children instead of passivizing them. An ideal participation project should have some specific qualities. It should be transparent, have voluntary basis, promote children to present their ideas, let them understand the whole process with all its aspects, offer the opportunity of building up the structure of the activity to children and let the children to see the results of their participation and effort (Chawla; 2001).

A successful Built Environment Education (BEE) model ought to be shaped both as a medium for creating awareness on environmental issues and also a direct way of participating in environmental design. Providing a proper environmental education, including children and youth in the urban decision-making process which is generally assumed as a "grown-up subject" is also important for letting children gain their self-confidence, which is important also for their social development.

## PLAY WITHOUT BARRIERS (PWB) PROJECT

The PWB project is basically a built environment education program continued between 2013-2016 and organized by the collaboration of several institutions. The main coordinator of the project is NKK (Nilüfer Kent Konseyi / Nilüfer City Council). The author's participation in the project was as an advisor and instructor in the educational phase. There were also other shareholders getting involved in the project including the Departments of Architecture and Education from the universities in Bursa & Istanbul (BOU, BTU, ITU, UU), the Nilüfer Municipality, District National Education Directorate (under the Ministry of National Education), the Chamber of Architects-Bursa Branch and the Chamber of Landscape Architects-Bursa Branch, "Bizim Ev" Social Life Support Center.

PWB aimed to provide necessary knowledge for all urban dwellers in order to participate in the urban design consciously and provoke urban awareness. The secondary goal of the project was to produce a preliminary design for a playground where disabled and nondisabled children can play altogether. Therefore the educational schedule was designed in order to give the proper theoretical and practical knowledge convenient for making children, the potential users of the playground, produce a design for their own needs.

The children who would attend to this program were chosen according to several criteria. The first criterion was to create an inclusive playground so that a total number of 30 attendees were planned, six of who were disabled and 24 were not. The second criterion was to involve the actual users of an urban space in the designing process. Therefore, the attendees of the program were chosen among the residents and the students attending the schools nearby the project site. The third criterion was the age of the participants. They were aged between 8-14 years old, as this group was the most appropriate group to learn and benefit from the built environment education, meanwhile being the potential age group to use the playground.

## PWB EDUCATIONAL SCHEDULE THEORETICAL EDUCATION



The theoretical section of PWB educational schedule is based on seminars on several subjects. The weekly topics discussed in this section are as follows: "Creative Drama & Introduction", "Human Rights, Children Rights", "Disabled Rights", "Constituting a Project", "The Use of Public Space", "Sustainability, Environment & Ecology", "Evolution of Play", "Built Environment / Recycling", "Body & Architecture", "Urban Space & Urban Management", "Architectural Cognition / Landscape Design". The topics of the seminars were chosen in order to create a general urban consciousness, supply necessary information about the built environment and inclusive playground design. This theoretical knowledge was helpful for the designing process and also essential to constitute urban consciousness. The theoretical background also nourished the participants' capacity of being a part of a team-work. When all of the various topics mentioned in the seminars came together, they formed an essential cognitive formation for the following design process.

Each week there was a meeting on Saturday that lasted for 3-4 hours. Each of the seminars was given by experts of that topic. All of the seminars were divided into 2-3 sections. Between the sections, there were breaks in order not to lose the students' concentration on the subject. Students played several games during these breaks. At the end of the seminar there was an open debate where children could express their ideas or ask questions about the topic.



## PWB EDUCATIONAL SCHEDULE DESIGN EDUCATION



The design education section of PWB is consisted of interrelated practical exercises that aimed to teach methods of design and representational techniques. The educational curriculum of the second term was planned to direct participants to design the playground project step by step. Each week's program consisted of approximately 3 parts that covered up to 4 hours total with the breaks. At the beginning of the session, there was a short presentation on that week's topic, and the students were given a paper including a detailed schedule explaining the exercises. There were generally two professional designers each week in workshop place to explain the task and help the participants without over-shaping their creativity. These sessions were similar to an architectural design studio. First exercises were focused on **basic design principles** and gave clues about ways and instruments of design. These were followed by **analysis and preparatory exercises** about analyzing the project site and neighborhood, setting the principal goals of the design. The exercises in the final 8 weeks aimed to develop the ability to design for a specific purpose, learn all factors affecting an architectural design, **experience all different levels in the architectural design process** (initial sketches, making up requirement list, conceptual design, jury evaluation, redesigning the project, etc.) and **gather a playground project at the end of a cooperative study** as a final product. The methodology of these design activities was based on brain storming, team work, face to face education, table crits and self-representational techniques.

## PWB PLAYGROUND PROJECT APPLICATION PHASE

At the end of the educational phase, the participant children designed a playground project and prepared a 1/50 scaled model of it as a cooperative work. The participants developed various designs during the whole process, but at the end they came up with a cooperative design which was found to be optimal for the needs of all users and convenient for the site. The design principles of this playground were protecting the present natural texture, designing play areas that enable various play scenarios instead of sticking to stereotype play equipment, using the play opportunities that nature offers and developing a playground in which everybody including abled and disabled children and adults would share the joy of playing.



Once the playground design was completed, the constructing phase started. The participants, educators and technical staff of Nilüfer Municipality, the shareholder responsible from the construction of the project, came together in several meetings in order to brief the aspects of design. Consequently the application project was prepared. During the construction all the parties of the project came together in the project site in order to avoid malpractice of the project. Also the participant children could find the opportunity of witnessing the construction process. This is also supporting the participatory soul of the project. The most common deficiency of participatory projects is that, participants can't see the result of their effort, which demotivates them and prevents them from attending this kind of projects anymore. But in PWB, participants were able to follow the process step by step and come out with a concrete product of their effort.

## PWB PLAYGROUND

After the education and application phases, PWB Playground and Children Assembly Center located in it were put into service in June 2016. The most unique aspect of PWB is involving children in urban design process through participation and not leaving this just only a design project but realising and constructing the final product. By this way the users of an urban space found the opportunity to reflect their ideas, wishes and needs to their environment. Another important factor is that this user group is composed of children which is the most ignored fraction in urban participation. Combining the participatory process with built environment education helped to raise urban awareness and made it possible to obtain an applicable project. Spreading participatory citizenship awareness amongst youngsters is rather important for the sustainability of the notion.



### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Chawla, L. (2001). Evaluating Children's Participation: Seeking Areas of Consensus, PLA Notes 42, pp:9-13  
 Hart, R. A. (1997). Children's Participation: The Theory and Practise of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care. Earthscan Publishing: London  
 Harvey, D. (2012). Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution. Verso Pub.:NY  
 Knowles-Yanez, K. L. (2005). Children's Participation in Planning Processes. Journal of Planning Literature. 20:3, pp: 3-14