

**Making Space 2010: architecture and design for children and young people**  
**7 – 8<sup>th</sup> October, Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh**  
**Key points:**

An international conference funded by the Scottish Government and held in partnership with OECD's Centre for Effective Learning Environments and Architecture and Design Scotland. The conference promoted innovation, creativity and sustainability in design for children and young people aged 0-18. International experts explored how children relate to their environment, how it impacts on their learning, the implications of Curriculum for Excellence on building and space design and what we need to focus on in the future. Making Space 2010 included an international architecture award focusing on excellence and innovation in architecture and design for children and young people. The award attracted entries from 26 countries.

Speakers included: Michael Russell, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (by video address); Michael Kellet, Scottish Government; Dr Charles Whitehead, Social Anthropologist; Sam Cassels, Architecture and Design Scotland; Dr Pia Ikonen, Brain Management Ltd; Michele Zini, ZPZ Partners and Reggio Children; Karin Hoyland, The Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Richard Yelland, OECD; and Will Alsop, RMJM. Chair: Seona Reid, Director, Glasgow School of Art.

**Key points**

**There is more to school than a building... designing school as part of the community**

Involving the wider community in education is key to the successful implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and emerged as a strong theme at Making Space 2010. Architects are not simply designing school buildings, they must understand the bigger picture. Gillian Tee, said schools should be multi-functional and operate as “a community resource” and Michele Zini, outlining Reggio Children's philosophy, said: “Schools and education of children must be integrated not isolated... The school setting is the osmotic filter for the children's learned experiences.” Indeed, the award-winning design from Thailand was described by judges as a building which provided “a focus for the community that... will build passion in the neighbourhood and contribute to a positive development in the area.” Sam Cassels cited a school building programme in Dumfries and Galloway as an example of good practice.

**Society's view of childhood and its impact on architecture and space design for children.**

Society's view of childhood impacts significantly on the development and delivery of services for children at every level. Reggio Emilia, Italy, is world-renowned for its “image of the child” as “competent, an explorer, equipped with a hundred languages and great abilities”, and as a citizen in his/her own right. This is reflected in its early childhood centres – from the way centres are designed to the furniture that goes in them. Karin Hoyland believes this image of the child as a citizen impacts on urban design more generally. “Make locations child-friendly, rather than just making separate locations for children”, she said, and referred to research which found that children spend only 10 per cent of the time in spaces designed specifically for them. A new Scottish Government policy called ‘Designing streets’, “puts people above the vehicle”. A view of

children as confident and independent individuals is key in policies such as Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child.

### **Using child development (biological, neurological and anthropological) to enhance architecture and design for children and young people.**

Could architects, landscape designers and planners benefit from closer collaboration with professions which specialise in understanding how children develop, particularly in light of Curriculum for Excellence, which places particular importance on developing children's independence and creativity? Pia Ikonen spoke about the importance of creating spaces that allow children to indulge in "wild play" – where they are able to develop their imaginations and creativity. She described creativity as "a resource for all learning". And Dr Charles Whitehead urged delegates to create spaces for children which protect "the innate playfulness that is essential to the wellbeing of children and the development of balanced, healthy, and socially constructive citizens". He agreed that "children seek out the untidy and incomplete" and questioned whether this should indeed influence the way that spaces are designed for children. Seona Reid, said: "A child's world is not necessarily divided into neat compartments in the way that bureaucracy often is. Perhaps we need to learn from the flexibility of children, and be brave enough to create spaces that are adaptable and can be constantly remoulded for different uses."

### **Involving children and other stakeholders in design**

There was concern among delegates that although stakeholder involvement is strong at the beginning of projects, this ends once the brief goes to the designer/architect. Their involvement must be sustained from beginning to completion of the build in order to be meaningful. A key aspect of the Reggio Children philosophy, presented by Michele Zini, is engagement and consultation. Relationships throughout the design and build process must "thread through all thinking and creation, involving children, educationalists and parents and carers". Will Alsop felt the current procurement process in this country "is a barrier to consultation" because bids conform to what the contractor believes is expected.

"Observation" was also put forward as an important part of the consultation process that is often overlooked. Just watching how children interact with their environment can provide valuable insight.

### **The need for more research**

Delegates raised concerns about a lack of research in this country on the impact of space and design on children's play and learning experiences. It seems that more weight is given to this in Nordic countries, as cited in *Children in Europe*, issue 19, and perhaps reflects "an incredible under-appreciation of the importance of childhood play in this country".

### **Designing for the Curriculum for Excellence**

Some of the key themes emerging from this conference are integral to policies such as Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child and demonstrate how important the design of indoor and outdoor space is to their successful implementation. The Scottish award winner was a good example of a low cost conversion of an old school dining hall to an imaginatively designed out of school building.

A resource, giving details of the award entries and their relevance to Scottish policies such as Curriculum for Excellence, will be available to the public at a later date.

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