

# Designing with Children

## Journeys Osieck

In 2006, the international association of children's architecture education, PLAYCE, led a workshop in Osieck Poland in which children at the Junior High School explored their school and local environment through a range of activities and sub-projects. Two PLAYCE members, architect Gary Johnson (Gareth Hoskins Architects) and the Polish landscape architect Ania Wrobel, secured funding from The Lucznica Academy Association to be able to develop the children's initial proposals and interventions through further workshops, this time also involving children from the primary school and architecture students from the University of Strathclyde.

### Motivation

PLAYCE values children's architecture education for a variety of reasons, which range from its potential to enrich approaches to learning and promote critical and creative thinking, to its ability to develop both skills and desire for engagement in democratic processes related to the future of the built environment. It is within this framework that the Osieck project was developed and it was therefore intended to:

- develop analytical skills through exploring architectural, design and environmental issues;
- allow young people a role in shaping their environment;
- promote the dialogue of people of different backgrounds, generations and professions by common positive work through an open exchange of ideas and experiences;
- develop communication skills through discussions and team work;
- support working co-operatively and collaboratively on tasks;

### What

Full size models and structures in school grounds

### Where

Osieck, Poland

### Age

13-15

### Group Size

16 from Scotland, 15-30 from Poland

### Project Stage

Concept, Construction, Design Development, In Use, Technical Design

### Children's Roles

(Co) Designers, Expert Consultants, Placemakers

### Timescale

September 2006–October 2008

### Partners

Ania Wrobel (Landscape architect)  
Gary Johnson, Gareth Hoskins Architects (Architect)  
PLAYCE (Facilitation)  
Lucznica Academy Association (Funder)  
Pupils from the Primary School and Junior High School in Osieck (Participants)  
Pupils from St. Matthews Academy, Kilwinning (Participants)

- develop creative and imaginative thinking;
- develop visual, construction and production skills;
- raise awareness of the spaces and places in which we live and understanding of man's influence on natural and built environments;
- create understanding around issues of sustainability in respect of traditional building techniques and materials within a cultural context; and
- promote architecture and built environment education.

## Children's involvement

The first workshop by PLAYCE involved a range of sub-projects with different themes. The 'Osieck Explorers', for example, looked at ways to draw attention to the special features and details in the built environment and to see their town in new ways; children focussed their own and other observers' attention by setting up poles with cardboard viewfinders to act as new 'eyes' for seeing architectural features around them. A group of children focused on the public spaces in the town and made proposals for those public spaces through models and 'performed' activities in the spaces themselves. The children working in their school grounds began with observation exercises, evaluating these outdoor areas and identifying the places they liked and disliked. Key among their findings was their appreciation of a particular wooded area of the school grounds, which they were not encouraged to use and which had been identified by the local authorities to become a car park for the adjacent community leisure centre. They began discussing their ideas for improvement and made drawings, often working outdoors in the area that was selected for change. Pupils presented their ideas to the rest of their group and discussed preferences.

The children agreed on a number of ideas to take forward, with one group renovating existing benches and railings and two groups choosing to make interventions in the wooded area. The first constructed a shelter and seat using willow, where they could wait for the bus in the rain and the second group constructed an amphitheatre and fire-pit, creating earthworks and using found materials and surplus construction materials already onsite. This was followed by a public presentation in the school grounds of all of the work carried out by the school children and an 'opening' of the amphitheatre, with ceremonial lighting of the fire-pit by the town's mayor.

In November 2006, Osieck pupils spent 2 days in workshops with building and landscape architects, further developing their proposals for change. They used techniques of photomontage, drawn plans and scale models to illustrate their final designs, which were then shown to architects and parents. In early 2007, the school pupils identified a space – a local bar – in which they could exhibit their ideas and suggestions. In February 2007, this bar was transformed by the pupils into the exhibition space where their ideas for their school grounds were documented and displayed to 200 attending residents. Children were heavily involved in the setting-up of their work for the exhibition – models they had made, sketches, cardboard and scale figures.

During summer and autumn 2007, 16 pupils from Kilwinning, Scotland, visited the Osieck School where Osieck pupils began by presenting their previous work. After this period of familiarisation with the work so far, both Polish and Scottish children together engaged in

talks and demonstrations by Polish wicker masters who explained history, tradition and techniques of wicker work to the participating children. Group working enabled the children to explore, at first hand, the possibilities and limitations of wicker as a material. Together, the pupils created full size models and structures for the school grounds.

A year later, in September 2008, the Polish school students this time visited the Scottish School – St. Matthews Academy, Kilwinning. During their week-long visit, the Osieck pupils familiarised themselves with the Scottish culture and local architecture, eventually documenting their experiences through photography and memoirs, placing them in the context of a cultural journey of their surroundings – both architecture and wider environment.

## Ouptuts and outcomes

As a result of the children's initial work with PLAYCE and the physical manifestation of their voices in and about their school grounds, the mayor declared that the wooded area would no longer become a car park. Installations were created for their school grounds and an exhibition which was shared with 200 members of the local community. Documentation of the later stages of the process can be found in a book due to be published – 'Stop: Osieck'.

## Resources

Gareth Hoskins 'Architects Journeys in a Forgotten Landscape Scotland / Poland'  
<http://www.garethhoskinsarchitects.co.uk/projects/education/journeys-in-a-forgotten-landscape> (accessed 21 March 2013).

Journeys in a forgotten landscape blog  
<http://architecturaleducation.blogspot.gr/2009/06/february-2007-osieck.html> (accessed 21 March 2013).

Playce (2006) 'In Dialogue with Surroundings'  
<http://www.playce.org/uploads/pdf/In%20Dialogue%20with%20Surroundings.pdf> (accessed 9 December 2013)



Courtesy: PLAYCE



Participants erecting the seven metre long wicker canopy.  
Courtesy: Gary Johnson (photographer)





Courtesy: PLAYCE



Courtesy: PLAYCE