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THE SPACES FOR THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN CHILDREN'S PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. *Bearing in mind that children at preschool age with their tender physical development represent a very sensitive category, as far as their staying in preschool institutions and taking part in various working functions and education is concerned, a very special treatment of children's physical activities through different ways of their engagement was performed. This paper deals with analysis of the spaces in which all types of these activities take place, with both closed and from the architectoniv and constructing points of view fixed and clearly defined spaces; and the outside spaces which function as a part of a children's institution. A special attention is paid to their size and their equipment as well as the existing law regulations in this area which are also commented on.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Preschool children with their delicate physical constitution while growing up and psycho-physical developing represent a specific and extremely sensitive category. As far as their stay in preschool institutions is concerned, as a part of many working and educating functions, there is a special treatment of physical activities with children as different sorts of their activities. This paper deals especially with architecturally and construction closed and strictly defined spaces for performing all these activities.

The way in which the children's needs for the physical activities will be met by means of appropriate surrounding where they spend most of the time, depends on their age, considering that children's preschool institutions such as nurseries and kindergartens take care of the children aging from 6 months up to 3 years, and from 3 up to 7 and the beginning of their schooling.

2. PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN NURSERIES

In nurseries which take care of the youngest children, up to 3 years old, the youngest of them being the most sensitive and dependant category of children spend most of the time in beds, except when they are fed, cleaned and washed. Their physical activities are taking places in beds as well. That is the space where they make their movements, where they are being interested in their bodies, or toys, get up or lie down again. Those who are the most persistent sometimes climb up the fence of bed, stand up and squat or lie down again. That is the space in which a nurse (kindergarten teachers take care of the older children in kindergartens) can do some plan exercises for strenghtening some parts of the body, and in that way they can influence the corect physical development of their delicate constitution.

A little bit older children, beside spending a part of their time in beds where they sneed, take rest of play they also sit at small tables, move or crawl along the living room at some periods of time. The children of this age after the first stambling steps make more stable ones and make physical activities, sqatting to reach their toy on the floor, or moving a chair while sitting at the table; they use these things as the first equipment for daily routine, a nurse is able to pay attantion to some simpler physical exercises with children.

The oldest children are the most independant while moving so that the place for this purpose and their plying represent the dominant space provided with toys and other equipment. There are some mats for rolling and similar physical activities in the living space for the children of this age. However, since these children walk and they are lively, interested in running and meeting older children, their treatmant and realization their physical activity is concerned is similar to those in kindergartens.

Thus they start using the other rooms in the building for their activities and for the first time they go out of the living room into the gathering ones where it is more difficult to take care of them and prevent their injuries.

3. SPACES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN KINDERGARTENS

Physical activities in kindergartens are a part of the curriculum of children's' and teacher's activities. Concerning the closed places within the building, the regulations do not specify the place of their performing; being different from the the outdoor plygrounds where the optimal areas, the materials and the equipment are clearly defined. Because of all these reasons, physical activities as the need of children of thes age, even as a game, are performed in different rooms. It depends of many factors which of them would be chosen by the architect. They are the following ones:

- the size, capacity and the number of the floors of a building
- the architectural concept of a building
- the curriculum and the way working with children

Considering the initial, most often the already set conditions and the locations limitations, as well as the attitudes towards these factors; there are the follwing ways of spacial solutions for the physical activities with children:

- within the living space
- in halls
- in the common multifunctional open space
- in the universal multifunctional hall or in a gymnasium.

There are nurseries where the special space for physical activities is not adequately defined and organized. In such institutions, the physical activities of children usually take place **within the unique living space**. These buildings are mostly of small size, with a small number of children's groups which influences the concept of the whole institution as well as the curriculum and the way of work with children. Very often these buildings are old, as far as their planning or construction are concerned so that their concept did not provide special spaces for physical activities and the physical activities of children's groups.

As far as their organisation is concerned the living rooms in these buildings are clustered along the longer or the shorter halls depending on the number of groups, and they are considered to be the linear type, without any special enlarging near the entrance. The curriculum does not plan any connection between the groups, so that each of them has its own living room. Since, the need for physical activities of children is present even in bad weather when it is impossible to use the outdoor playgrounds, and when children must move and play if not exercising, it is possible to perform these activities within the living rooms.

Living space itself according to its definition is a multifunctional one and it must meet the multifunctional demands with its size and shape. In this case it is not a big problem, by removing the movable furniture we get the central part of the room large enough for gathering and doing some physical exercises with children, at some periods of time among some other activities. Quickly after the time for playing or exercising, by removing tables, chairs and other furniture, it is possible to prepare the room for the following completely different activities.

A shortcoming of such work is seen in the change of the microclimate of the living space, raising the temperature, spreading dust and other small polluting particles, which can be a serious problem, no matter it is possible to make a natural ventilation. A better case is that one when it is possible to connect two living spaces, two neighbouring groups of children of the same or similar age, when the walls between the two of them can be removed. A larger central part is obtained, though the number of children is also larger, but they have the opportunity to play and work together.

The preschool institutions which are architecturally speaking of the hall type, where the living spaces are grouped along the main central hall, or they are attached to it at several sides, have a qualitatively new component a very precious common space enlarging. This **central common hall space** can also be treated as a multifunctional meeting place, according to the needs of the children of the same or different age. One of its most specific functions can be the taking place of physical activities doing physical exercises while standing on or the mats, when the rudiments of gymnastics with apparatus are taught accompanied by music. The youngest children can be taught the elements of sport dancing. Architecturally speaking there are several ways to solving the problem of halls.

Small or old buildings, when the idea of the enriched and organized hall space was not taken into consideration, have a classical approach to the problem of hall enlarging rationally dimensioned at the entrance. There is a large number of buildings of this sort both in our country and in the world. They do not represent an optimal solution, but if we want and are aware of the need of the physical activities of children, this enlarging of even such sort is important. It can be used as the space for coming out of the living space, and for doing exercises in the space with more air, so that living space is preserved for its basic use (Fig. 1).

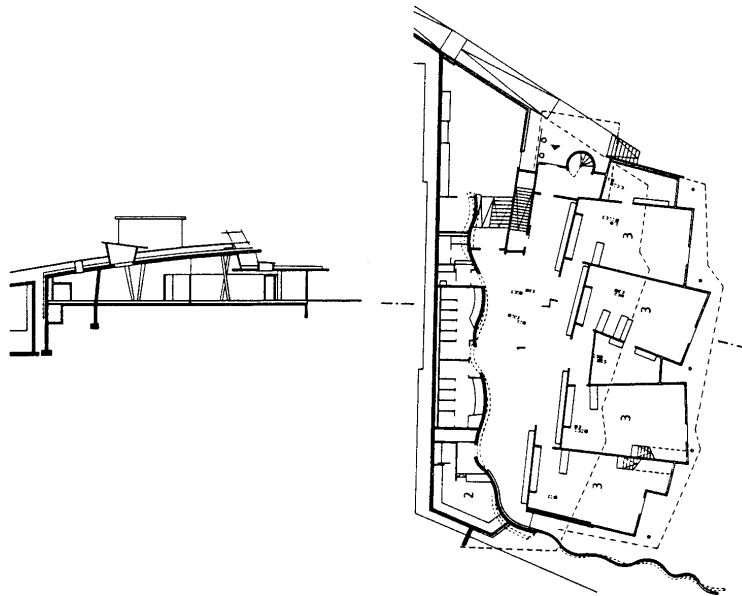


Fig. 1. Basis of ground floor of the children's institutions in Germering, Arch. Auer & Weber, Wolfgang Glaser, Munchen, 1996.

More modern concepts of preschool institutions are based on **the multifunctional hall space** as the central core of the meeting. The entrance zone of the building has its own entrance hall with a unique purpose; yet the living rooms for children are not directed towards it, but towards its own common central enlarging which is very often a new dimension of the entrance hall, and has a different floor level divided with two or three steps. A multifunctional space like this meets the conditions for performing such activities with children, activities which are based on movement and play, as well as their physical activities (Fig. 2).

Our law regulations as well as most of the European countries demand a **special multifunctional space** within a preschool institution. Its basic function is the gathering of all the groups for some common performances, happenings and playing. Since these are only temporal activities, one of the purposes of this space can be

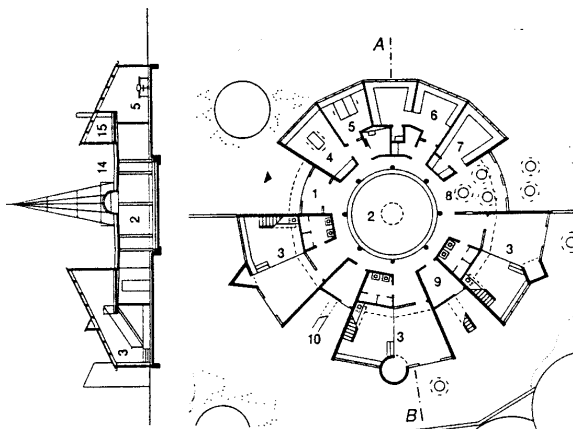


Fig. 2. Basis of ground floor of the children's institutions Birkenau, Arch. Prof. H. Waechter, 1993.

Since these are only temporal activities, one of the purposes of this space can be

the cases of physical engagement of children. If there is a special room for storing the tools, and the chairs, which is very often the case, this space can very quickly obtain the characteristics of a gymnasium, where games with balls can be played (Fig. 3).

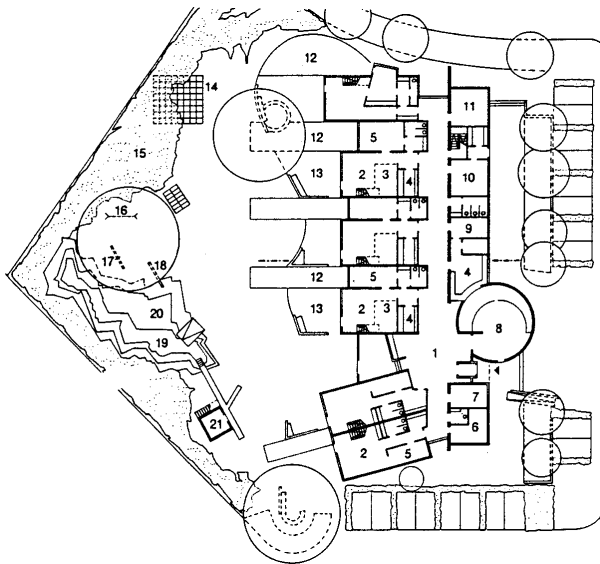


Fig. 3. Basis of ground floor of the children's institutions "Trimmelter Hof",
Trier, Arch. A. Funk, P. Schroder, 1993.

A real **gymnasium** as a part of a preschool institution is rarely found. It is a big investment both financially and constructively, as well as its equipment is concerned; so it is not often present even in the richer societies than our is. At the same time it is an investment into children's health and a correct physical development. Functionally, it can be considered a multi-functional space, and at the time when it is not used for its basic purpose it can be used for common activities and performances which imply gathering in a preschool institution because of some special occasion (Fig. 4).

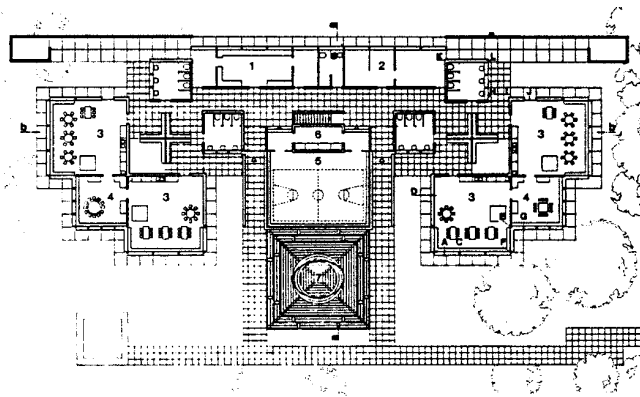


Fig. 4. Basis of ground floor of the children's institutions Angererstrabe, Minhen,
Arch. D. Schreiber, 1992.

4. CONCLUSION

The need of children's physical activities in preschool institutions is an inevitable fact which must face both the teachers and the parents who go to work and whose children

spend most of the day in the institutions such as nurseries and kindergartens. The way of performing these activities in children's institutions does not depend only on the curriculum and the way of work with children in the sense of planning and organizing their stay in this space, but on the concrete, physical and spatial advantages of each building. An adequately organized space, with a correct distribution of the individual rooms, their optimal dimensioning, with an appropriate and good realisation and equipment, is the basic condition for the good and appropriate use in the future.

The architectural praxis is full of poor, passive, degrading spaces which face the children from the early childhood after going out of their homes where they lived a different sort of life; and it is different for them to put these two way of life together. The comfort of the interior, healthy space and an appropriate work on developing a child's personality and his physical vitality are the primal conditions to invest in in order to reach the wanted goal.

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PROSTORI ZA FIZIČKE AKTIVNOSTI U DEČJIM PREDŠKOLSKIM USTANOVAMA

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Obzirom da deca predškolskog uzrasta svojom nežnom konstitucijom, u rastu i opštem psiho-fizičkom razvoju predstavljaju specifičnu i posebno osetljivu kategoriju, kada je u pitanju njihov boravak u predškolskim ustanovama u sklopu mnogostrukih funkcija u procesu rada i vaspitanja, zastupljen je poseban tretman fizičkih aktivnosti dece kroz različite vidove njihovog angažovanja. U radu se analiziraju prostori u kojima se odvijaju svi tipovi ovih aktivnosti, kako zatvoreni i u arhitektoško-građevinskom smislu fiksno i jasno definisani, tako i prostori na otvorenom koji funkcionišu u sklopu dečje ustanove. Posvećuje se posebna pažnja veličini i obliku ovih prostora, njihovoj opremljenosti i komentariše postojeća i aktuelna zakonska regulativa u toj oblasti.