

Designing with Children

Department store children's restaurant

Le Buffet restaurant concession is located on the 4th floor of the Karstadt department store, set within a pedestrianised retail area in the centre of Cologne, Germany. Die Baupiloten is an architecture practice based in Berlin. The directors of Le Buffet commissioned die Baupiloten to redevelop part of the restaurant area to become a space that children would like for eating, playing and relaxing. Die Baupiloten, working within its usual remit of involving users in design, led two engagement sessions for children. The session we observed followed on from a previous half-day workshop with children, which had taken place a month beforehand.

Motivation

The commission to design a children's space at Le Buffet restaurant area arose from die Baupiloten's reputation for design of high quality and striking public buildings and interiors. Of great importance to die Baupiloten's practice is how 'strong emphasis is placed on a sensory approach to the design of space and materiality'. As well as being a practising architect, Die Baupiloten founder Susanne Hofmann is an active trainer, researcher and academic particularly in the field of architecture and participation. The practice's portfolio of work is wide ranging and includes a number of spaces and participatory designs for children and young people of all ages.

The children's motivations arose from their own, their parents' and teachers' interests in participation in the design sessions. The initial invitation to this particular group of children developed from a connection between a Le Buffet employee (and mum) involving her own children; then subsequently children from the same school were asked if they'd like to participate.

What

Design for a children's area within a department store restaurant

Where

Cologne, Germany

Age

5-9 years old

Group Size

6 children

Project Stage

Brief, Concept

Children's Roles

Creative Inspirers

Timescale

2.5 hour workshop, March 2014

Partners

Susanne Hofmann (Architect, Founder of Die Baupiloten)

Martin Mohelnicky (Architect, Project Architect at Die Baupiloten)

Tina Strack (Architectural Assistant, Die Baupiloten)

Zuzana Tabačková (Architectural Assistant, Die Baupiloten)

6 children (Participants)

Parent and employee at Le Buffet (Facilitator)
Teacher (Facilitator)

This project is one of the four case studies that we followed live as part of the research process for the Leverhulme-funded project 'Creative encounters with children: Children transforming spatial design.'

Children's involvement

During the afternoon we observed in Le Buffet, children were first introduced to the two design workstations. Susanne also described a third station which was the research tent where one of the Sheffield research team based herself in order to get a quiet corner to talk with children and learn about the design session from their point of view. After the five minute introduction, the children worked in pairs – either with Martin at the 'model workstation' or Susanne at the 'module workstation', changing every 20 to 30 minutes and moving over to the research station when one of the design activities had been completed. An impromptu break for food from the café was taken in the middle of the session.

In the previous session children had used different materials to create their own shoebox dreamworlds including aluminium foils, old phone parts and computer keyboards, colourful papers, wires, sponges and cloth. There was no remit for the children to design the restaurant area in question but they were asked to take the 'land of milk and honey' as a starting point – thinking of it as somewhere where everything is abundant and available to them and where they would feel comfortable. The children had then written their own narratives to describe these worlds. The narratives and shoebox worlds were intended to represent the qualities of space that the children aspired to for the restaurant and, especially, what it would *feel* like. Using these texts and shoebox worlds as the basis of a brief, a design proposal had been developed in Die Baupiloten's office, which was now presented to the children at the 'model workstation', based with Martin Mohelnicky. Here children were invited to engage with and provide feedback on the model, with Martin providing small human figures with which children could explore the spaces. Prior to this, Martin read out loud the narratives to allow the children to make connections between their aspirations and the design proposal.

The second workstation, a deconstructed design proposal in the form of modular spaces and elements, was presented as 'the module' and based with Susanne Hofmann. This activity was created to enable the children to explore the key features more thoroughly, investigating materials and atmospheric qualities of space, again using small-scale card human figures. The 'modules' were diverse, many with openings, and could be positioned and re-positioned by children and stuck together with Velcro strips to build-up a larger scale model. These were similarly inspired by children's narratives from the previous workshop, drawing on qualities around light, colour and texture. Children had a variety of materials and resources available to use at this workstation to add to their models: 'spy glass' two way mirrors; periscopes; coloured transparent foils; staircases and small boxes representing different sized spaces; and sponges.

At both workstations, and following Susanne's suggestion, the children worked in self-selected pairs.

Outputs and outcomes

Children's co-created modules were photographed, and the whole process was recorded by designers, reporters and researchers. The chief outcomes for Die Baupiloten were the children's contributions to Susanne and Martin's understandings of their sensory,

experiential and activity preferences as well as furthering understandings of their design process with children, in particular around the use of design narrative and modules.

Although it was the intention that the children's space would be built very quickly after the engagement sessions, Le Buffet was unable to go ahead with the build.

Resources

Die Baupiloten <http://www.baupiloten.com/en/officestructure/> (accessed 24 February 2016)

Hofmann, S. (2014) *Architecture is Participation*. Jovis Berlin.



A dreamworld in a shoebox.



Making sense of the model.



Co-creation with modules.



So many materials, so much choice.

