

Designing with Children

TUC Park Playground

The TUC Park Playground is located within a well-preserved, bio-diverse area of 30 hectares in Chania, Crete: the Park for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna, created in 2004 by the Technical University of Crete (TUC). The park is open to the public, schools and other groups and serves the wider area as a unique habitat promoting environmentally friendly initiatives. In this context, Konstantinos-Alketas Oungrinis (Architect, TUC TIE Lab General Director and Asst. Professor) and Marianthi Liapi (Architect and Research Director at the TUC TIE Lab Educational Pla(y)ces Group) guided 25 students of architecture to design and implement the TUC Park Playground project with the aim to create an alternative, natural playground inside an olive grove. The grove transformed into a child-friendly, learning-through-play environment, which is currently used by the visiting kindergarten and elementary schools from the city of Chania.

Motivation

The main directive addressed to the design team by the Park's personnel was to create a child-friendly playground with the minimum artificial spatial imprint inside the grove. A second directive was to invite and involve a larger part of the local community in the Park's philosophy and activities.

The design team, in collaboration with a group of consultants, identified, in turn, four learning objectives that guided the creation of the new playground:

- The ability to read a natural environment and behave accordingly within it;
- The ability to understand short-term and long-term cyclical changes in the surrounding environment, related to seasonal shifts;

What

Natural playground

Where

Chania, Greece

Age

2-8

Group Size

50+

Project Stage

Concept

Children's Roles

Creative Inspirers, Expert Consultants

Timescale

February 2012 – February 2013

Partners

Konstantinos Alketas Oungrinis (Architect, TUC TIE Lab Director, Initiator and Project manager)

Marianthi Liapi (Architect-Playscape designer, consultant)

Yannis Phillis (TUC Park founder, TUC former rector, facilitator)

Costanza Dal Cin D'Agata (TUC Park biologist, facilitator)

Ioanna Manolikaki (TUC Park agronomist, facilitator)

Sophie Alevizaki (Pediatrician, consultant)

C. Chamilothoni (Student Architects, design and construction)

G. Chorba (Student Architects, design and construction)

S. Drakouli (Student Architects, design and construction)

– To bring together a larger part of the local community and promote an everyday living culture that respects nature, and;

– To support team play and collaboration between different groups.

Children's involvement

Prior to the intervention, the design team spent a lot of time observing the involved children's play routines and scenarios inside the grove, recording the ways in which they 'spatialised' play inside a natural environment.

The basic components in their playful activities were the olive trees (as fortresses, houses, hide-outs, nests and so on), as well as a variety of natural materials such as leaves, flowers, stones, soil and mud found in abundance inside the Park.

Children dedicated most of their time in exploratory and fantasy play, while testing their physical skills in climbing, jumping and running around the tree trunks. In most of the conversations carried out with children and their teachers, the design team observed their underlying wish either for objects that 'look like...' or for objects-mediums that facilitate the construction of imaginary play-worlds within a real space-time frame.

Outputs and outcomes

The area of intervention was divided into three activity zones: in-between the olive trees, under the olive trees and on the olive trees. Only natural and recyclable materials, like wood, plastic milk crates and natural jute twine, were used. The playscape that finally emerged after a long process of testing and experimenting with forms and functions includes both hand-crafted and machine-crafted, child-proof configurations that facilitate open-ended play for numerous body and mind games. The playground is ephemeral and portable. This is the first Educational Pla(y)ce created by the TUC Transformable Intelligent Environments Laboratory in February 2013.

Resources

Transformable Intelligent Environments Laboratory, Technical University of Crete 'TUC TIE Lab Education / Play / Educational Pla(y)ces / Εκπαιδóτοποι' <http://www.tielabtuc.com/tuc-park-playground> (accessed 23 February 2016).

Technical University of Crete 'Park for the Preservation of Fauna and Flora' <http://www.tuc.gr/408.html> (accessed 23 February 2016).

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TUC Park Playground, Chania, Park for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna. Courtesy: Transformable Intelligent Environments Laboratory (TUC TIE Lab), Technical University of Crete.



Supporting children's favourite activities. TUC Park Playground, Chania, Park for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna. Courtesy: Transformable Intelligent Environments Laboratory (TUC TIE Lab), Technical University of Crete.



Social play at the TUC Park Playground, Chania, Park for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna. Courtesy: Transformable Intelligent Environments Laboratory (TUC TIE Lab), Technical University of Crete.



Intergenerational play and interactions among children. TUC Park Playground, Chania, Park for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna. Courtesy: Transformable Intelligent Environments Laboratory (TUC TIE Lab), Technical University of Crete.