

**CHILDREN'S HIDEOUTS - SHELTERS (DENS)
REGARDING TO BE AN ARCHETYPE AS CREATION,
BUILDING AREA OF CULTURAL FRAMEWORK**

Nikolaos Mitoulas

PhD Urban Planning, N.T.U.A., Educator

nmitoulasgr@yahoo.gr

Abstract

Time, space and human relations define the rhetoric, the myth of each built space that became now a location since it was constructed and invested with meanings and symbolisms. The innate need of children to build and modify the space, leads us to study childhood and human path as well, through the cultural context which is now a social-area ecosystem. Children of all cultures define the space with symbols, materials, relationships and meanings with archetypal and primitive way.

A cross-cultural feature of childhood that associates the game with the space is the practice of construction of Hideouts and shelters. Children hideouts are natural areas exclusively with the presence of children, were adults rarely enter and only by invitation. The construction is done during the upturn of the child, when he is allowed to leave the family home in order to meet his peers and play or to attend kindergarten, nursery school or basic education. Children, boys and girls separately according to gender, age and culture involved, create a culture of children with special characteristics, referred to that of primitive man. This culture has its society, its hierarchies; hidden obvious shelters hideouts.

Key words: *children's hideouts, children's shelters.*

Introduction

A cross-cultural feature of childhood that associates the game with the space is the practice of construction of Hideouts shelters. Children's hideouts are places exclusively with the presence of children, were adults rarely enter and only by invitation. Their construction is done during the upturn of the child, when he is allowed to exit the family home in order to meet his peers and play or to attend kindergarten, nursery school or basic education.

Primary appearance of this behavior appears as far as he is limited in security of the house, since he begins to walk in the second year of his age. Children likes to hide and look for niches-hideouts inside the house and furniture, where is isolated sometimes causing others to search for him.

Later, in the neighborhood forming droves with the other children this desire in social and semantic level, in a practical and symbolic way will occur. The recognition, detection and local knowledge of the neighborhood is a "primitive" mean and method pertaining to the distant prehistoric past of man. The research, discovery, preservation and protection of the environment are the sequence of stereotyped behavior in the herd, the tribe of hunters.

The child passing from egocentric stage of perception at about the time that school begins, at 5-6 years of age, understands himself in relation to other persons. Leaves 'I' and comes to "we" necessary passage of to be led to the realization of himself. We can not be a general concept that refers to a large-scale group of people or area as the city throughout. The bipolar confrontation of

subjects and premises needs to be in correspondence with his psycho-physical scale.

The depopulated baby droves are selfproportising the area of the neighborhood, which they explor and occupy. With subconscious and effective way they realize their inability to posses it. So in the world of domination of grown-ups, they choose some points of dominancy in another parallel world of the neighborhood which is the one of the children.

Shelters and Hideouts

Shelters constructed purrely for the joy of creation, participation and communication, rather than the use of hand-made structure. The child shares secrets with friends and is part of an exclusive group, which is associated with the hidden knowledge of the secret spot. Obtains identity and is among the first in connection with the social environment of the neighborhood. This special area is a hidden sanctuary for adults, held entirely by children and more easily revealed to peers, provided that they adhere to the rules of secrecy. Although children usually know the location of hideouts of other teams, they talk only about their own unconsciously observing a code of silence because it is considered important that no parents know about it.

Hideouts are often in observation points and views of a large part of the neighborhood and the private areas of neighbors, especially when they are in trees. That's why kids know details about the neighborhood and the personal lives of neighbors that adults can not imagine. The construction of children's hideouts satisfy the children's need for isolation teritorial possession and control of the environment.

Figure 1. Shelter in tree



Source: (www.pinterest.com/27respectglay/outside-tree-housegarden-play-houseteepee/)

Habitat constructed on site of the neighborhood in shrubs, tree branches, behind electricity transformers, under stairs.

Figure2. Retreat with tree branches



Source: (www.creativestarlarning.co.uk/developing-school-grounds-outdoor-spaces/toulcuv-dvur-nursery-in-the-czech-republic/)

Figure 3. Child shelter with branches



Source: (http://chocolatelifelandjazz.blogspot.gr/2012_06_01_archive.html)

They display distinctive levels of perfection and permanency degrees. They are frequently built with the help of adults but more often the creators are children. Small spaces and corners are chosen landlocked and hidden from public view. The characteristics that are met repeatedly as far as

materials are concerned and their position is always an outdoor location and their recognition as a spatial boundary between the children and the rest of the world. The construction can be simple, for example between two beams which are attached to the ground, or complex consisting of two or more rooms. Hideouts take symbolic representational and practical form of forts, houses, caves, secret palaces. Hart points out that the symbolism of the name given varies according to the culture children involved (Hart R., 1979). In U.S.A. for example, are formed as fortresses, in England based in South America, etc. are formed as bush-houses Site selection of construction are areas designated as wide open areas or closed internal sections that motivate children to convert them with creative effort (Susa A. & Benedict J., 1994)

Research of Herrington and Studtmann concluded that separating the school courtyard space of kindergartens with vegetation, which creates pockets of shelter, changes the social hierarchy of groups of children that had emerged in the previous environment. The hierarchy that previously relied on physical power gives its place to kids that handle well the language, are ingenious with imagination in the management of the premises (Herrington S. & Studtmann K., 1998).

Three studies of, Hart, Sobel and Powell contributed to educating about children's hideouts in the neighborhood, each one following a different approach. Hart focuses on the topic of materials and location of the construction, analyzing the logistical data, while the other two in social and psychological significance of the structures (Hart R., 1979). Hart while researching in the USA in 1979, considered striking the dedication and time spend on the construction of the hideout by children. It seemed that the option of positioning captures eloquently the wealth of experiences gained by the child from the public area of the neighborhood. Also, the quality of the construction and the materials used indicate the child's skill level to work with the objects and his spirit.

Sober conducted researches in England and in the West India. (Sober D., 1993) He diagnosed the strong desire of children for possessing special and exclusive sites just for themselves. Powell dealt with the appearance of this phenomenon in school courtyards in the USA (Powell M., 2001). Studying the choices of roles that the kids attributed in their construction every time, he found out that most often prefer to construct forts. Construction activity continues to appear in all school years of basic education. Also, the hierarchy that is created in the group inside the hideout is maintained in all other contexts of student life. The construction of fortresses is beneficial, since it enables the child to develop the social skills of cooperation, participation, achievement of goals and learns to make democratic decisions. Powell spoke about the existence of a separate children's culture of fortresses that must be taken into account in the design of educational programmes. Rules and systems adopted voluntarily and spontaneously by the baby in their lairs, hide outs have irreplaceable pedagogical value, because they work in a natural and playful way.

The location the shelter is constructed depends mostly on the location of the houses of the children of the Group concerning the construction of young and older children. Young children do not move far away from the House, keeping a distance that allows audio and visual communication with the adults, while older children are choosing places away from home, in places where parents have no control over them. In addition, the location depends on the peculiarities of the outdoor environment of the neighborhood, the construction level, the existence of free natural spaces, yards and isolated sites (Kylin M., 2003).

Speck and Rogier [8] observed that when there is a good play area close to home, children do not usually move far away until they are old enough. Hart [9] found that the dens are constructed within 90 to 300 meters away from the house. Most active creators are children aged 7-9 years. The unknown location and access control represent a sense of autonomy and isolation. (Wolfe M., 1978)

Children construct Hide outs-shelters with materials they find on the spot and they continually improve them with escape routes, exits, props and roofs. Inside all the "treasures" are gathered, namely the objects that in the eyes of adult can only be garbage while in children's imagination are transformed into objects of precious value for the conduct of the game. From all

materials, most favorable for the construction are the branches of trees and their logs offering excellent location in the area of the neighborhood. Many times loose materials are used such as wood, stone, cardboard, sheets for walls and for ceiling. They enclose with them the recesses in the bushes, tree trunks, facets and angles in walls or other materials deemed appropriate, thus connecting fixed points with the building materials. There are gender differences as far as the construction materials are regarded, the settlement of space and usage scenario. Boys use the construction hammers and heavy woods making sure to continuously improve it, while girls use tools of such delicate handling trimmers, scissors and other tools gardening, caring for grooming and cleanliness

Dens may be secret places, untouched for those who are not members of the group or they may be socialise and gathering places for play, remaining nevertheless in some extent both aspects of privacy and sociality ever-present. Boys are building more closed dens with few and narrow openings, leaving in the center within empty space for social activities such as narratives of stories in order of the membersto be in a circle.

Girls are building dens with large openings by placing objects of furnishing in the Center within. Powell links the appearance of different type in each sex at the distinct particularities in the game (Powell M., 2001). The open girls' shelters serve in social game involving many children that include representations of housework, family and social life in a civilized environment. In contrast, the closed construction of boys leaves little room for 'others' and of social gaming within since darkness and caves conditions prevail. Only after the boys have exhausted the improvements of their structure, often leave or they tear it down to build elsewhere a new one. Dovey Kimberly described three main types of children's den: (Dovey Kimberly, 1987)

- Dens that consist of an open space around them defined in relation to the external site with a fence of wood, stones, or other useless items.
- Dens made landlocked without outer space which are similar to the nests of wild animals
- Dens of trees with the branches and trunks to provide view and open space for play and long-distance supervision and ensuring the privacy of private space. This is the reason why kids often prefer the copses, bushes and trees to build their hide outs.

Children hideouts in the neighborhood are the first technical habitat manufactured human in the cultural ecosystem in which it lives. At the same time with the appearance of language, data are presented that distinguishes homosapiens from the rest of the animal kingdom. The child becomes inhabitant, conqueror and master of the area, shaping and transforming the terrain of the land with its materials. The human-made primary construction of the primeval hut hosts the primitive child society with its culture, making it understood and repeating with ritual way the conditions of the origins of human society and the spirit. In modern cities where the dominance of rich commercial importance of all other options, the eco-systems are destroyed. The disappearance of ecosystems for many species of animals and plants causes the interest of scientists and activists for their salvation. However, at the same time the disappearance of children's places in the neighbourhoods of cities occur without equally taking seriously the quality of the life of children and families. The rampant growth of cities that is required for the return on investment and the functioning of the economy, leading to increased land prices and this in turn is a strong incentive for the commercialization of every open space.

In Greece, for reasons that have been analyzed the sciences of areas, economy and politics, citieshave sacrificed green, open spaces and scale of the neighborhood on the altar of profit and shortsighted settlement of life, mortgaging the future of future generations. The Greek cities have less green than the rest of Europe. The neighborhoods are over-populated, mainly structured with apartment buildings without large open areas for children. The natural element that provides the most suitable environment for building dens is rare and often located far away from the neighborhood, not being part of it but public impersonal and municipal park. The expansion of

population and building scale of neighborhoods of Greek cities and especially the capital, brought alienation among residents depriving the safety for children playing in the neighborhood. The isolation and the game in remote and hidden places that are not known by the parents, poses serious risks to the modern urban environment of megacity which is plagued by crime. The need for cleanliness, for public nuisance and parking does not allow children to influence the neighborhood's environment transforming some corners in a hideout. The space becomes a stranger and psychologically unfamiliar for children who lack the sense of control out of the apartment. They then often react with vandalism and disrespect for public property, at school and in the neighborhood. The ownership and the child's link with game positions in the neighborhood, creates emotional bond with the space, resulting that he shows responsible daily behavior in all contexts of action. (Vaske J.J., & Korbin K.C., 2001)

Conclusions

Game and the need for adjustment and knowledge in the world pace throughout childhood. Mental and physical boundaries of the game are determined actively and with strategical limits in relation to how and which quality places are offered. Like primitive people, children construct shelters in their neighborhood. There are tree houses, huts, hiding in alcoves. Girls and boys build with materials. Anything useless can serve. The type and internal configuration of these shelters differ culturally and is gender-related to manufacturers. The constructions of the hideouts and shelters are still a feature of childhood that occurs worldwide. The Shelters, constructed by boys and girls, are made in secret places in the neighborhood, certifying that for children the collective unconscious is expressed in the primeval need of companionship and precaution.

The particular psychophysical scale of children and their individual needs, make us refer to the existence of child's culture. The spatial context of existence of this culture-since it is referred _ civilization-is social, it is relationships.

References

- Hart R. (1979) "Children's Experience of Place", ed: Irvington Publishers, New York.
- Susa A. & Benedict J. (1994) "The effects of playground Design on Pretend Play and Divergent Thinking", *Environment and Behaviour*, 26, 4.
- Herrington S. & Studtmann K. (1998) "Landscape interventions: New Directions for the Design of children's Outdoor Play Environments", *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 42, p.p. 191-205.
- Sober D. (1993) "Children's special Places: Exploring the role of forts, Dens and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood", ed: Zephyr, Tucson.
- Powell M. (2001) "Fort Culture: The Hidden Curriculum of Recess Play", ed: School of Education, Lesley University.
- Kylin M. (2003) "Children's Dens", *Children, Rough and Environments*, V. 13, 1.
- Speck M. & Rogier N. (1997) "Children's Freedom of Movement in the Streets", In R. Camstra, ed: *Growing up in a changing Urban Landscape*, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, Assen.
- Wolfe M. (1978) "Childhood and Privacy", In I. Altman & J. Wohlwill, ed: *Human Behavior and the Environment, Advances in Theory and Research*, 3: *Children and the Environment*, ed: Plenum Press, New York & London, p.p. 175-222.

- Dovey Kimberly (1987) "The life and death of the Arlington Huts", *Children's Environments Quarterly*, 4, 4, 1987, p.p. 18-26.
- Vaske J.J, & Korbin K.C., (2001) "Place attachment and environmentally responsible behaviour", *Journal of Environmental Education*, 32, 4, 2001, p.p. 16-21.