Schoolyard Diversity
6th International Conference in Berlin, September 2017

From the 4th ‘til the 6th of September 2017, a total of 130 landscape architects, environmental educators, school principals, landscape designers of lively outdoor spaces, local representatives and scientists from all over the world, came to Berlin to discuss green and sustainable schoolyards.

The participants came from: USA, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Japan, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, Australia, Iraq, Czech Republic, Portugal, Italy, Estonia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, England, Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. The conference was held in English.

Regardless of the differences between the countries of origin and their educational systems, one thing united all participants: transforming standard schoolyards into a variety of landscapes for playing, moving and learning!

Three days conference, from the 4th until the 6th of September 2017

The lectures during the first day showed schoolyard planning by undergraduate students in Denver / USA and Japan, the very first attempts of designing outdoor playgrounds in China, alternative educational concepts of natural and environmental schools in Sweden, innovative educational concepts in Germany and the need to rethink and design learning spaces in a completely different way, not only indoors but especially outside. On the second day, excursions across Berlin gave the participants a first-hand experience of Berlin schoolyards, and on the third day of the conference, together with pupils of the Otto-Wels Primary School, the participants got to test the positive effect of artistic workshops through a hand-on experience with the chisel and wooden mallet.
First conference day at the Berlin City Hall

*Grün macht Schule* invited in total ten speakers to the Berlin City Hall. The different subject areas were presented from an international perspective, all having in common the focus on the importance of a good design for open spaces in educational institutions. The participants where welcomed by Dr. Michael Gödde on behalf of the patroness, Mrs. Günther, senator of the Department for Environment, Transportation and Climate Protection, as well as Manfred Dietzen, from *Grün macht Schule*. Dr. Heike Tauch was in charge of moderating the conference.

Lectures:

**Prof. Dr. Lois Brink - Denver / USA**
Prof. Dr. Lois Brink introduced an innovative schoolyard planning executed by undergraduate landscape architecture students in a Denver high school. Brink calls for a better education of landscape architecture in the field of open space planning for educational institutions. Landscape architects need to acquire basic pedagogical knowledge in their specialized education, learn about participatory processes, in order to develop sustainable and child-friendly open-space concepts.

**Prof. Dr Hartmut Wedekind - Berlin / Germany**
Prof. Dr Hartmut Wedekind sees open spaces in educational institutions as an opportunity, where children and adolescents can learn intensive scientific and basic social experiences if they are offered diversity and a connection to nature. His institute with the educational workshop "Helleum" researches the didactical relationships that need to be applied in educational institutions for them to become qualified for this, concludes his lecture.

**Eva von Boldern - Shanghai / China**
In China it has long been recognized how important it is to provide children with a connection to nature. In the Chinese metropolis of Shanghai, Eva von Boldern’s team is developing initial projects to counteract a complete alienation to nature by city children. Her contribution clearly illustrated the urgency of an international rethinking in the planning of kindergartens and schoolyards.

**Dr. Michael Gödde - Berlin / Germany**
According to Gödde, the biological diversity in Berlin depends on the proportion of green areas in the city. Sustainable urban development requires not only the preservation of these areas in regards to climate change, but also the creation of new intensively green urban areas. Apart from the already existing parks and green areas, the large number of open spaces in nurseries and schools offers a great potential to get designed in a healthier and more sustainable way: Living spaces and areas for children and adolescents should be transformed into green areas through unsealing and greening.

**Prof. Dr. Matluba Khan - Dhaka / Bangladesh, Edinburgh / UK**
The professor of landscape architecture described the participatory projects, which she develops and implements together with children and students. In doing so, she shares basic pedagogical knowledge, which then flows into the planning. In her speech, she illustrated very well how excellent participatory projects were being developed in schoolyards in Bangladesh, considerably improving the quality of the educational opportunities, even with very limited financial resources.
Marianne van Lier, Willy Leufgen - Texel / Netherlands
The pictures of ecological schoolyards, playgrounds and kindergartens in the Netherlands were impressive. The extremely creative and sustainable designs already originated in the 1970s, when a first ecological rethinking in society took place. Since then, the association "OASE", based on the island of Texel, promotes natural areas for children, for play, leisure and living.

Julian Richter - Frasdorf / Germany
Founder of the company Richter Spielgeräte GmbH near Munich, Julian Richter has been working for over 40 years in national and international security committees to plan and design games and open spaces for children and youth in a way that permits a high degree of physical and sensory experiences. This includes learning the assessment of risks. With great commitment, he pleaded to design outdoor spaces, especially for educational institutions, not as safe as possible, but as safe as necessary.

Laís Fleury - Rio de Janeiro / Brazil
The number of children and adolescents who present deficits in physical and social skills is increasing also in Brazil. In view of the unequal educational opportunities of the poorer sections of the population, the association ALANA is committed to creating more open spaces and playgrounds, in touch with nature, throughout Brazil. The lecture showed new approaches, creative designs and the learning outcomes of children who have participated in natural settings at schoolyards and kindergartens in Brazil.

Silke Wissel, Gerhard Fuchs - Radolfzell / Germany
"Mein Schulhof" is a German nation-wide competition for participative, sustainable and innovative schoolyards - 800 schools participated. The Deutsche Umwelthilfe (Environmental Action Germany) and the Lebendige Stadt Foundation presented the project, the competition criteria and the 2017 winners. One of the winning schools is the Hans Fallada School in Berlin-Neukölln, which is supervised by Grün macht Schule. Greening, school gardens, green classrooms, creative exercise programs, art-projects - just to name a few examples - inspired and triggered the desire to emulate it, such was the response of the participants from all over the world.

Dr. Ko Senda - Yokohama / Japan
Dr. Senda has been active in teaching for more than 15 years, focusing especially on the concept of a living environment for children. In addition to his work as a lecturer, he also worked in Japan as a schoolyard designer and specialized in lively play environments for city children. He combines indoor and outdoor experiences. His presentation showed examples of his work in more than 40 kindergartens and school grounds. Dr. Senda invited all participants to another International Schoolyard Conference, which will take place in November 2018 at the University of Yokohama, Japan.
Impressions of the first conference day at the City Hall, Berlin
Second Conference Day, Excursions

On the second day, each of the five bus excursions led to outdoor areas of day-care centres, elementary schools, secondary schools, extracurricular learning venues, finishing at the campus site of the International Garden Exhibition (IGA), where school garden projects were presented, along with the "space to experience nature" created by the Nature Conservation Foundation.

For the participants, the bus excursions were an important part of the conference. They were able to witness directly and concretely how only outdoor areas are capable of providing children and youth with a direct contact to the natural environment. Natural phenomena, weather and climate, animals and plants and natural elements such as water, earth and air were experienced together with the children, and understood as part of an "Education for Sustainable Development".

Excursions

Excursion 1 - excursion guide Manfred Dietzen, Grün macht Schule, B.-Traven-Oberschule (High School), Spandau

This school location was designed and constructed by high school students. The principal of the school, Mr. Fries, welcomed the group and explained the project. Afterwards, the participants were able to explore the schoolyard in small groups. The participants were impressed both with the ecological effect of the green areas, as well as by the students’ artistic projects.
Helmuth-James-von-Moltke-School – Charlottenburg
This is a primary school with a very large proportion of green areas, art projects and sustainably designed play spaces. Antje Solmsdorf delighted the participants and showed particular enthusiasm during the presentation of the school garden that she supervised.

Gardening School Mitte (Schulumweltzentrum - SUZ) – Reinickendorf
Regina Fuhrmann, director of the SUZ Mitte, guided the site and presented the varied program of the school-garden projects of the gardening school. The fully environmental educational program was presented to the participants, from the Swedish energy-saving garden-shelter to the natural water-purifier plant all the way to the bees.

Kindergarten "Eene Meene Mopel" – Lichtenberg
An unusually natural open-space concept was implemented in this kindergarten. The kindergarten principal and the landscape architect explained and showed the participants why this concept is exemplary for open spaces in kindergartens.

Excursion 2 - excursion guide Ulrike Wolf, Grün macht Schule
Kindergarten "Friedermäuse" – Friedrichshain
The kindergarten principal presented the way in which the kindergarten community was allowed to co-determine and what was then designed. Many bushes, hills, water marsh areas, vegetable and fruit orchards...

Reinhardswald Primary School - Kreuzberg
Annegret Seifert, the school’s art teacher, guided the participants around the grounds. Every year she integrates new art projects in the schoolyard, which is designed according to ecological criteria. The schoolyard conversion initiated already 15 years ago.

Leibniz-Gymnasium – Kreuzberg
With a great deal of dedication, students demonstrated how, from this high school located in the narrowest urban area, a boring recess space could be transformed through creative intercultural projects into a green oases of well being.

Gardening School August Heyn – Neukölln
A gardening school with a long tradition in Berlin presented itself. Auguste Kuschnerow, former principal, gave an insight into the extensive program of environmental education in extracurricular learning venues. In particular, the intensive animal farming and the students’ handling of these astonished many participants.

Excursion 3 - excursion guide Ulf Schröder, Grün macht Schule
Galilei Elementary School – Kreuzberg
Because of its exemplary, sustainable and child-oriented open spaces, the Galilei school in Friedrichstrasse is one of the most visited schools in Berlin. The participants were especially impressed by the participatory process of the school and by the accomplishment of the process’ results.

Hans Fallada Elementary School – Neukölln
This school is the winner of the schoolyard competition by the German environmental foundation "Mein Schulhof". One participant in the conference was Gerhard Fuchs from the "Lebendige Stadt" Foundation, who had assessed the Fallada elementary school as a jury member. The headmaster Mr. Paeprer and Deputy Headmistress Mrs. Schröder welcomed the participants and acknowledged the support of Grün macht Schule in the construction of the schoolyard of the school.
Neumark Elementary School – Schöneberg
The schoolyard, with its different areas for playing and sports, but also for retreat and communication, was perceived very positively. Special attention was given to the school garden, which was used by pupils and teachers despite the summer holidays.

Gardening school Schöneberg – Schöneberg
The participants were greeted warmly by Mrs. Müller-Kahl and guided through the garden, which is designed in a very diverse and imaginative way. The participants took the opportunity to explore the garden in small groups and were then relaxed and enthusiastic. For many participants, the idea of a gardening school as a central and extracurricular educational location was new.

Excursion 4 - excursion guide Birgit Teichmann, landscape architect
Kita Uhlandzwerge - Prenzlauer Berg
At Kita Uhlandzwerge, a young nursery school teacher welcomed the group and led them through the kindergarten, which was very well attended by children. Observing the children in the various play activities as well as their handling of the challenges presented to them in the playground, prompted the participants to ask numerous questions to the kindergarten staff.

Peter Witte School – Reinickendorf
The participants were received by a teacher from the school and led across the schoolyard. Since the schoolyard was redesigned 10 years ago, the interest of the participants was focused on the sustainable construction methods, aspects of impermanence of temporary objects and the on going development of the site.

Kita Letteallee – Reinickendorf
The principal of the family centre described the reconstruction process of the garden, which was completed only last year. The participatory aspect of the project was of great interest, as it was carried out with children, parents, educators, neighbours and volunteers from the neighbourhood, together with a group of artists, in an extensive process. During the guided tour through the garden, the landscape architect explained the design and construction features and provided drawings and execution plans, and photos documenting the previous state.

Excursion 5 - excursion guide Ortrud Kuhl, former Coordinator of Grün macht Schule
Schweizerhof Elementary School - Zehlendorf
In addition to the sustainable, ecological construction of the schoolyard, which was designed more than 10 years ago according to the criteria of Grün macht Schule, the participants were impressed by the variety of student-projects. It quickly became apparent that this resulted in a strong identification of the students with their schoolyard.

Elementary school on the Bäke – Steglitz
A former dusty football pitch was transformed into a green oasis with a watercourse, hills, climbing and balancing facilities, a furnace, small rooms with bushes and trees. A particular attention was paid to the description that Ortrud Kuhl gave of the initial problems for the project. When the proposal with the wishes of the students was going to be realized, both the school and the district were very critical and pessimistic. Now however, one experiences an enthusiastic project-presentation by the school.
**Goethe High School – Steglitz**

Visiting the schoolyard and witnessing the educational-work taking place in the school garden, have proven yet again the possible quality that a sustainable schoolyard design can provide. Many participants were grateful to have been imparted with their know-how, that sustainable pedagogical and creative aspects have to be considered when designing a good schoolyard.

**Nursery Spatzenhaus – Hellersdorf**

The sponsor "Boot e.V." builds the open spaces of its day-care centres, now counting fifteen, according to the quality principals of *Grün macht Schule*. Here, the implementation of a large number of these criteria could be experienced. Whether educators or landscape architects, the way the children were using this space - everything fascinated the excursion participants.

**Excursions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 - Excursion guide: staff of IGA- Campus and of the office Hengge and Beissert**

**IGA Campus Nature Experience Space, IGA – Hellersdorf**

All bus excursions met at the IGA site around 4pm. The program included the presentation of the campus’ projects as well as the nature-experience space of the Stiftung Naturschutz Berlin. Employees of the "Green League" guided through the campus projects, divided in five groups: *Weltacker*, bees, school gardens, vegetable farming and others. All projects are used and maintained by schools in the catchment area. The nature-experience space on the IGA site is a pilot project for a new category of playground areas and was funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment and Nature Conservation. The innovative design is being successfully tested in Berlin, for the first time in Germany, with 3 projects. The excursions ended on the lakeside terrace of the IGA with a conclusive speech by the organizer.

**Photos with impressions of the second conference day Excursions**
Third conference day workshops

The Otto-Wels Elementary School enjoyed a very special 3rd conference day together with the conference participants. Together with the students, they set out to change the schoolyard with 12 workshops. Creativity, initiative and craftsmanship were in demand after having presented a schoolyard concept, which was developed with an intensive participation of the school community and presented by the landscape architect Antje Schwabersberger in the school’s multipurpose room. Fences were embellished with diverse materials, igloos were made out of wicker, mosaics were created, stone blocks and tree trunks were carved into sculptures, walls painted, colourful paths paved, balancing structures and tepee tents were built. During the energetic efforts of the more than 300 participants, a sensational meal was provided by the school. At about 3.30 pm, all participants gathered for the "conference group photo", and the pride and connection to everything that had been achieved on this day is visible on everyone’s faces.

The workshops

*Workshop 1 - workshop leader Christoph Gramberg - woodworking, wooden sculptures*
Two wooden sculptures with different motifs from the animal world were carved as a relief and erected in the schoolyard at the end of the workshop.

*Workshop 2 - workshop leader Christof Glamm - stone cutting, stone sculptures*
Tuff stone blocks were hammered and chiselled. The students immediately used the designed blocks after the workshop as seating structures and for climbing.
Workshop 3 - workshop leader Fabian Bruske - Fencing design with colourful butterflies
Butterflies in various shapes and colours were made out of wood and attached to the fence in the entrance area.

Workshop 4 - workshop leader Wiebke Wagenführ - wall design, painting
Three different art techniques for wall design were presented. Together with the experienced teacher, the conference participants developed different implementation strategies according to the different age groups of the children and according to the conditions of the schoolyard and the school.

Workshop 5 - Workshop leader Gerburg Fuchs - building games with bamboo sticks
With the use of hundreds of bamboo sticks, games were built and played with. A gaming experience that encourages participation, develops creativity, and especially helps forge skill and patience.

Workshop 6 - Workshop leader Jens Klaue - Tree trunks for balancing and climbing
A stilt path was created according to instructions. Tree trunk sections were placed in the ground and used at different heights as balancing stilts.

Workshop 7 - Workshop leader Anja Lübeck - Creative colourful paved areas emerged
With colourful bricks, cobblestones and natural stones, the participants paved colourful squares together with the pupils in the grey pavement.

Workshop 8 - Workshop leader Stefan Rode - Tipis, sitting and balancing structures made from Robinia
This workshop used round logs. It was hard work to erect and connect the logs in order to create three tepees.

Workshop 9 - Workshop leader Elke Lübecke-Bauer - Sandy area full of archaeological treasure
An archaeological sandpit was created, where treasures were buried and dug up by other children. The excavation of cultural objects and fossils transformed the workshop into a real research expedition.

Workshop 10 - workshop leader Anna Kalberer - Wicker igloos for chatting and hiding
In the spring, the 4th grade children of the school planted a wicker spiral. During the workshop, the fully-grown wicker branches were woven and tied together to create a green tunnel to be used by small groups of students as a retreat.

Workshop 11 - workshop leader Toralf Jaekel - stone processing, stone design
A boulder is a stone that was transported by glaciers during the ice ages. It is characterized by its particular hardness. The participants and the students learned how to approach such a stone and how its surface can be changed through creative motifs.

Workshop 12 - workshop leader Jan Mertens - Colourful mosaics on pedestal walls
Mosaics change the look of the schoolyard. Even small creations can give the schoolyard an entirely new identity. The mosaics of the workshop led to a particularly high level of student identification with the schoolyard project.
Conclusion

Ultimately, it became evident on this day of the conference how creativity, teamwork, pleasure, fun and mutual support enabled people of different cultures to reach a common goal that everyone could be proud of: changing together the "Schoolyard Living Space" positively, child-friendly, ecological and sustainable.

After these wonderful workshop assignments at the Otto-Wels School, for the conclusion of the conference everyone met afterwards at the Prinzessinnengarten at Moritzplatz - in the centre of Kreuzberg. After a guided tour of the garden, it quickly became clear that environmental education starts at school, but - if you have been brought up to appreciate it at school or kindergarten, it continues in everyday life in a variety of areas.

Photos with impressions of the third conference day
The conference setting

Network Trade Fair
In addition to the lectures in the Louise Schroeder hall at the Berlin City Hall, the event in the neighbouring Ferdinand-Friedensburg hall was all about international networking: In between the lectures and during the breaks, here is where projects and initiatives on all sorts of topics from all over the world were presented and discussed; Experiences were exchanged and new contacts were made.

Photos with impressions of the network fair
The DECLARATION

Lisa Howard - San Francisco / USA and Anders Wånge Kjellsson - Lund / Sweden
International School Grounds Alliance (ISGA)

A result of the conference and an important concern of the common platform ISGA and Grün macht Schule is the departure from a false sense of security, which would like to chisel in stone the necessity of flat surfaces, standardized devices, boredom and maximum supervision in every aspect. The basic need of children for exciting playgrounds is so important that a Declaration has been issued as a result of this conference, which sets out to allow a minimum level of "risk" in playgrounds and school grounds as a fundamental right for children according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31, General Comment 17):

... "Those who design, manage, monitor and maintain open spaces at schools and kindergartens should be encouraged to consider a positive risk. Open spaces at schools and kindergartens should not be as safe as possible, but as safe as necessary!"

(Excerpt UBUD-HÖÖR-DECLARATION 2017 in Berlin)

This view was also supported by many institutions in Germany that deal with the issue of safety, like the Unfallkasse Berlin (Accident Insurance Berlin) which, as a partner of the conference and cooperation partner of the Berlin schools, has recognized that a restriction on motoric challenges and positive risks during playing can do much more harm than good.
Conclusion of the conference

Speaking to representatives from all over the world and under the patronage of the Berlin Senator for the Environment Regine Günther, this conference organized by Grün macht Schule and ISGA in Berlin was a great success and gave a great impetus. Let’s hope that the incitements will generate waves and encourage imitation in Berlin, in other German regions and all around the world.

It is urgent to implement the planning and design of open spaces for children - whether in schools, kindergartens, living areas in cities and countryside - not only according to design-focussed criteria, but especially according to child-appropriate design criteria and with a serious participation of the users - or leave it to the schoolyard designers who are specialized in user-oriented open space design. In-depth teaching, research, practice-oriented study projects, in-service training and, of course, continuous interdisciplinary exchange are urgently needed on this topic.

The conference participants experienced and discussed specific examples of new schoolyards and children's gardens, their advantages and problems, and it is to be hoped that, little by little, steps will be made towards open-air educational facilities that are finer, more exciting and child-friendly - in line with the motto of the conference "SCHOOLYARD DIVERSITY"!