

## **The children's museum**

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**What is the Children's Museum:** a children sized museum has nothing to do with museums for adults, where one walks on for hours and where a frightening alarm is ready to ring as soon as someone steps close to an item of exposition. The Children's Museums are small colourful cities, where everything is at hand and everything can, must be touched, because that is how, according to the designers of these "supermuseums", kids aged from 3 to 12 can better understand what they will see.

In the Museum of the Children laughing, shouting, running and playing are compulsory activities, and parents, teachers and tutors are expected to behave in the same way. That is why the Children's Museums cannot be called museums in a traditional way, peculiar as they are in purpose and approach.

### **Goal of the Children's Museum:**

- Learning through activity and interaction, through self-driven exploration and discovery; learning concepts regarding life, past, present and future, and anything of interest for the purpose of each particular museum;
- Social commitment in order to support parents and relatives;
- Mixed use of looking and interacting, as a means to introduce children to the realms of "traditional" museums and galleries where, usually, objects can only be looked at, and informations are gathered only by seeing and reading.

Its goal is to propose a "lighter" approach to teaching the knowledge of the world, privileging playing. In the space granted to the museum, all has been conceived in order to let the children have significative experiences interacting with the features of the museum, purchase new informations through playing, and to let them discover things useful for their growth.

**Subjects of the Children's Museum:** in these museums one will mostly find expositions about Nature, the world of animals, the human body or about technology, but also Planetaria from which it's possible to watch the stars, great three-dimensional cinemas, actual art expositions, showing works of artists (both adults and children), and workshops where it is possible to learn how to paint, how to build something or how to use a PC.

The expos are prepared by adults, who involve in the process the young fruitors themselves in order to be sure that both content and educational approach will turn out to be perfectly adequate. Stress is being put on the opportunity granted to each individual to learn in full autonomy and in the way he finds most pleasing.

The Children's Museum could be, for example, a structure representing the city, its peculiar places and its services, presented as a big toy, which children can feel free to touch, manipulate and experiment.

The first attempts at creating such educational structure, which can be identified with the concept of the Children's Museum, can be traced back to experiences developed in the United States almost a century ago, which were thought as support and integration to the educational activities of minors.

**Paedagogical aspects:** the main element shared by the several Children's Museums present in most of the world is the importance of the visitor over that of the items presented in the exposition. The child, playing and experimenting, will learn some aspects of reality which stand as a constant stimulus to creativity and imagination. Thanks to a fast form of learning, in fact, the child will be pushed towards new fields of interest, will continuously put himself in discussion and will, from time to time, confront himself with new questions arisen by the experimentations on the many features of the Museum. The implicit desire of the kid of having a place "of his own", in which he can learn having fun, becomes a reality most of all in the United States, in fact it is there that the first Children's Museum sees the light, taking off from the paedagogical intuitions of Charles Dewey and Maria Montessori, who thoroughly studied the subject. Today there are more than three hundred and fifty Children's Museums, and many can be counted in several other countries.

**Design Guidelines:** from the most widely accepted paedagogical indications are drawn guidelines that help the process of designing the Children's Museum, that study the museographical distribution of the halls in order to facilitate the children's learning, its management and functionality. Through analysing and filing several examples, formal and locational considerations are brought forth: centrality and accessibility are fundamental factors; dismissed urban areas are a suitable localization for Children's Museums, because able to satisfy the former requests and to offer other advantages; the trend of designing shells marked by symbolic elements and using elements of the shell itself for explaining concepts and scientific processes; moreover the world distribution of such institutions, stressing their strong concentration in the USA, and the recent trend of opening new museums while the attention towards children's education and formation is growing.

**Design Ipotesis:** all the aforementioned paedagogical and projectual indications flow together in the drawing of a possible project for a Children's Museum in Turin, city which is up to now lacking of a museum dedicated to such a peculiar audience.



Situated in Turin, corso Umbria 84, "building 37", so addressed to when the Michelin stabilishment was functional, was built in the late 20s, to host the offices of the Valle Susa Cotton-mill, than connected to the Michelin establishment (1951). The building, subject to refunctionalization, has been dedicated to administration and reception.



Close to the aforementioned building, the dismissed subterranean stamps ward, thought to house the Museum's core.



Rendering of the proposed project for a Children's Museum in Turin; the sites seen before have been connected by the use of new spaces destined to house the expo halls, the cinema, the party room, shop and toilets.

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