



**WE ARE HERE
CUT THE KIDS SOME SLACK**

Spazio Libero - Ferrara slack city Festival in Bruxelles

2011



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Spazio Libero - Ferrara slack city Festival is one of the winning projects of the public notice “Architecture Festival - II edition”, promoted by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Culture, that occurred earlier this year in Ferrara, Italy. With the collaboration of Recyclart, we brought the festival abroad, connecting the conversations we had in Ferrara with a broader discussion that does not solely concern Italy.

Spazio libero is a festival about slack space. We aim to encourage the existence and endurance of bottom-up urban practices able to change the face of the city for the better, an approach that we believe is embodied well by the fertile network of associations in the city of Brussels. This booklet presents the outcomes and the participants of a workshop and talk we ran in Brussels in October 2023, dedicated to kids and their need for slack spaces.

As birthrates across Europe continue to diminish and the population gets older and older, the focus in the architectural discussion is shifting toward people in later stages of life and how they interact with architecture and the city. In the current scenario, children and their parents risk becoming less politically relevant and unable to attract the attention of public administrations and private investors alike.

For adults, childhood is a mystery, a lost world of wonder. Children are not only people who need to be included and protected in cities but can also be creative agents who carry their points of view. In particular, the dimension of play and adventure plays a crucial role in children’s minds, a role that we, as adults, often forget. The talk postulates that working with slack space requires a playful mind: so, let’s see how we can cut the kids some slack. What can we learn from how children see the city? How can children’s play affect



how we look at public space? What are the practices that saw children take an active role in shaping their space, and what are the possibilities for new experiences in the future?

Archikids is an initiative by Recyclart focused on involving local children in architecture and design practices through playful activities. Spazio Libero took over the Archikids session on October 15, 2023, inviting kids to generate a free space to play and invent stories by painting textiles. A visual report of the workshop constitutes the first part of this booklet.

Following the workshop, the talk gathered practitioners from Belgium and Italy to discuss the role of children in architecture. We explored urban, collaborative, and participative practices in which children play a crucial role as recipients and as active designers. We are interested in how children can be not only receivers of urban transformation but active participants in the life of the city. We would like to explore how play can help us see the world that surrounds us in a different light.

The talk brought out insights on the involvement of kids in collective work and of them together with communities, their ability to translate the most diverse objects into play, and the complex issues of safety and responsibility that must not lead to avoiding action. The participants illustrated different approaches, showing how experimentation and the ability to involve children can generate surprising and meaningful transformative interventions for the whole city. The second part of this booklet is an in-depth look at the themes and work of the participants at our talk.

A brief introduction to the participants' work:

Lisa Matthys is a visual artist based in Brussels. Her work explores how children play in different contexts through photography, videos, and installations.

Emanuele Barili is one half of the architecture studio ECÒL, based in Florence, that focuses on the work with associations to transform and find new ways of experiencing public spaces.

Maria Glionna is an architect focusing on construction with natural materials, in particular, rammed earth, and building with and within communities. She often works with children including as a yoga instructor.

Yannick Roels is part of Cultureghem, a Brussels association focused on cultivating human and inclusive public space in the former abattoir through all sorts of interventions.

Omar Kashmiry is an architect and collaborates now and then with the Archikids team at Recyclart, he works on projects related to social inclusion in public space.

Francesca Chessa is a children's books illustrator who also runs workshops and laboratories engaging kids in collective activities. She conducted the workshop alongside Luca Barello, Kobe Lootens and Diane Handali.

Alberto Geuna & Luca Barello

atelier mobile aps, organizer of the Festival, is a cultural association based in Torino, Italy, whose aim is to involve local communities in the development of a conscious, responsible, and creative approach towards the spaces of everyday life. It runs experimental and educational activities including design+build workshops to transform public spaces through collaborative working and transmission of building techniques, organization of multicultural spaces and events, interactive installations to raise awareness of social and environmental issues, design competitions of open-source self-buildable objects to show the potentiality of sharing ideas.



Archikids Recyclart, that are our weekly ateliers every Wednesday afternoon from 2 till 5 pm, for kids between 6 and 12 years from the neighbourhood around Recyclart. We deal with the topics of architecture, urbanism, the city, the neighbourhood, ...and try to communicate this towards the children using methods like drawing, making maquettes, speak about their dreams and wishes, walkings in the neighbourhood and visiting all kind of construction sites in the neighbourhood. Now and then, we welcome architects, urbanists, artists in our atelier, with who we develop each time a specific atelier about one specific topic.

Recyclart is a multi- and interdisciplinary center that develops an artistic program reflecting on society in the Brussels district of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean. Taking into account the possibilities and volatility of our contemporary times, it offers a very broad program of subcultures: experimental music, graphic design, hybrid forms of performing and (audio-)visual arts, reflections on architecture, public space and urbanism. Recyclart is a also creative space with a restaurant and a small factory (construction, wood, metal) where people learn new jobs, produce and share knowledge. Recyclart pays special attention to the voices from the underground and less heard in the dominant discourse of society.





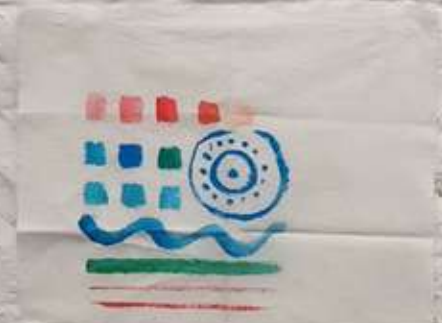


Have you ever thought about how many things there are in a city?

Streets, parks, buildings, neon signs, lights and also rain, wind, links between things, spaces and people, you are friend of a kid who is friend with another kid, all three of you are linked together by friendship, there are connections between people and at night there are stars. And we are here.

Recyclart welcomed on the 11th october the team of the Spazio Libero-festival from Italy. Together with Francesca and Luca, we painted with the Archikids on linen different scenes about architecture and nature: buildings of the Archikids, the streets to reach their places, lights in the city, leaves from trees, signs in the city. Afterwards the linen were hung on ropes, set in a labyrinthic way, so that spectators could walk through the different scenes. In the evening the installation of the linen were shown to the public that was there in Recyclart for the evening talk with the theme 'We are Here. Cut the Kids Some Slack'. And one of the Archikids, Salah-Eddine, was there to show the installation to the public.

All Archikids really liked the atelier. They liked a lot the use of the expressive colours, the different scenes. One of the Archikids for example liked a lot the scene with the 'Lights in the city' : *"It was so cool the painting of the lights on the sheet, it was like you felt yourself being in a big Disco Ball."*







JETONS

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Nous sommes ici - Here we are



Tutors

KoBE
LUCA
DIANE
FRANCESCA

Artistes / Artists

ESSAM MAHROUG
SALAH EDDINE
MAHROUG
ADAM SAIDI
LIAH SAIDI
YASSIN AHARKOUCH
BRYANNA
TAO
MYA

ARCHIKIDS
SPAZIO LIBERO
October 11th
Recyclart
Fabrik
2pm 5pm

Hello, Maria here.

I am an architect (mm..not much anymore) , a designer (perhaps more appropriate), a maker (that sounds much better!) and, through it all, a yogi.

I experiment with different kinds of design and construction processes which are crossing the borders from our normative way of doing architecture. With every new project, the challenge is to be more inclusive, participatory and regenerative, from both a material and a (more-than)human perspective.

I have a tendency to work with communities who don't have much of a voice in the making of our common spaces; and children, unfortunately, are often one of them.

Through this work, I try to foster and strengthen the relationship between (and within) a community and their space, through processes of appropriation, care, and empowerment.

Because I'm a very rooted person, I often work with Earth. I find it an amazing element, which talks so many different languages, proper of cultures from all around the globe; it opens up new and old perspectives in our way of living and is, ultimately, accessible to all.

Among other things, it has the power to make us very dirty, but of an ok kind of dirt. Perfect for kids of all ages!

In Parckfarm, a wonderful association in the Park of Tour & Taxi, Brussels, with Building Beyond Borders we created a one month architecture festival to renovate the interior and the garden of their greenhouse in a participatory way. A great occasion to throw in a community party, invent some games, play music and talk to the neighbour's radio! The built and unbuilt outcome is the result of shared intentions, dreams, skills and will to contribute.

At Rezolution, a maison de jeunes in Anderlecht, Brussels we are building collectively an oven for the community, made of rammed earth. We are learning how strong the earth becomes when rammed into a formwork! We can even make patterns by using earth of different colours. And this is just part of the fun, we can't wait to make our first pizzas!

At Elzenhof, a community building in Ixelles, Brussels, we are doing a one year residency with our new project, Pied à Terre, to promote earthen construction techniques. The day of 'La caravane magique' , an itinerant circus invaded the building, with plenty of magical activities. With Pied à Terre we built the tiny earthen city of our dreams, full of colours and shine thanks to magical types of earth, gems and stones, and shining sands!

Maria Glionna

In.Habit







The workshop carried out in Brussels takes its inspiration from previous laboratories engaging kids in collaborative activities of playing, drawing and building. The first was 'SettimanaOca', proposed with Luca Barello, a portable game that combines on its two sides two classics of playing in the streets (Hopscotch and Game of the Goose) to be used in urban places that require kids-friendly areas. The prototype was tested in 'TuPlay' an event of street games at the Parco Bassi park in Milano.

'Sfarfallosi fiori su nuvolosi alberi stellati' (Flickering Flowers on Cloudy Starry Trees) involved all the Primary school classes of the Istituto Adorazione del Sacro Cuore in Torino. Long paper rolls were painted giving a specific topic to each class, to describe natural elements in the city: flowers, trees, butterflies, skies full of fluffy clouds or bright stars.

'LA MIA CITTÀ È...' (MY CITY IS...The fantastic never ending city. If children could design a city, what would they put in it?) is a series of three workshops run together with Valentina Gazzoni (www.valentinagazzoni.blogspot.it). The aim was to build a city for children where imagination, dreams, desires and needs of the little ones are the protagonists. The aim is to make children more aware of the environment in which they live by developing their critical and observational sense, their sense of group and their personal creative and manual skills.







As an architect and storyteller, I view my role as that of a curator, mediator, and bridge-builder. I endeavor to leverage my position to transform the needs and dreams of marginalized groups into tangible public spaces within our cities. Children represent one such voiceless group who are often overlooked in the process of place-making.

In 2021, in collaboration with Maarten Weyns, we initiated a neighborhood project named “Adventure Playground.” This project involved a participatory approach, engaging both children and adults in conversations regarding their dream adventure games and reminiscences of their most cherished adventures. Our objective was to delve deeper into the significance of their favorite games, collectively interpret their stories, and gain a deeper understanding of children’s innate playfulness. Subsequently, we translated these dreams and stories into playful elements, which were constructed with the help of volunteers, leading to the creation of a temporary Adventure Playground.

During our participation in the “Anti-Architecture Atelier,” alongside Sophia Holst, we introduced the theme of anti-architecture to Archikids. Informed by our research, we aimed to educate them about the destructive impact of anti-architecture interventions that restrict the use of public spaces for city residents. We encouraged them to propose alternatives to replace these anti-architecture elements. Regrettably, the initial approach left the kids disengaged, and we were disappointed. Fortunately, we had a second opportunity with the same group of kids. We took a different approach, discussing the concept of the ‘defensive city.’ We divided the Archikids atelier into islands, with each group of kids tasked with creating their own defensive city. This approach encouraged them to study and experiment with the subject, rather than simply acting upon our conclusions. The results were remarkable, and some kids even questioned whether it was necessary to take a break, as they were thoroughly enjoying the exercise.

Every project or exercise involving children continues to astonish me with their boundless creativity, honesty, and playfulness. Equipping kids with tools for building and creating not only empowers them but also teaches me valuable lessons. Their ideas, often simple yet profound, include suggestions like a sandbox on the sidewalk, a small tent for hiding, a goal with a ladder that doubles as a treehouse, or simply a bench built to their scale. It begs the question: What would our cities look like if children co-created them with us?





Adventure Playground 21' - MEOW - Workshop Photo by Maarten Weyns



Anti-architecture 22' - Sophia Holst & Omar Kashmiry at Archikids Recyclart
Photo by Omar Kashmiry

Archikids 23' at Park Albert LabNorth - Omar Kashmiry Photo by Hilde Peeters



Anti-architecture 22' - Sophia Holst & Omar Kashmiry at Archikids Recyclart
Photo by Omar Kashmiry



My social commitment translates into video work, photography and installations in which children often play a starring role. In this way I aim to denounce different political and/or social contexts.

Research into children playing (video-installation PLAY!) produces authentic images from all over the world: the streets of Palestine, the vast nature of Iceland or the districts of Brussels in which I try to make the camera itself part of the game. The viewer experiences the pleasure of the game as if he or she were that child. At the same time, I'm also making the spectator aware of the very different circumstances in which these children always make the best of the situation they find themselves in and how unequal the game becomes as a result.

I'm exploring public interaction and intervention, shattering the boundaries between contemplation and action. In my most recent work 'The Museum Of Innocence', I attempt to refine this method even more. The project is part of 'the collective museum', a participatory program by KANAL-Centre Pompidou. It is an architectural installation, a museum, established in different phases and in collaboration with neighborhood children, supported by architects, students, pedagogical institutions, manual workers and myself. It is inspired by the philosophy and pedagogy of the post-war adventure or trash playground in which the children's forming process is not only focused on a practical result but the structure itself is a game and a spur to further play. Through play and construction by using real tools and waste materials, children are invited to take ownership of the future of a wasteland. By pushing the boundaries of freely chosen challenges and risks, they develop self-confidence, autonomy and self-esteem. 'The Museum of Innocence' is embedded in my research on children's play: "The way of intuitive creation and building, the 'innocence' of it, stands in contrast with the rational ideas of the architects and the political prestige most institutions wish to radiate."

To accompany this major structure, I'm now working with children to produce a soundscape that expands on the philosophical aspect of the project, asking what a museum could be?





PLAY Photo by Lisa Matthyn and Katrijn Geeraert



Museum of Innocence Photo by Lotte Knaepen



In the vibrant heart of Brussels, Cultureghem champions a space where imagination knows no bounds. Our initiatives, KETMET and VADROUILLE, are not mere projects; they're gateways to a world where kids' creativity flourishes in the most unexpected places.

KETMET, the city's largest covered playground, reinvents the Abattoir market's vacant spaces every Wednesday. It's a realm where children can soar on the wings of their imagination, in a safe and stimulating environment. We believe in the power of these spaces as canvases for creativity, where the sky is just the beginning.

VADROUILLE extends this idea to the streets, transforming everyday urban landscapes into wonderlands of play. We encourage kids to view their city through a lens of fun and possibility, reimagining their surroundings into a playground of their own making.

Our philosophy is simple yet profound: give children the freedom to explore and the responsibility they seek, and watch as they forge a bond with their environment. It's this connection that breathes life into spaces, turning them into evolving landscapes of joy and community.

At Cultureghem, we're doing more than just providing play areas. We're nurturing a generation that values innovation, adaptability, and creativity. We're crafting a future where every child is empowered to transform their world.



Court Circuit Dartfleche Photo by Dear Pigs



KETMET Photo by Yannick Roels



Libelco Photo by Philippe De Bont

ZAZA Photo by Yannick Roels



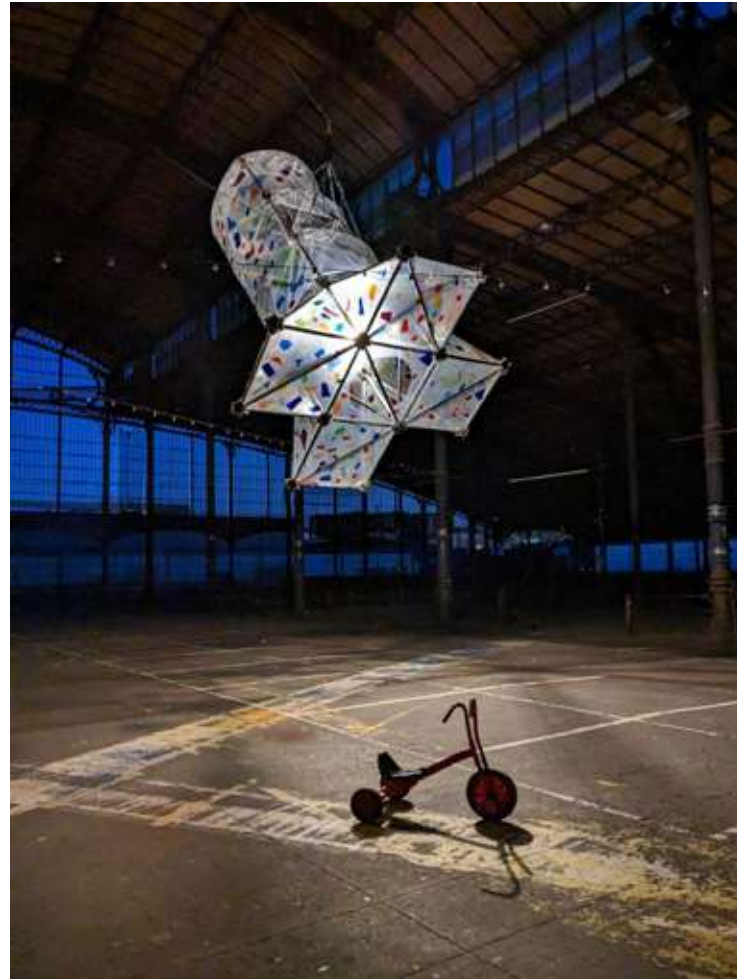
Court Circuit Race Photo by Dear Pigs



Broedplek basket Photo by Yannick Roels



FUSEE Photo by Jade Kawan



Once upon a time, in the mythical lands of Prato, there was a contemporary art museum made entirely of gold, resembling a grand castle. In its sacred rooms, the power of creativity was venerated, and art flowed abundantly from every corner and crevice.

However, within this magical castle, there was a place that had remained off the maps of art, squeezed between two bastions of the fortress, a hidden place that no one knew about.

One day, something curious happened; a colossal animal in search of a home, delighted to be close to the source of art, made this nook its den. Stretching and curling up, it lay down in this newfound space, fitting itself into the museum's walls as if it were made for it.

It was in this way that the majestic animal, by sleeping and quenching its thirst at the wellspring of art, awoke its magical powers: the dreams and fantasies of anyone brave enough to venture into its den would come true.

Years passed, almost a decade, until the courageous educators of the Centro Pecci decided to embark on a great adventure. They invited numerous children from nearby schools to play with the powers of the new tenant, creating a wonderland inside the den, a place where children's dreams would come to life.

The den became an extensive realm of imagination. Guided by the educators, the children had a magical toolbox at their disposal, filled with powerful geometric-shaped stickers. With these tools, they were encouraged to dream, create, and draw, bringing to life their unique animal companions.

In this way, a series of incredible creatures were born, one for each invited class, animated with their own lives, each with a name, peculiar habits, and favorite foods. These creatures of pure imagination emerged directly from the source of art, coming to life with a series of whimsical movements, eager to have fun and play with the students.

Everything seemed to be going splendidly, but one day, the majestic creature, the mother of all animals, fell ill. Its fur began to fade, becoming increasingly gray day by day until it blended with the den's floor. The magic faded, the animals disappeared, and the place was infested with malevolent creatures with red eyes and pigeon-like appearances.

When all seemed lost, the brave older schoolmates, from the heights of the art high school, arrived at the den armed with paint rollers and buckets, with a mission to restore color to the creature. The operation was not easy; they needed to repaint only the fur. Most of the mission involved identifying the majestic creature, which blended with the floor. Once located, they used the trick of adhesive tape to ensure they only colored the animal's fur.

The majestic creature revived, and all the animals returned to life, as if awakened from a long slumber.



Centro Pecci Photo by Giulia Del Vento

A solemn ceremony was held to thank the courageous art students, granting them the honor of drinking directly from the wellspring of art and appointing them as sacred guardians of the idea of wonder, protectors of the Centro Pecci's den.

And so, the story of the magical den at the Centro Pecci became a legend in the land of Prato. It reminded all who entered that with the power of art, even the most ordinary places could transform into fantastical worlds. In the heart of the art museum, the children's creations thrived, connected to the spirit of the majestic creature, ensuring that the den would always be a place where imagination reigned supreme.

"L'Anima(le) del museo" is a permanent installation for children and young people co-designed by Studio Ecol, Luca Boscardin, and Sociolab, coordinated by the Education Department of the Centro Pecci in collaboration with the students of Prato's schools, as part of the Ciel'in città project, which was selected and fully funded by Con i bambini within the scope of the Fund to Combat Educational Poverty. The project Ciel'in Città is coordinated by Uscita di Sicurezza (Grosseto), and for the activities in Prato by the Center for Contemporary Art Luigi Pecci and the Municipality of Prato.

The project, the winning result of a competition, envisions a large animal deciding to make its den in the wide interstitial space between the old museum and its expansion. Subsequently, the project, with the help of the educators at the Centro Pecci, has seen significant involvement from schools in shaping the characteristics of this animal. The final result is a synthesis of various contributions, with the floor painting being carried out in collaboration with high school students from the art school.

The installation is nearing its completion, and the inauguration is scheduled for mid-November.



Centro Pecci Photo by Giulia Del Vento



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Centro Pecci Photo by Giulia Del Vento



Photo by ECÒL



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CUT THE KIDS SOME SLACK

Spazio Libero-Ferrara slack city Festival

Bruxelles, October 2023

atelier mobile aps + Recyclart

Alberto Geuna, Nora Unger (coordinators), Luca Barello, Francesca Chessa, Enrico Vercellino, Cristiano Tosco (atelier mobile aps), Kobe Lootens, Vir Pochat, Marie Scheins, Baptiste Berlier, Dai-Linh Nguyen, Diane Handali (Recyclart)

We are Here

ArchiKids Workshop

Brayanna Dumoulin, Salah-Eddine Mahroug, Essam Mahroug, Adam Saïdi, Liam Saïdi, Tao Mathieu, Mya Mathieu, Naël Doublali, Yassin Amarkouch (participants)

Cut the Kids some Slack

Talk

Alberto Geuna (moderator), Emanuele Barili-Ecòl Studio, Francesca Chessa-atelier mobile, Maria Glionna-In.Habit, Omar Kashmiry, Lisa Matthys, Yannick Roels-Cultureghem

Booklet edited by Luca Barello

Graphic design by Fabrizia Muci

Chief curator of Spazio Libero Festival Niccolò Suraci

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