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Inclusion, Light And Children



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This talk was initially titled "Social Sustainability, Space and the Human." However, to select more precise terminology, I have renamed it "Inclusion, Light and Children." Why so?

Inclusion: because it most likely represents the main challenge to a socially sustainable society and, in fact, to a worthy democratic future.

Light: because it represents the primary design tool considering the inherent connection to vision, the dominating sense in perception of space.

Children: because this is the crucial target group. Childhood exclusion today will emerge tomorrow as a threat to the community.

As designers we have the capacity as well as the responsibility to exert considerable impact on these matters. If we deepen our understanding of inclusion as a form of attachment, we realize that this may refer to a person or group as well as to a physical setting or place. The perception of surrounding human relations is essentially different from that of the surrounding physical environment. However, they affect one another. The attachment to specific persons in a specific place will affect the attachment to the current space itself and vice versa. Such assumptions indicate a vital role of design for inclusion. A task in which light is the outstanding tool and the application to environments of the youngest citizens is the most effective approach. To become more instrumental when dealing with these issues in design practice, we should also call for more cooperative research between the fields of psychology, social psychology and anthropology.

At the core of mankind's development, we find the key to inclusion expressed in one single term: communication. By observing the communication development during the first consecutive years of an infant-toddler-child, we also discern the corresponding 100,000-year development of communication in humanity, from vision-based messages to phonetic language to writing and increasing levels of abstraction.

In terms of inclusion, the importance of mastering a language cannot be overestimated. Yet, there are consistent signs of deteriorating language skills in the young generation. The virtual world is contributing to a reading crisis, while places and occasions offering the best circumstances for meeting meaningful conversations in real life are strikingly scarce. It's remarkable and astonishing that we have failed to design spaces optimized in terms of ergonomics, acoustics and lighting for this most important social activity.

While the talk refers to theories and evidence-based research in neuroscience, the focus will be on concrete examples of physical design from the architect's practice.