

The Educational and Cultural School Centers

The Concept

Exploring the possibilities of applying the Pedagogical Space Design method combined with the consideration for the upgrading of educational services offered by school, led us to propose the creation of a new type of space for Greek education. It's the **Educational and Cultural School Center**, a unit of spaces and activities that's missing from the Greek school.

The concept of the Educational and Cultural School Center suggests the association of educational process with culture. It aims to correlate two procedures:

- Access to information
- Academic, social and cultural development of the pupil.

At the level of practice the architectural and educational part of the “Center” has been designed to correlate activities of searching, processing and classifying information to

- the formation of conscious reading culture
- the development of educational interaction and communication
- the academic and social learning activities,
- the connection with art and culture.

This unity as space for being able to respond to the coexistence of its characteristics, should be functioning with **flexibility**, should offer the possibility for undertaking different objectives and activities, alternatively, and in the same place, with the same equipment. Its flexibility consists of two aspects:

- Flexibility in architectural synthesis, i.e. the formation of space units that have the ability to be changed and adapted to different functions each time.
- Freedom of pupils and teachers in their relationship with space that gives them the possibility to undertake initiatives for alternative use of space, and as a consequence to develop a variety of different activities.

Thus, the flexibility of space offers the possibility to be developed alternatively, many different activities in the same place with the same equipment.

From the function point of view, an Educational and Cultural School Center can be used alternatively in two forms:

- As a school library and study room
- As a venue for literature and art events.

Thereby, it concentrates capabilities offered in other educational systems the CDI, the Learning Center and the Library Media Center combining them with development of culture.

The four objectives of the “Educational and Cultural School Center”

The first objective is to contribute to the opening of school in its social and cultural surroundings.

The second objective is the expansion of educational and cultural potential of the school, which is pursued in three ways:

- By *exceeding the limits of school activity*, which can be performed with more complex and enriched way than in classroom.
- By creating new centers of interest for the student and/or school class. Centers that are related to the curriculum and, often enough, enriching and expanding it.
- By applying modern teaching methods, especially, cooperative approaches of teaching and learning.

The third objective is to contribute in creation and maintaining of a positive psychological-pedagogical climate in school unit. This is pursued through educational practices connected with interaction processes, the development of creative activities and the active role of the pupil. In this context, the pleasure that pupils and teachers feel because of their being in school is emphasized as a very important factor in the educational process.

Finally, the fourth objective is the spherical cultivation of the child through a combination of academic learning with the development of culture.

Organization of space

Activity Areas

According to the P.S.D. method, space is organized into activity areas according to their personal or collective character. Three categories of activity environments are created 1) individual, 2) in small groups, 3) in one large group-class.

On the other hand, these areas must serve the bipolar nature (pedagogical and cultural) of space, by facilitating:

- The development of activities belonging to each of the two categories, education and culture
- The transition from one type of activity to another.

Therefore, an Educational and Cultural School Center has the following areas:

Activity areas	Activities		
	Individual	In small groups	In one big group
Reception, information, sources management	X	X	
Library – Discotheque – Film Archive	X	X	
Study	X	X	
Cooperation - Discussion		X	X
Multimedia and Internet	X	X	X
Screenings and Lectures		X	X
Theatrical stage		X	X
Auditorium place (when the room function as a literary and artistic events venue)		X	X

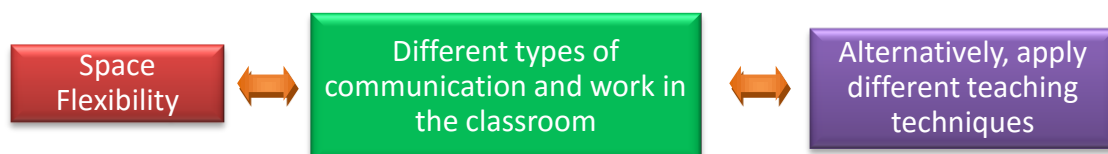
Table

Activity Areas of an Educational and Cultural School Center

Flexibility

As property of space, flexibility allows the arrangement of the same space unit in many different ways. For example, in a classroom, there is flexibility when it is possible to apply different arrangements of furniture and equipment without previously modifying its architectural characteristics (i.e. without changing its dimensions, without creating new openings etc.). In their turn, multiple arrangements facilitate the use of space in multiple ways. Thus, they contribute to the presence of different types of communication and work in the classroom and as a consequence, to the application of different forms of teaching techniques. For possessing cooperative character, these forms should favor *dialogue* as type of communication, and *cooperation*, as type of work.

As research showed after its initial application, a new teaching technique opens new perspective in communication and interaction, since it modifies the roles and relationships in class. Through their new teaching experience, children and teacher live new possibilities experimenting with new types of work and communication that enrich and differentiate the previous ones. The decision of the class to adopt some of them very often leads to a new intervention for re-arrangement of space extending its previously identified flexibility potential. Thus, the whole process is taking the form of a continuous interaction described in the following plan.



It is obvious that is not enough for space organization to favor its alternative uses. The pursued flexibility doesn't depend only on the perspectives given by the multiplicity of furniture and equipment arrangement, but mainly it depends on the pupil's ability to practically utilize it in various ways that contribute to the development of educational interaction. Therefore, educational practices should promote freedom in child's relationship with his own body, as well as with space.

In case of an Educational and Cultural School Center, the framework presented above favors space susceptibility to pass alternatively from educational activities, to literature and art activities. This way, the combination of educational and cultural form of functioning is achieved.

Pleasant and beautiful space

The basic objective of creating a pleasant atmosphere is to overturn the impersonal, inhospitable and often stereotypical impression that school space gives. The creation of this pleasant atmosphere relies on the use of aesthetic and functional points of reference, so that (1) the configuration of the classroom areas and (2) the organization of space stimulation, refer to household appearance and lifestyle.

In practice the connection of space stimulus with home can be achieved in many ways, such as, the color selection, the texture of the materials used, objects' sizes and shapes, as well as room's lighting design and arrangement. Space stimulation must be distinguished for its organized complexity, especially, visual and tactile with the following objectives:

- To make **space** interesting for children, from both perceptual and aesthetic point of view
- To offer by its complex organization, a variety of points of references that enables children to become familiar with it.

Micro-environments for the individual and the group

In an Educational and Cultural School Center space design intends, also, to provide opportunities for the children and teacher for intervening and modifying its function and aesthetics. The key objective of these interventions is to adapt space to the needs of the class, as well as to the requirements of cooperative learning. Through their exploitation, children can create personal micro-environments of a temporary or more permanent character related to their own and their teams' centers of interest. The integration of these micro-environments in the "center" can contribute to the creative development of educational process and cultivation of culture.

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