

## New Landmarks in the Slovenian School Design

**Ana Kreč and Ana Kosi - partners of the Svet vmes office. Initially they came together as a non - formal creative group of architects in 2010 in Ljubljana, Slovenia who had a similar goal, namely to redesign the existing residual volumes and create new spaces in between; They set new landmarks in school design emphasizing the importance of the neglected „in-between” spaces. In January 2014 they opened an architectural office Svet vmes, Ltd., that primarily focuses on educational buildings. In an interview they explain their approach to school design.**

Ana Kreč, Jure Hrovat, Ana Kosi. Picture: Romana Verbič



### The role of the architect

*The situation and the role of an architect differs vastly. There are star architects who focus on creating monuments for themselves. They claim intellectual property rights and nobody is allowed to change „their” building afterwards. And there are architects voiceless and faceless doing an invisible job as drawing servants without any influence on the superior idea of the design and the materials*

*What is the situation like in your context? Are architects able to set social and political statements with their works?*

They are. Especially the architects who worked in the period of transition, when Slovenia declared its independence from Yugoslavia. The newly born country was in great need of public buildings (Chamber of commerce, galleries, museums, etc.), the private sector was investing in big scale housing redevelopments and architects had a lot of work. A new generation of Slovene architects came back from abroad and emerged on the architectural scene. They won the majority of projects through numerous competitions and then built new Slovene iconic buildings that gave them worldwide fame and recognition.

### The responsibility of the architect

*Your philosophy is: [“”] Therefore classrooms and „in-between space” should not only follow and adapt to new changes in the school curriculum, they should challenge it and make it better. Can a building itself aid the educational process?*

*What is your responsibility in the redesign of the educational and social environment?*

In our opinion the newly built school Orestad College in Copenhagen in 2007 from the Danish 3XN architects was, after the Hertzberger Schools, one of the best new educational buildings ever built. We think this building showed us (and other architects) that schools function more like a small city, that they need to offer more relaxed ways of learning, not just in ex cathedra style, that students become far more creative in soft, non-formal areas, which are placed outside the classroom, perhaps even on top of it. School corridors are inner streets, school halls are inner squares, etc.



Forestry and Wood Processing School · Postojna 2013 · Main entry hall renovation  
Pictures: David Lotrič

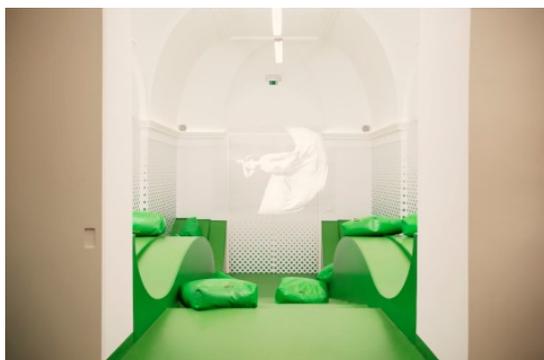
Our reasonability as an architect is to make school ambiances and buildings more appropriate for the new school curriculum which periodically changed without adapting its school learning environments. In schools we're not allowed to do much but sit, learn, talk, walk to another classroom and repeat the process. We're overwhelmed by the amount of information we have to learn every day, and we're still forced to do it in the most rigid way. We would like to create spaces that intrigue young adults. We would like them to become spatially more aware by placing them into more complex or flexible „in between spaces”, where they create their own learning or relaxed ambiance.

### The design idea beyond pure images

*How do you create a room/ architecture that challenges users?*

We usually visit schools many times, before we draw the first sketch. We interview students, ask them what they're missing, what kind of space they're expecting and then we repeat the same process with the school management. Synthesis of both is usually the program brief that guides us through the design process.

Schools have a lot of additional unused space, small nooks without any character that eventually become deserted. This means that the schools use less and less space where students could interact and far more for storage where different clutter is placed.



Ledina Grammar School · Ljubljana 2013 · Renovation of the unused secondary entry  
Pictures: Matevž Paternoster



We intervene in these deserted areas with flexible, bold, colourful design that attracts young adults. These interventions become playful, inviting, and almost irresistible – different from the existing building „tissue”. They become their living rooms of choice. And they have many to choose from. We give them space for interaction, observation, group work, but in the meantime, we never forget to give them spaces for complete laziness and fun too.

*What is the influence of the building?*

School buildings should be seen less as an institution and more as a home away from home, since pupils spend the majority of their day there. They learn from other pupils, their teachers and the building itself. If the building is poorly designed, it will raise a student with poor spatial awareness.

*What do children need to learn?*

It is overwhelming how much data every child needs to learn every day just to pass elementary school. In Slovenia children have nine years of elementary school starting from the age of six. When we were going to school, you could start it at age 7 and complete it in eight years. This means that we were able to play for one more year. Playing is important for developing children’s imagination, social skills and empathy. So my biggest wish for them is never to stop playing.

*What are your sources of inspiration and information?*

A lot of our inspiration comes from children and students. We see how they interact and behave – before and after our intervention. Good design will always trigger unconscious behaviour in youngsters (adults even). That means that we were successful in our task. For example, a boy stacked a bunch of sitting cubes in a giant throne in the middle of the school entry hall. He sat on it and thought no one is watching. This means his fantasy was influenced by our design, and for the past five minutes or so, he was thinking about how to make the biggest chair from those soft and flexible elements. This means he was developing 3D skills, while also creating his own personal space in the middle of public building. Seeing that, as a designer, is one of the biggest rewards.



Ledina Grammar School · Ljubljana 2014 · Renovation of the main entry hall  
Pictures: Matevž Paternoster



Ledina Grammar School · Ljubljana 2014 · Renovation of the main entry hall  
Pictures: Matevž Paternoster

### The dialogue in the planning process

*Architects and planners deny the „unprofessional clients` competence” to evaluate a plan or a drawing. Most often users have a subjective viewpoint in the assessment of architectural design. This is based on the fact that it significantly influences their living environment. Where is the right balance between the integration or consideration of users` needs and a superior foresight planning?*

It is our belief that the architect should pay great attention to what client says so that he/she can understand the problems the client is trying to solve. Every client should provide a detailed program brief and a vision for the project if he/she has one. It is upon the architect to interpret the clients` brief and vision and to deliver an architectural concept that will work in the relevant context.



Youth hostel Proteus · Postojna 2013 · Renovation of the main entry hall  
Pictures: David Lotrič

### Further information:

svet vmes [www.svetvmes.si/](http://www.svetvmes.si/)

Interview: Sonja Geier, March 2015