

**Conferenza internazionale “Wood in the city”
Trieste, venerdì 30 settembre 2011, Centro Congressi Stazione Marittima**

Intervento: Ampliare: il nuovo spazio giochi di un asilo a Lubiana / *Extension: the new play space in a kindergarten in Ljubliana (Kindergarten Kekec)**
Arch. Jure Kotnik, Arhitektura Jure Kotnik, Ljublijana (SLO), Parigi (FR)

The lecture will represent two recent kindergarten extensions in Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia. Those project represent the first timber constructions for the kindergartens and were built last year only. It will also be explained how did it lead to choose timber construction, its context and how the success of those pilot projects has planted a seed for the future timber kindergarten constructions in Slovenia.

Lecture: content

1. Today I would like to present you kindergarten extensions built in Slovenian capital city Ljubljana. Both projects, Kekec and Jelka kindergartens, gained a lot of public and media attention and somehow do represent a seed of timber constructions of kindergartens in Slovenia. In order to present all aspects of the projects I will have to say few words of its context and urban background, as the topic of the conference is wood in the city.
2. Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia and one of the smallest capitals in European Union, lies on the outskirts of, as architect Aleš Vrhovc says, Alpine Banana.
3. As a partly Alpine country, Slovenia is rich in forests and shares the central European tradition of timber constructions. However the wood, very common material in the rural areas in traditional constructions in the history, is not very present in the cities. In Slovenia the reasons for this can be found in strong brick and concrete construction production which is especially strong in building multi-storey housing. Also there are some reservations in peoples mind regarding the maintainance, especially wooden facades. Also there is some historical background for it.
4. As in many European cities, the tradition of timber construction was banished from many cities due to the fire regulations. Wood in that time was not fire proof neither there was efficient fire protection service and was therefore prohibited to be used as construction. In Vienna that happened in 1278, in Ljubljana in 1524 after the great fire.
5. Since then of course many changes happened and the fire safety become more efficient and the new ecology and sustainability the wood is slowly coming back to the cities. In Ljubljana there are few contemporary examples, some built mostly in wood including the construction, some just with a wooden façade that are gaining popularity. As you see on the photos there are some wooden villas, fitness and wellness centre, also we can find some urban furniture elements and from last year on, also kindergartens.

6. The time of the current economic crisis lead to some rethinking in the architecture. From pushing the boundaries of what is man capable to build, using star architects with unlimited budgets, the focus is now more on the social infrastructure architecture. This includes city parks, squares, social housing, schools and kindergartens. (photo: Zaha Hadid and New York: High Line park project)

7. Kindergartens, as a part of the social infrastructure, gained a lot of attention lately all over the world. They have become interesting to the media and are a good stepping stone for young architects as well interesting for renowned architects. Before that, as they were mostly funded locally and are projects of a small size they weren't in particular interesting to the architects. Almost until recently no star architect did a kindergarten project (now we have Will Alsop or Campo Baeza: Kindergarten Benetton on the photo).

8. Many changes have happened in the contemporary society, technology and pedagogical sciences that have also been reflected on the architecture. And the kindergarten architecture has become more exiting buildings than ever, with quality kindergartens popping up all over the world.

9. New kindergartens have many new features, they promote multi-use of spaces, they have mobile furniture or walls, they incorporate and promote sustainable energy and materials such as wood. Wood is of course the best natural material, with positive CO2 sum, it is warm and natural environment that creates the best microclimate conditions in the interior. On the photo we can see an example of a multi-use hallway and the use of wood for flooring, walls, roofing, furniture etc.

10. Despite all those qualities. Ljubljana got it's first timber kindergarten last year only! Due to the increased demand for kindergartens, the most urgent two extensions were quickly built using wooden prefabricated elements.

This is the concept project. The small kindergarten extension Jelka was firstly designed with a didactic blackboard façade due to the new trends of kindergarten design, in this case – blackboard façade, where children could express themselves and could also be used as didactic tool for the teachers. There were jokes about more children from this kindergarten to apply the Art Academy later, but still the decision was made to go with the wooden façade in order to show the wood fully in its beauty and to give a statement as a first project of this kind.

11. Jelka Front view

12. Side view

13. Jelka Interior – big windows

14. Jelka covered terrace.

15. The second kindergarten by timber construction was extension of a kindergarten Kekec. Kindergarten Kekec is a the most typical Slovenian kindergarten in a shape of letter H. It was built in the eighties all over Slovenia. There are at least 50 same kindergartens from the Alps to the Mediterranean regions, from rural to urban. This one is situated in a housing area of Ljubljana, called nove Jarše.

16. On this photo is kindergarten before it was extended. Pale building, not in its best condition anymore.

17. Front view before the extension.

18. The new annex is added on the south side and stretches into the garden. It benefits the sun from all three sides.

19. The extension consists of two small playrooms of nursery and a joined toilet in between. From the existing building it is separated with a access corridor used as a dressing room. The small size has its own reason in restrictive regulations for construction on this site due to some water protected area, and a project was built officialy as an reconstruction.

20. The main design idea came from the lack of the playground equipment at the existing playground. On the first meeting was pointed out by the headmaster of the kindergarten that they are lacking of playground equipment and that they are afraid not to get them for years after they get this new investition. I thought this might be a good opportunity to help them within the tight budget, making a useful element. Combining the façade, playground toy and shading element for the windows.

21. This is the result. The extension with the toy, revolving wooden slats, around all three sides of the buildings.

22. Revolving slats are on one side painted in nine different colours on the other there is wood. Children can play, rotate the timber slats and get to know the colours as well as to experience and touch the wood as a natural material.

23. The blues

24. The greens

25. The reds

26. Closing and opening the windows.

27. Children rarely get the opportunity to connect with their kindergarten as in case of Kekec, when they can change alone its visually appearance.

28. Again. This is side view fully in wood.

29. In colours with open window.

30. Random in colours.

31. In the interior. The playrooms are compact but allow for various furniture formations. Daylight floods the interior from three sides as well as from the roof. Washrooms are located between the two playrooms and have large glass openings-- which visually increase their volume as well as ease tutor supervision. Outside terrace is also accessible directly from the playroom.

32. Dressrooms are made from pure natural wood and have pull-out boxes for shoes in all the colours of the façade, which also serve as a bench, hence functioning as a space saver.

33. As for the construction. Kekec is built with prefab timber frame construction. The layers from the inside are: painted plaster boards,sub construction for the plaster boards, steam protection foil, OSB boards, timber frame with thermal insulation, additional thermal isolation and rough cast façade. (Jelka is the similar frame construction with different façade only).

34. Of course it would be better to have massive wooden walls, but we had to remain within the budget. And the importance of this project is that it has proven that it is possible to build quality, design spaces for children with natural materials for the same price as average constructions. Meaning more for same price. Those two projects have already set new standards and Ljubljana has recently made a competition already prescribing the use of wood from the scratch. I hope this will become a pattern in the future.

35. Short video

36. Thank you.