New Learning Environments for Street Children

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Abstract

Despite many efforts and programs meant to improve the life and the access to education for children in need, the number of children living or working on the street is not decreasing. In order to rehabilitate and to reintegrate this category of children in society, we conducted studies in order to understand their needs and perceptions better. The tests we performed proved that the needs of a child who lives or lived on the street are totally different from those of other children and also there perception of the architectonical environment also. The aim of this article is to present the tests which were performed on four categories of children: children who were in an orphanage, children who are in a centre, street children and children form common families; and the results that prove the necessity of creating special learning and rehabilitation environments for children who live or lived on the street.

Keywords: children in need, learning environment, institutionalized children, orphanages;

1. Introduction

The access to education and formation of a child is in one of the main goals of the European Union, many ONG's, and not only, for many years from now, and despite the efforts, the programs and the financial resources invested in different programs dedicated to children in need, even if the situation got better, the problem of this category of children couldn't be eradicated (Rosapepe, 2001; UNICEF, 1997).

According to The Children Act 1989 (Principles and Concepts) a child can be called a child in need if "they are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving, or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for them of services by a Local

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Authority". (The Children Act, 1989) In this category of children we can include: the children from poor neighbourhoods, children with mental or physical problems, orphans, street children and recently there is one more category of children in need- children with parents working abroad.

The category of children in need can change its gravity in time, if in Romania in 1989 the problem of children living in improper conditions in the communist centres was the main issue, nowadays we have new categories of children in need with a high probability of becoming street children like children living in poverty, children with parents working abroad and who were left home with grandparents or sometimes with neighbours. (Department for Child Protection in Timiș County, 2008; 2014) Even if the number of "street children" is not that high in Romania, unfortunately despite the many changes made in the social system after 1989 the number it's not decreasing it's actually increasing in the last years. (Povian & Dumitrescu, 2015) If in December 2004 in Timiș County we had registered 54 children living, working or spending the most of their time on the street, in 2007 we have more than 65. (Department for Child Protection in Timiș County, 2004) Even if it's almost impossible to know the exact number of "street children", because their nomadic way of living, according to UN sources there are up to 150 million "street children" worldwide in 2015.

The children living, working or spending the most of their time on the street are a special category of children in need and three types are included:

- The first category includes the children who even if they maintain a close contact with their families they spend the most of their time in the street, feeling more safe there than in their homes because of the poverty, the alcohol problems of their parents, the abuse etc;
- Children who are orphans but they rather live on the street than in a centre;
- Children who live with their families on the street because of poverty (International Youth Advocate Program, 2013).

During the research on new educational and architectural concepts for children in need (Povian, 2013; Povian, Gurza, Dumitrescu, 2014; Povian, Dumitrescu, 2013), we could notice that the street children have a percentage of rehabilitation and manifesting resilience under 1%. Even if for Romania, looking at the numbers, the situation of "street children" it's not that critical, the low percentage of rehabilitation and reintegration of these children draws our attention in order to identify the causes.

Nowadays "street children" don't have special centres dedicated to their needs, addiction and problems. If in the thesis Architectural Strategies for Children in Need (Povian, 2015) we could prove that it's necessary to created special architectural environments for the rehabilitation process of this category of children in need, using three types of psychological tests, the aim of this article is to extend this test to the teenagers who are 18 years old and don't leave anymore in special institutions dedicated to them and they couldn't be able to integrate in the society, and nowadays they are living on the street.

2. Methodology

2.1. Premises and Assumptions

In the thesis Architectural Strategies for Children in Need (Povian, 2015) we presented the results of three types of tests on three categories of children: children from common families, children from special centers and children living or spending the most of their time on the street. The main purpose of the tests was to prove that the children who lived or spent an important period of time on the street have different perspectives about the environment and different needs which requests special architectural and educational environments in order to rehabilitate them. This article presents the further research which took into consideration the youngsters who spent their childhood in an institution and are living on the streets now. Our main assumption is that this category of young

people needs special architectural and educational environments in order to be able to reintegrate in society.

2.2. Subjects and Methods

The first we conducted was asking children to draw a house, the second was to draw three objects which they want the most in their rooms and for the last test they had to draw a composition using five colors to they choose. The results of the first and the third test on all four categories of subjects are presented in detail in the thesis. (Povian, 2015) In this article we choose to present the second test in detail taking into consideration also the forth category, the one of the young adults who were institutionalized in the communist period and nowadays they live on the street.

The test was conducted on:

- Ten persons aged between 22 and 35 years old, 6 male and 4 female, who were institutionalized during their childhood and now live on the street.
- Five children living on the street, 3 boys and 2 girls.
- Sixteen children who live in special centers, aged between 10 and 15 years old, 8 boys and 8 girls.
- And the last category was composed by children form common families, 17 children aged between 2 and 17 years old, 10 boys and 7 girls.
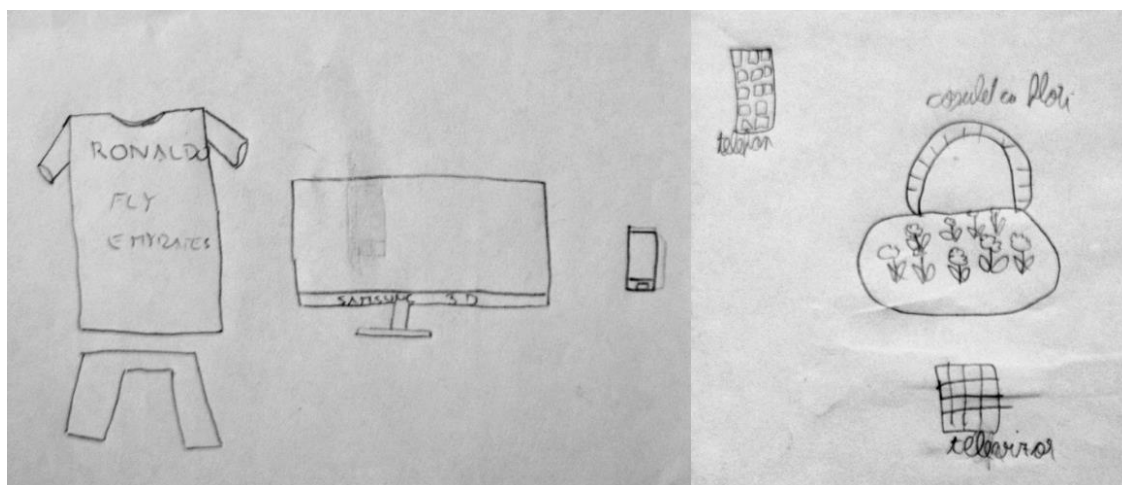

Figure 1. a) Drawing made by a child from a usual family;
b) Drawing made by a child who lives in a centre from Bihor County, Romania.

3. Results and discussions

If the first test, drawing a house, focused on identifying the differences of perception of a home between the four categories of subjects, the third proved that it's not necessary for them to have a predilection for cold or dark colors even if they lived or live on the street and sleep in sewage tunnels. The second test, detailed in this article focused on identifying the needs they think they have.
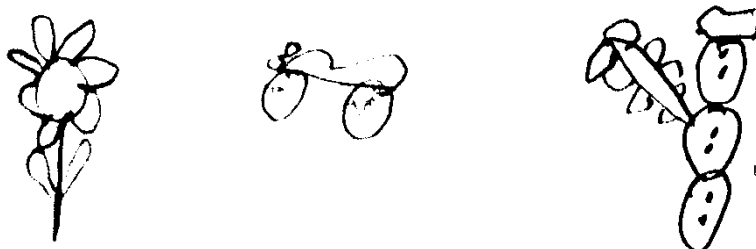
Figure 2. Drawing made by a young adult who was institutionalized in the communist period and nowadays lives on the streets of Timișoara, Romania.

With all the information from the drawings we created a table structured in for columns, one for each category of subjects, and in three major categories of objects: useful objects, infant items (sensibility) and extravagant elements.

Table 1. The results of the second test- choosing three elements

| CATEGORY OF OBJECTS	CHILDREN FROM COMMON FAMILIES	INSTITUTIONALIZED CHILDREN	„STREET CHILDREN"	YOUNG ADULS LIVING ON THE STREETS
Useful objects	9%	11%	27.8	20%
Food (juice)	2%	3%	5.6%	5.5%
Functional elements (home, lamp, table, coach etc.)	7%	8%	22.2%	14.5%
Infant items, sensibility	38.5%	81.5%	72.2%	80%
Toys (puzzle, ball, Lego, roller blades, etc.)	8%	25%	0%	
Electronics (phone, television)	1%	35%	22.2%	20%
Decoration (Picture)	13%	8%	5%	5%
Animals (dog, pony, butterfly, etc.)	11%	3%	0%	
Vegetation (flower, snowman, tree, etc.)	1%	2%	45%	55%
Clothes/ accessories (wardrobe, hat)	4,5%	9.5%	0%	0%
Extravagant elements	52.5%	6.5%	0%	0%
Brands (I phone, football player t-shirt, famous singers, Hello Kitty etc.)	12.5%	3.5%	0%	0%
Smart technology(Smart TV, smart Phone, Games, laptop,etc.)	40%	3%	0%	0%
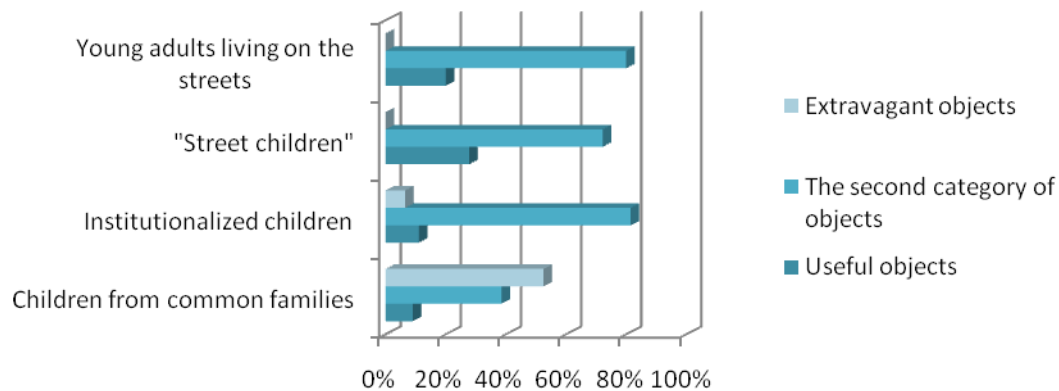
Figure 3. The chart with the results from the test.

Studying the results makes it easy to notice the big differences between the four categories of subjects, and also a resemblance between the category of "street children" and the category of former institutionalized children, and nowadays homeless people. If the children and the young adults have a percent of 45% and 55% for choosing elements from nature, we can notice only a 2 % of children in centers and only 1% of the rest of the children. Another remarkable discrepancy can be noticed at the category of extravagant elements, if children from common families have chosen elements from this category in proportion of 52.5%, the children from centers have chosen this type of elements only by 6.5% and the children/ young adults living on the streets have expressed their preferences in a proportion of 0%.

4. Conclusions

Even if they are not children anymore and there are programs dedicated to them in order to reintegrate them into the society, this formation programs and architectural environments should take into consideration the effects of the period spent on the street, trying to adapt this programs to their perspective, needs and problems. The tests which were conducted and presented in this article and in the thesis "Architectural Strategies for Children in Need" prove that they have a different perspective of life from youngsters with families and a resemblance of perspective with the "street children" even if they are older. The conclusion is that a special environment is required to form and to reintegrate the children and the youngsters who live or lived a period of time in the street, and in this way to improve the percentage of rehabilitation of this category of people.

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