



CAMBODIA KINDERGARTENS

Project name: CAMBODIA KINDERGARTENS
ASF Int. Member Organization: ASF-DK & ASF-SE
Design Team: Ane Lohse Kristiansen, Johanne Vestergaard, Laura Parsons, Agnete Plauborg Lorentzen and Nanna Riise
Names and Roles of Clients & Partners: Janet Gracey (initiator), Samuth Mech (Site manager), Bat Trang and Kampang Svay schools (clients)
Total Costs: approx. 70.885 USD (Construction), 5.590 USD (Playgrounds, on-going)
Main Source of Funding: Private Sponsor, Mr. John White, UK
Project Start: March 2012/ Construction Dec 2013
Project End: Opening ceremonies January 2015 (construction of playgrounds still on-going)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In March 2012 Architects Without Borders DK was contacted by Janet Gracey, who asked for assistance in building two new kindergartens in connection with existing schools in Sisophon and Bat Trang, in Banteay Meanchey province, Cambodia.

The project aim was to design and build two kindergartens with 3 classrooms and 3 toilets in each building. Each classroom will have about 25-30 children and one teacher per class. The materials used need to withstand the climate, and provide natural ventilation and light inside the building. Our focus was to develop the current way of designing kindergartens, to become more playful and appealing to the creativity of the children.

In addition to the classrooms we have worked with the surrounding landscape and built two playgrounds which are responsive to the natural environment and built using natural and inexpensive materials based on locally available resources and plants. Integrating educational and inventive playground elements, to encourage the children to play outside the classroom.

We have been working together with a local site manager and team of workers. We have each taken visits to the site during the various stages of the process and will continue to follow-up on the buildings and playgrounds over the coming years.



New kindergarten building at Kampang Svay school



Old classrooms



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Students showing their work after drawing workshop

We have chosen issues 8, 5 and 6 from the Hasselt Charter, here presented in that order.

8. Support participatory, democratic, multicultural and interdisciplinary processes and approaches in strengthening community solidarity as a factor of rural and urban social development.

Our design process was focused on working together with the end users, and enabling those who are usually left unheard in the design process. We noticed that the teachers were not familiar with a democratic approach or being asked to share their opinions. During our first visit we held a series of interviews with the teachers, this gave us a clearer understanding of how the architecture could support the practicalities of a school day. Meetings with the school board and local governors encouraged a diversity of perspectives to be heard. The students were also involved during the measuring, sketching and construction phase. Each stage of the design process aimed to encourage participation; starting with sketching and modelling sessions during the initial design development, down to the construction phase which used local workers who brought together their skills and ideas. This involvement throughout encouraged a transparent process, working side-by-side to share and discuss with the community which made them realise and appreciate the value of their own collective knowledge, and yet working together with us in a cross-cultural team provided new exploration and advancement of traditional approaches to architecture as to develop what a kindergarten could be in rural Cambodia.



Measuring the old kindergarten together with site manager Samueth



Student helping out carrying stones for foundation



Older students learning about the project



Modelling session



Taking measurements with help from the children



Teachers being interviewed



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View of exterior toilet wall from 'the in between space' at Kampong Svay school



View of the rice paddy field from 'the in between space' at Bat Trang school

5. Facilitate the use of appropriate technologies, materials and labour adequate to local values, to the cultural specificity and responsive to the natural environment.

We spent time investigating the most appropriate choice of materials and construction methods that would provide advancement but also support local values, cultural integrity and are responsive to our situation and natural environment.

Initially we wanted to use bamboo and wood but the community felt it was not suitable for the context and environmental issues with flooding and termites. We compromised by using clay bricks of higher quality than what is usually used in school buildings and encouraged the local craftsmen to use the material in a more creative and playful way, incorporating seating and steps that the children could run over. Utilizing the beauty of the brick, leaving the surface exposed and testing new methods that allowed for natural light and ventilation to be let into the building. All work was done by hand using local and low-key techniques. Sustainability has many aspects. This design is sustainable in the sense that it is robust and suited to the sites natural environment and especially its climatic presets.

We wanted to connect the schools to their surrounding environments. As Bat Trang school is situated in beautiful rice fields we positioned views in the building that would connect to the landscape, and at Kampong Svay we added more trees to provide more shade for the building and play area instead. We feel strongly that 'local adaption' should not only be made based upon the natural environment on each specific site, but also on the trust and knowledge of the local inhabitants.



Brick layer making the exposed mortar look nice



Mockup on site, displayed among curious students



Handmade steel reinforcement for cement pillars



Local woman learning to lay bricks and adjusting walls to a new type of window



New Bat Trang kindergarten seen from the playground area



Curious children looking through the open window shutters



Parents waiting outside for children to finish their school day



New seesaws are popular for all ages!



Playground area at Bat Trang school with natural shading from existing trees



Classroom



Opening ceremony celebrations!

6. Share knowledge, promote discussion, reflection and awareness, and collaborate in the advancement of the 'social production of education'

A main focus for our project was to share knowledge, using architecture as a tool to promote discussions, reflect and build awareness about what a kindergarten in Cambodia could be. Before, the kindergartens were dark, rotten and unhealthy for the children to be in. They were standardized and not adapted to the children's needs or daily activities.

The facilities for education in Cambodia, in general, are very poor. We believe that creating a stimulating school environment is essential for children's educational development. The new school buildings and playgrounds are an example of how function and play can be integrated into the architecture of schools in Cambodia.

During our latest visit, at the opening ceremonies in January 2015, it was evident that the teachers and parents were very proud of the buildings and excited to send their kids to this new and different school. The communities are excited by the change, and they use the architecture instinctively, as a social hub and a meeting place. The teachers and children have already taken ownership of the classrooms and play areas by moving into and decorating them. And we hope by this change to have put focus on the role that schools can play even in smaller communities in Cambodia today. It is essential that this is reflected upon in the whole of Cambodia as well, and that we promote the importance of engagement and financial support in education to strengthen the country's development as a whole.