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KINDERGARTEN LICHTENBERGWEG, LEIPZIG  
Susanne Hofmann Architects developed a new child-care centre through an intense participatory planning process, which has provided differentiated indoor and outdoor spatial experiences and learning environments since 2012.

## Learning by doing

For years, Susanne Hofmann has been combining architectural teaching and practice in a unique way. Her project, *Baupiloten*, became famous throughout Germany for its conversions and installations. She began with design-and-build participatory projects with students of the TU Berlin, and has since become an in-demand expert for educational buildings. For *Susanne Hofmann Architects*, involving future users is an important part of the design approach.

**Carl Zillich:** What was the starting point of the idea for the *Baupiloten*? Was it as a result of shortcomings in school construction or in architectural education?

**Susanne Hofmann:** People were lamenting how little architecture graduates were prepared for professional practice – they were either unsuited to it, or they were not trained for the offices in which they would later pursue careers. That's where the idea of making students the main actors in real projects came from – 'building pilots' (*Baupiloten*) who are involved in learning by doing. The students did everything, from defining the task with the user to developing their own ideas, which became individual designs in collaboration with the users. The conceptual-academic process ran parallel to the practical process of communicating with the user and working on the real design that would be built.

**CZ:** What was the role of the user in this process?

**SH:** It all started when the Erika Mann Primary School in Berlin was to be given a facelift in collaboration with pupils from the third grade and upwards. 'A path through the garden of the future' became an area of focus, from which much ambient material could be drawn. The students were able to take up on precisely that and to develop it into concrete design proposals in exchange with the pupils.

**CZ:** Isn't the bottom line that, despite all of this, the children end up drawing the pictures while the students design the spaces?

**SH:** Children think from the very beginning in three-dimensional worlds, which they are already able to describe very well using words. The young 'client representatives' therefore speak about how they would like to be able to feel their environment and the students translate the essence of that into spaces. Models make collaboration easy and perspective drawings can give the pupils an idea of this new world, which they are able to critically examine. The students become the mediators between desire and reality. The pupils are happy with the mere fact that they are often experiencing self-efficacy for the first time.

**CZ:** When speaking of space as a third teacher, many warn against designing it too efficaciously. How do you deal with such a supposition?

**SH:** I think both are needed – restraint and design intent. I am told again and again that our architecture stimulates the children's imaginations. Critics claim that the children will no longer be able to develop their own fantasies. We experience the opposite because the design is only the beginning, which can be reflected upon, used and shaped. ←

Info [www.baupiloten.com](http://www.baupiloten.com)



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ERIKA MANN PRIMARY SCHOOL, BERLIN  
In the socially disadvantaged Berlin area of Wedding, the *Baupiloten* developed ideas and collages with the pupils for a retrofit of the building that was built during the era of the German Empire. As a result, the school, the self-esteem of the pupils and the architectural education at the TU Berlin changed significantly in two phases between 2002 and 2008.

## Openness in design

In 2003, Patrick Ostrop set up *bof architects* in Hamburg with Bert Bücking and Ole Flemming. As a young practice, they attracted much attention by winning diverse competitions. A defining feature of the practice is that its approach to architecture derives from the task and context at hand, meaning they do not appear to have a signature style.

**Carl Zillich:** What are the differences if you compare German school buildings with those in other European countries?

**Patrick Ostrop:** I can only really directly compare with Scandinavia – Denmark in particular – and they are somewhat ahead of us. A lot of convincing has to be done before teachers will open up to new spatial concepts. Since we became familiar with almost all types of schooling through two projects, I can say that primary schools appear to be further advanced than secondary. In competition tenders, one is often still faced with mere lists of classrooms and access areas. Interest in change still appears to be absent on many levels.

**CZ:** How do clients, educators, architects and even pupils and parents come together? Are competitions at all adequate when it comes to such complex correlations?

**PO:** Competition tenders that do not involve the schools themselves are tragic, especially when the school administration

simply ignores the future users. The knowledge of the teachers in a specific place is decisive, but not all architects are open enough to let users contribute to the process. Perhaps openness when it comes to design also needs to be learned and isn't necessarily compatible with all approaches to design.

**CZ:** What do you mean by 'openness when it comes to design'?

**PO:** Participation is just as important before a competition as after. The structure of the design must outlive the competition because it is important that the user can recognize himself in it. From that point of view it is important that the user is adequately involved in the jury. In Wolfsburg, it was apparently a high school student who convinced the consultant adjudicator of the value of our architecture.

**CZ:** In all of this, what becomes of the characteristic style of the architect?

**PO:** We do not bring a characteristic *bof* school concept to the table – on the contrary, openness takes us to the ideal school each time. We do, however, salvage certain design decisions for ourselves. The users tell us in what relation the rooms should be placed to one another and we decide what those rooms will look like. ←

Info <http://bof-architekten.de>



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TOR-ZUR-WELT EDUCATIONAL CENTRE, HAMBURG  
Within the context of the Hamburg International Building Exhibition 2013, *bof architects* won a competition with a project that transformed a collection of multi-generational educational institutes into a coherent educational landscape. They used wood as the main facade material, which is untypical for site and function, and created unique classrooms by playfully applying polygonal forms to the facade and interiors.



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FALLERSLEBEN SCHOOL CENTRE, WOLFSBURG  
Despite the fact that an on-site participatory workshop had already taken place and a design had been created for the extension of an existing mixed secondary school complex, the client chose to hold an invited international competition, which *bof architects* won. In contrast to an obvious extension, they suggested a new structure to consolidate the square 1960s and '70s building volumes, thus providing completely novel spatial possibilities and combinations.