



### get involved

International Symposium 19th and 20th October 2012  
architectural & built environment education for young people  
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**Session** Riklef Rambow  
coming to terms

In my talk I formulated the idea that one of the most important goals for Architectural Education lies in the construction of a "common ground" of basic concepts that enables us to communicate about our experiences with architecture and urban space. This construction process can hardly be initiated too early, therefore its essential principles are applicable for adults as much as for children or youth.

It must be stated clearly that "concept" in this context is not to be understood solely in the meaning of "word". Instead, concepts are essential cognitive tools that are needed for the structuring of our perception as well as for our thinking. That means we are talking of a continuous interaction: Perception, communication and thinking are needed to develop concepts, and those in turn change the ways in which we perceive, think, and communicate.

I furthermore argued that the city of Venice is suited more than almost any other place to inspire a dialogue about architecture and urban space and to develop a language for the urban experience. Conscious of the fact that Venice constitutes an extraordinary example of the European city, it presents the visitor with a richness of spatial configurations and experiential possibilities that leaves neither experts nor laypeople untouched. Now the challenge for architectural education is to find ways to explain this fascination, to make it more conscious and communicable, and to take the step from Venice as a special case to urban experience as a general phenomenon. These were the tasks that we wanted to tackle in the workshop "Coming to terms".



The implementation of this task seemed pretty straightforward. To get in contact with the "Venice experience" we just had to step outside the door of the symposium venue. So our mixed group of fourteen took a slow and concentrated walk through that area of the sestiere castello that we could cover in two hours time. We stopped more or less literally at every corner and talked about what we saw, heard, felt or imagined, and gave special attention to the ways these impressions were translated into words and sentences. For the moderator of such a tour it is most important to make clear that it is not her/him who can be expected to explain what is to be seen or perceived, as would be the case in a classical guided tour through a city. She/he will not provide knowledge, but simply motivate the participants to explain their observations to the others and to compare their experiences. Why is one tempted to pause at a certain place, but not at another? Where are attractive vistas, how is our view guided by the arrangement of buildings and openings? Where are suspense or curiosity aroused, where do we feel uncertain or even insecure? Which feelings and images are evoked by certain sights, smells, and sounds? How is the spatial dramaturgy of cavity and contraction experienced, the sequence of alley and square? Which characteristics of the built structure are responsible for these feelings and experiences? Can we describe similar situations in other cities and places, and do they evoke similar connotations, or does context change everything? What tells us the architecture about everyday use and the life of the occupants?



Continuously walking and talking, we tried to strengthen the conceptual common ground that we need to communicate about our life between buildings. To be certain, many of these experiences were quite idiosyncratic and differed strongly between participants. But nevertheless, there was also much agreement, and the confrontation of different views and perspectives gave the diversity of the urban environment even more depth and richness.

So after all, "Coming to terms" was rather a Walkshop than a Workshop, no material results were produced. But in the concluding conversation in a café there seemed to prevail a certain consensus that strolling through the city and exchanging the perceptions we make with all our senses is a most valuable instrument for architectural education that is hardly replaceable by any other.

