

**BIRCH**

## **Letter of Explanation**

### **Tartu Waldorf Centre**

The three new buildings and the old one have each a specific design according to use. Whereas, to the southwest, the school opens out to the playground with a generous entrance situation, the kindergarten and social centre have a more protected entrance area by a small yard with trees and a pond. The new buildings are mainly decked with coloured panels. The hues vary from building to building and reflect the basic mood of each. The kindergarten has the hue of peach-blossom as its starting point; the school has a range of hues shifting further towards red; and the social centre has a range shifting more towards indigo-blue.

### **School**

The entrance area on level 0 leads to a hall with three stories lit brightly by daylight from above. From here stairs lead to the lower area, storey -1, which lies about 2 metres below ground level, and up to stories +1 and +2. The hall serves as the main stairway, as a hall for breaks and as a foyer for the assembly hall. This assembly hall is the school's hub, encircled by all rooms and serving as a sense organ for the whole school-organism – internal as well as external. Next to the stairs there are steps to sit on while chatting in the breaks. The assembly hall and the dining hall on storey -1 are spatially linked and can be used jointly in the case of bigger events and celebrations. The dining hall has a sunny open area with an entrance of its own in the south and should appeal to afternoon visitors. The terrain facing them is sloping, so the rooms seem to be overground. The dining hall and kitchen can be used separately. The music class has been put in the northeast, far from other classes, which it might otherwise distract, but can nonetheless be reached easily via the northeastern stairway. Moreover on this storey, though slightly lower, there is the entrance to the gym with the washing and dressing rooms. From here it takes little time to go via the southwest stairway out into the open to the sports ground next to the school building. The gym has the maximal size stipulated and is lit naturally from the north and west.

On storey +1 there is not only the administration and staff room but also classes 1 to 4. These lowest classes have a hallway of their own so are somewhat apart and protected from goings-on in the rest of the school but are linked well with the school organism via the foyer

hall. Teachers have a place of withdrawal in the northeast and are near the lowest classes but can swiftly reach all classes on all storeys via the northeastern stairway. From the foyer hall it is also possible to reach the balcony of the assembly hall.

On storey +2 can be found all other classrooms. Classes 1 to 8 have a more protective form. This tallies with the period during which each class has a single teacher for all main subjects. At the science section in the north with an auditorium, practical training room and so on, there is a little patio roofed with glass, whose roof can be opened in summer and which can also be used as a winter garden. Here plants can be grown and studied. All storeys are linked by a lift. There is a sculptural element in the open multi-storey foyer-hall, through which all streams of movement pulsate.

To ensure there is no need to flee through the foyer hall in event of fire, the adjacent classrooms have direct routes – partly through a further classroom – to stairways. There are many well functioning examples of this in Europe.

The assembly hall for 500 people is characterized by round forms, which are good for the acoustic and raise the mood from the humdrum to the celebratory. Daylight reaches the room through windows to the foyer hall and through panes in the ceiling. Mechanical ventilation is planned for the roof area.

Both the assembly hall and the dining hall can be used outside school hours, without having to impinge on the teaching area. The same is true of the gym, since there is access through the southwestern stairway without going through the rest of the school.

Toilets for the whole school are next to the foyer on storey -1, and on storey +2 there is a smaller set, easily reached from the administrative area as well as from the teachers room.

### **Kindergarten**

The way from the bicycle room to the kindergarten is roofed over. The kindergarten is on two storeys with a small cellar for subsidiary or technical rooms. On each storey there are two group rooms with wardrobes and subsidiary rooms linked by a shared stairway. From this shared stairway it is possible to reach the south-facing garden which can also be reached via a small balcony with a flight of stairs outside. The group rooms face south and east and

receive all the morning's light. The round room-forms – even in the ceiling of the group rooms – create a protected atmosphere suitable for this age group.

### **Social Centre**

Both the social centre and the kindergarten can be reached through a little yard with trees and a pond, somewhat apart from the school area. Rooms are found on three storeys and additionally a cellar. On each storey there is a group with a living room cum dining room and 10 bedrooms. The living room and dining room face east, where there is a little yard with a pond, and also west, where there are open areas on the ground floor and balconies on the upper floors. All bedrooms face south and west, and all corridors are well lit from the sides. At need it is possible to split the group on each storeys and to create a second access route from the stairway converting the laundry room to a means of access.

### **Former Church**

The former church encompasses workshops, studios, the library and lecture rooms. The library with its little shop is within easy reach of visitors, since it is by the main entrance to the site, and has a gallery. Workshops and studios can be reached from the north through a shared corridor from the playground. The cookery class, sewing and loom workshops share with the lecture rooms on the upper floor an entrance in the southeast of the building. Some workshops also have a gallery, which makes more space available than is presently called for. Most rooms are additionally lit by roof lights. If this is compatible with protection of monuments, each of a number of workshops could be given its own exit and area out of doors. It would be advisable to provide the entrance to the cellar with glass panes if this too is compatible with protection of monuments.

### **The Grounds**

The grounds are meant to give an impression of motion. Even the cobbled areas of the school playground and the paths are made curvaceous. In front of the school there is a big tree encircled by benches. The garden of the kindergarten has leafy hummocks where it borders the school. The yard created by the kindergarten and the social centre has a little cobbled area with a bench encircling a tree and with a pond and flowerbed for residents. The school garden south of the social centre is near the cookery class in the old building and offers residents of the social centre a variegated view.

### **Construction**

The school is made of massive materials, whereas the kindergarten and social centre could also be made of wood and be heat-insulated with straw. If the straw were set into the construction by the Kindergarten's users under guidance, this might enhance a community feeling and lead to increased identification with the 'home-made' building. Most roofs are covered largely with greenery; the use of solar energy remains a possibility.